they defend our freedoms

30 years of the Sakharov Prize

they

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freedoms

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30 years of the Sakharov Prize

Following double page: **Guy le Querrec**
Germany, Berlin, 1989.
Young people celebrating the New Year on top of the Berlin Wall.

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Foreword

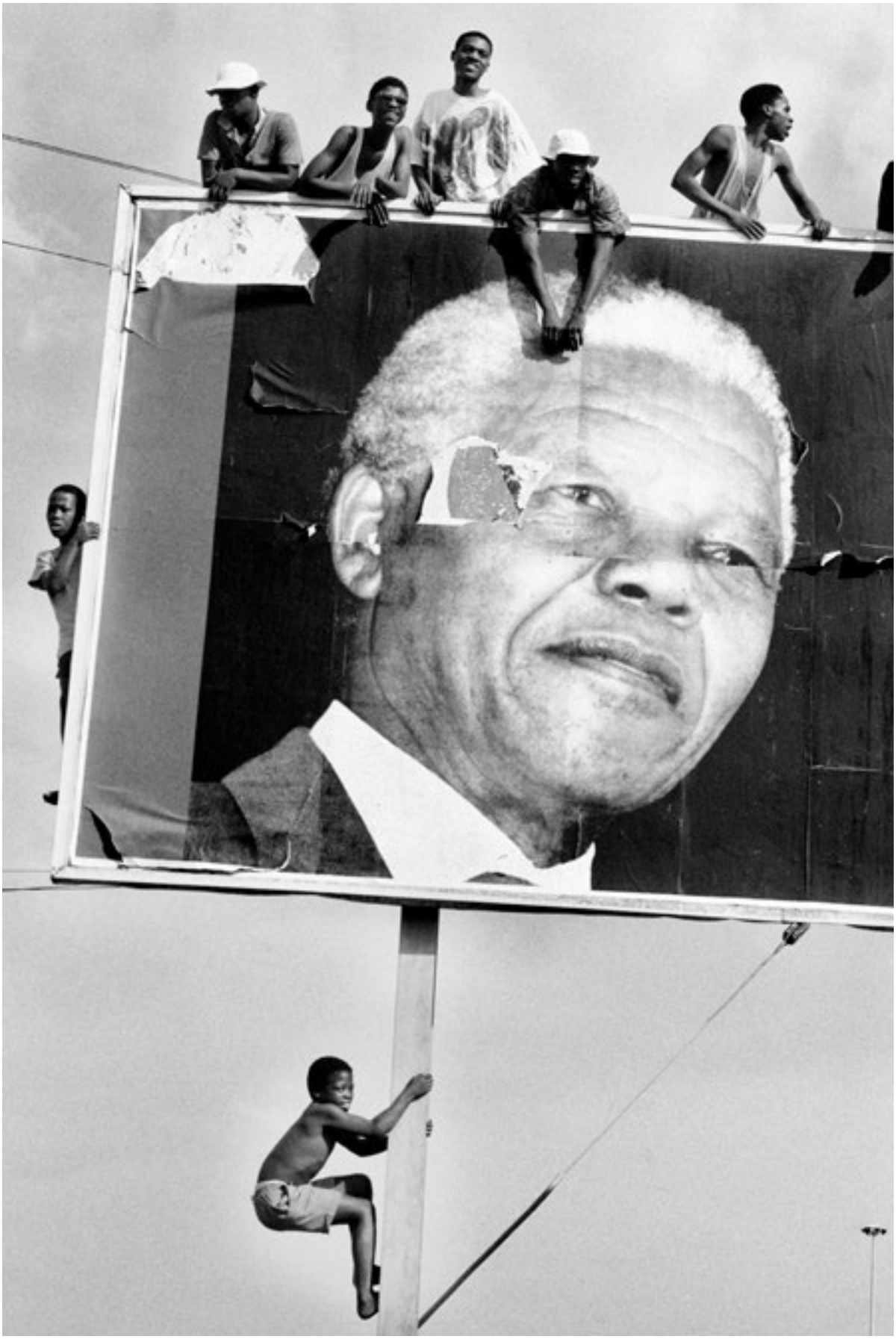
Antonio Tajani
President of the European Parliament

As the Sakharov Prize celebrates its thirtieth year, I believe that it is as relevant now as it was when Nelson Mandela and Anatoli Martchenko first received the award in 1988. The fight for human rights remains high on the European Parliament's agenda. The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is a flagship initiative in our broader engagement on human rights, which are at the core of our shared values.

The Sakharov Prize has been awarded to many outstanding personalities. Over time, the prize has become much more than a yearly ceremony, it has grown into an important tool for laureates. The European Parliament connects them to the Sakharov Prize Network and supports laureates as ambassadors promoting the spirit of the initiative. Together with the laureates, we have launched the Sakharov Fellowship for human rights defenders to support activists worldwide.

This book is about all those who — just as the laureates — fight for their rights and fairer societies while motivating others to do the same. I can only express my admiration and support for the four courageous Sakharov Fellows – four amongst many – whose emblematic lives and work are the subject of this book. I would also take the opportunity to thank to the eminent journalist and writer, Eric Fottorino, who both tells their stories and offers us a thought provoking essay on human rights in the world, as well as the four renowned photographers – Jérôme Sessini, Bieke Depoorter, Enri Canaj, Newsha Tavakolian – whose pictures do so much bring these stories to life.

In recent years, platforms for civil society have progressively shrunk in many places around the world. Organisations promoting their fellow citizens' fundamental rights are sometimes accused of being foreign agents, while intimidation, imprisonment and torture are used to silence their voices. Fundamental rights are also challenged in Western society and within the borders of the European Union. Global terrorism threatens our citizens'



most basic freedoms and we should fight it with resolve. However, we must ensure that this does not encroach upon our fundamental freedoms.

So far, the Sakharov Prize has honoured fighters for democracy from Cuba three times: Guillermo Fariñas in 2010, Damas de Blanco in 2005, and Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas in 2002. By recognising Wei Jingsheg in 1996 and Hu Jia in 2008, the prize has twice emphasised the long and difficult struggle for human rights in China. We have also honoured the Russian NGO, Memorial in 2009 and Iranian activists: Nasrin Sotoudeh and Jafar Panahi in 2012.

Freedom of the press has come under threat in many countries where governments try to silence and oppress journalists. When awarding the Sakharov Prize to Reporters Without Borders in 2005, to the Belarussian Association of Journalists in 2004 and to Oslobođenje in 1993, the European Parliament paid tribute to emblematic actors that uphold independent journalism as the backbone of democracy.

Women continue to be among the most vulnerable when it comes to human rights violations. The 2013 and 2005 laureates — Malala Yousafzai and Hauwa Ibrahim — vigorously defend and promote women's rights, including guaranteeing access to education. In 2016, the Sakharov Prize paid tribute to two courageous Yazidi women from Iraq, Lamya Haji Bashar and Nadia Murad, and in 2014 to the Congolese doctor Denis Mukwege, for standing up against the abominable violence that women and children suffer in conflict.

The Sakharov Prize also honours freedom of thought itself, the most intimate of all human rights. Sakharov Prize laureates like Saudi blogger, Raif Badawi, were sent to prison just for expressing their ideas.

Over three decades, the Sakharov laureates have established an inspiring legacy. My hope is that over the next thirty years, this heritage encourages others to care, to commit, and to fight for a fairer world, making the Sakharov Prize grow even stronger.

Left-hand page: **Ian Berry**
South Africa, Lamontville, 1994.
Supporters of Nelson Mandela await his arrival during the presidential elections.

Following double page: **Stuart Franklin**
China, Beijing, 1989.
Rally in Tiananmen Square, which was to be severely repressed a few days later.

Samrith Vaing

Cambodia

by Jérôme Sessini

Samrith Vaing is 35 years old and immediately introduces himself as an indigenous person. He belongs to Bunong, a minority ethnic group and one of the country's 24 communities. It is also among its most populous and oldest, having been settled in Mondul Kiri in eastern Cambodia near the border with Vietnam, for almost 2 000 years.

Jérôme Sessini, the photographer who spent several days with him, was struck by the absolute calm of the landscapes and people. The villagers exude a simplicity and authenticity they want to preserve at all costs. 'There's nothing abstract or ideological in their make-up,' explained the reporter, who is used to the highest-pressure situations in war zones. It would appear to be a very calming environment. 'It's difficult to depict political violence,' he stressed. He did, however, encounter it during their trip to Stung Treng. Samrith wanted to visit villages in the forest, but the police and military barred access to them. Any contact with the local communities was therefore impossible. But the human rights activist was intent on passing the blockade no matter the cost, so great was his desire to convey to his visitor the difficulties faced by these communities at the mercy of the Chinese companies gobbling up their land with the complicity of the government. Jérôme Sessini stopped him from taking such a risk; the dangers were too great.

The stage is set and the stakes are clear. Here, the defence of individual freedoms cannot be dissociated from that of the environment, the forest and its inhabitants, people and animals, such as the monkeys who share the peoples' lives or the dogs that appear in photographs as a part of the family. When the photographer arrived in Cambodia, Samrith Vaing was happy to be able to speak English for an entire week. This was an opportunity to improve his command of the language and thus fine-tune his message, which he addresses to the international authorities and people whose awareness he wishes to raise about his cause. The link between people and their land, the

Cambodia, Prame, July 2017.
Samrith Vaing, human rights activist and Sakharov Prize Fellow.

Cambodia, Stung Treng province.
Deforestation caused by intensive logging, the expansion of arable land and the construction of dams.

Following double page:
Cambodia, Mondol Kiri province.
The Bunong are the most populous ethnic group in Cambodia's highlands. They have lived in Mondol Kiri province for 2 000 years.

conservation of natural environments and the fight against climate change are at the heart of the concerns of this grassroots activist. 'I go to the ground,' he often repeated, which was his way of showing how closely involved he was with the people and their problems and worries.

'I'm particularly interested in the forest,' he said. 'I expected the government would act and stand by our side in our efforts. But it hasn't done anything. Quite the opposite, in fact: the forest has disappeared. Some activists have even been killed or are currently in prison. Others finally succumbed to the pressure exerted upon them and gave up.' Samrith Vaing, however, refuses to let himself be intimidated. He wants to fight for his people against all injustice, without leaving anyone behind. Saving nature to save humanity.

It was the spectacle of this country and the forest people that persuaded Jérôme Sessini to eschew colour. He believed the authentic lives the people lead needed to be captured in black and white. 'To get to what matters,' he said, 'it's best to convey beauty while removing everything that seems superfluous from the frame.' As if he were seeking to establish a more direct relationship between the subject and the beholder. What struck him most in this Cambodia still grappling with the ghosts of the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979? At the Museum of Memory in Phnom Penh, Jérôme Sessini saw thousands of photographs of victims, their faces forever silent yet saying so much. There is no doubt as to whether some of the severity of their expressions has rubbed off on his pictures, such as the photo of the open-air market in Stung Treng, where a determined young woman sells her home-grown vegetables in the rain. Here the indigenous people have been living under the constant threat of expulsion since a Chinese company began building a dam. To force them from their homes, the local authorities ban the Bunong from using the covered markets, which are, nevertheless, still standing. By leaving them exposed to the elements, the authorities are trying to weaken their resolve. They also know that by imposing these precarious conditions, they are reducing their income. This is how they hope to convince the Bunong to accept the central government's offer: to leave their homes and resettle far away, a long way from their ancestral lands and in anonymous dwellings in places without history. These relocation programmes are terrifying for the Bunong forest people, who ask for no more than to be allowed to remain on the land where they have always lived. Samrith Vaing stands alongside them. He knows that the powerful are untroubled by questions of conscience. The country's ruling clan can raze thousands of hectares without raising an eyebrow and without worrying whether there are villages there or not. Financial interests trump all other concerns.

This is where Samrith comes in, via his organisation called Community Development Cambodia. 'I worked in a national association based in the capital for a long time,' he

explains. 'We didn't have much funding, so money for travel was tight. Now I'm back in my home province, Kratie, a popular tourist destination. We have all kinds of difficulties here. The local indigenous people have been overcome by an invasion of sugar cane plantations. Chinese and Vietnamese companies take over land, cut down the forest and plant sugar cane. Elsewhere the problem is rubber plantations. Near the border with Vietnam it's palm oil farms, something that puts people's lives in danger and cuts off access to natural resources.' These serious imbalances are a result of the government's policy of granting permits to foreign companies in exchange for cash, thus allowing land to fall into the hands of unscrupulous investors. Corruption prevails and the forest is rapidly disappearing. 'The companies that set up facilities here produce fake reports claiming that their activities don't affect the people. The authorities turn a blind eye. Foreign companies quickly clear vast tracts of land. The timber is sent to Vietnam then to China for sale.' Jérôme Sessini's photographs speak for themselves. A long succession of desolated, devastated landscapes, as if hit by an earthquake. Deforested land shorn of its vegetation becomes unstable. Floods cause untold damage. Only children enjoy them as they dive into these temporary seas that swell up out of nowhere.

Samrith Vaing provides people threatened with being driven from their homes a powerful weapon: knowledge of their rights. 'If they're not aware of their rights, how can they defend themselves?' Despite the risks, he does not hesitate to speak in the media when he has to or to give his name in public. He uses social networking and releases many videos. He has even set up his own YouTube channel to inform people of his actions. His work remains altruistic: 'I keep out of the spotlight so as to help indigenous peoples. I am behind them to help them build their defence. My aim is to raise awareness, not to fight against any particular organisation. I avoid pointing the finger at the government. My strategy is not to criticise directly but to highlight acts of wrongdoing. Another focus of my work is global warming, which is closely linked to the issue of living conditions. This was something I learned from observing the situation in Malaysia. The native peoples live off the bounty offered by the forest: honey and game. They also extract resin and rubber, and in return they take care of the forest. Their protection of the forest acts as a brake on climate change. Here in Cambodia, indigenous peoples are fighting to ensure that the government takes action and safeguards not only their rights of access to land and natural resources, but also their right to have schools, roads and hospitals. If these vital issues are not solved together, bitter conflicts will break out.'

In his unrelenting work helping the families he meets to fight for their rights, Samrith passes on his fire, energy and willpower. The expressions captured by Jérôme Sessini radiate a quiet determination, a mixture of serenity and firmness that so deeply struck the photographer. The face of a woman in front of the Chinese Rui Feng industrial complex, which is

suspected of an illegal land grab of 500 hectares to plant sugar cane in Preah Vihear province. The faces of Kui villagers in the village of Prame: women, children, fishermen and schoolchildren who simply want their lives to remain the same. Observing them is a lesson in courage and a source of hope.

Cambodia, Stung Treng.
Bunong woman selling her wares at the edge of Stung Treng market.

Cambodia, Stung Treng province.
Samrith Vaing (right) visits a Bunong family resettled by the government. Intensive logging and dams built by Chinese industrial groups have caused the Cambodian government to force indigenous communities off their ancestral lands.

Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
Cheom Kol lives opposite the Chinese Rui Feng industrial complex. The families accuse Rui Feng International of illegally clearing almost 500 hectares of land to set up a sugar cane plantation.

Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
Bunong child swimming in floodwaters caused by torrential rains.

Cambodia, Stung Treng province.
Bunong child in a government resettlement camp.

Previous double page and left page:
Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
Bunong children playing by the roadside.

Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
Young Bunong woman fishing.

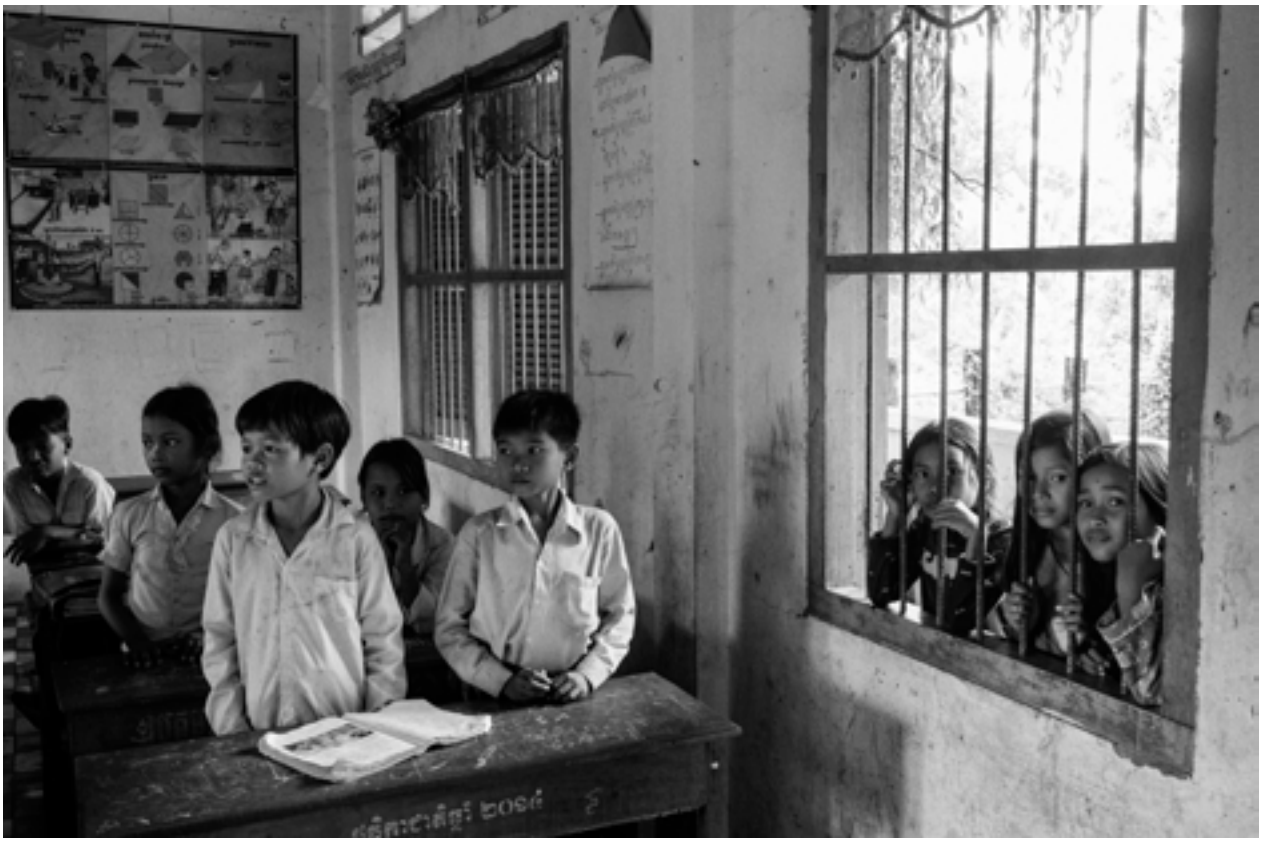
Left and right pages: Cambodia, Mondol Kiri province.
Bunong children before Sunday mass at the Christian church in Laoka.

Above: Cambodia, Mondol Kiri province.
Mass at the church in Laoka.

Right page: Cambodia, Prame.
Kui children in the village of Prame.

Following double page: Cambodia, Anlong Srey.
Members of the Kui indigenous minority in the village of Anlong Srey. The Kui are actively engaged in protecting the forest of Prey Lang.

Cambodia, Stung Treng province.



Above: Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
Children, mostly from the Kui community, at school.

Following double page:
Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
A Bunong family living opposite the Chinese Rui Feng industrial complex.

Left page: Cambodia, Prame.
Young Kui woman in the village of Prame.

Above: Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
View of the Chinese Rui Feng industrial complex.

Following double page: Cambodia, Prame.
Kui children in the village of Prame.

Left and right pages: Cambodia, Prame.
Human rights activists from the Kui minority.

Following double page: Cambodia, Preah Vihear province.
Bunong schoolchildren playing by the roadside.

Asma Kaouech

Tunisia

by Newsha Tavakolian

Asma Kaouech is a 25-year-old lawyer. Her father was a philosophy teacher who gave her some good advice: not to watch Ben Ali's television; instead, to read books — those of Kant or Heidegger — and to study democracy, individual liberties and women's rights. 'He brought me a lot of books on feminism', says the young Tunisian, who was brought up in the capital but originally came from the south.

'Throughout my childhood, he taught me to be a person with values.' Someone who nurtures values as one nurtures hope. These words characterise this activist, whose baptism of fire took place in 2011, 2 weeks before the revolution which led to the fall and departure of the dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Tunisia certainly has thousands of Asmas to rely on around the country, as highlighted by the Iranian photographer Newsha Tavakolian who followed her, and they represent a considerable human asset. But this Asma, who through her words, her actions and her way of transforming into white-faced clowns the idle street children who are at risk of turning out badly, is unique.

Tunisia, Tunis, August 2017.
Asma Kaouech, aged 25, fellow of the Sakharov Prize, directs Fanni Raghman Anni, a Tunisian human rights association. It is one of the first organisations to have established art workshops to combat the radicalisation of young people.

First, there was the pain of a man, Mohamed Bouazizi, whose immolation in Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010 sparked an unprecedented wave of protests. An entire people, exhausted by the police-state regime of Ben Ali and his clan, had found their voice. Peoples, once liberated, do not always know what to do with their newfound freedom. So a time came when power was handed to the Islamists of the Ennahda party, which meant another source of pain. But history was moving on, driven by the street, which was calling for a new constituent assembly and a new constitution that was finally adopted on 26 January 2014. Asma is happy: 'That legislative document guarantees many new rights: gender equality; young people's right to participate in politics; and freedom of conscience. It is a major step forward.' Like many of her compatriots, she did not fight for nothing. Her protests were not in vain. It was not for nothing that she spent 2 days in prison before the

Tunisia, Tunis.
Young actors working with the Fanni Raghman Anni association.

revolution, when Ben Ali's police put her behind bars. She emerged from there after having promised the impossible: that she would no longer express her political opinions. She had pledged in writing to no longer demonstrate or to study — yes, even just to study — but instead to go home and keep quiet. 'Thank God the revolution came,' says Asma. 'One of the greatest moments of my life! So many things touched me, like those people who organised themselves to protect their neighbourhood. They went on patrols. The women prepared meals. We all met up to share our stories, our misfortunes and our aspirations.' Civil society fought the Islamists who wanted to impose religion within the state. Asma was the only student who succeeded in becoming a trainee in the new assembly. She wanted to see what the members would decide. They told her: 'Go to the beach!' She stayed where she was. They did not know how stubborn Asma could be. It was at that time that Asma and a handful of activists created Fanni Raghman Anni (FRA), which literally means 'an artist in spite of myself'. A revolution within the revolution. Voices and

Tunisia, Tunis.
Group of children and teenagers at the Bardo National Museum during a workshop for the prevention of radicalisation. A childhood friend of Asma Kaouech was one of those who attacked the museum in the 2015 terrorist attack. That really brought things home to the young woman. She now organises visits to the site of the attack for young people in order to illustrate the country's history and revisit the events of 2015. During the visits, she is always accompanied by a psychologist.

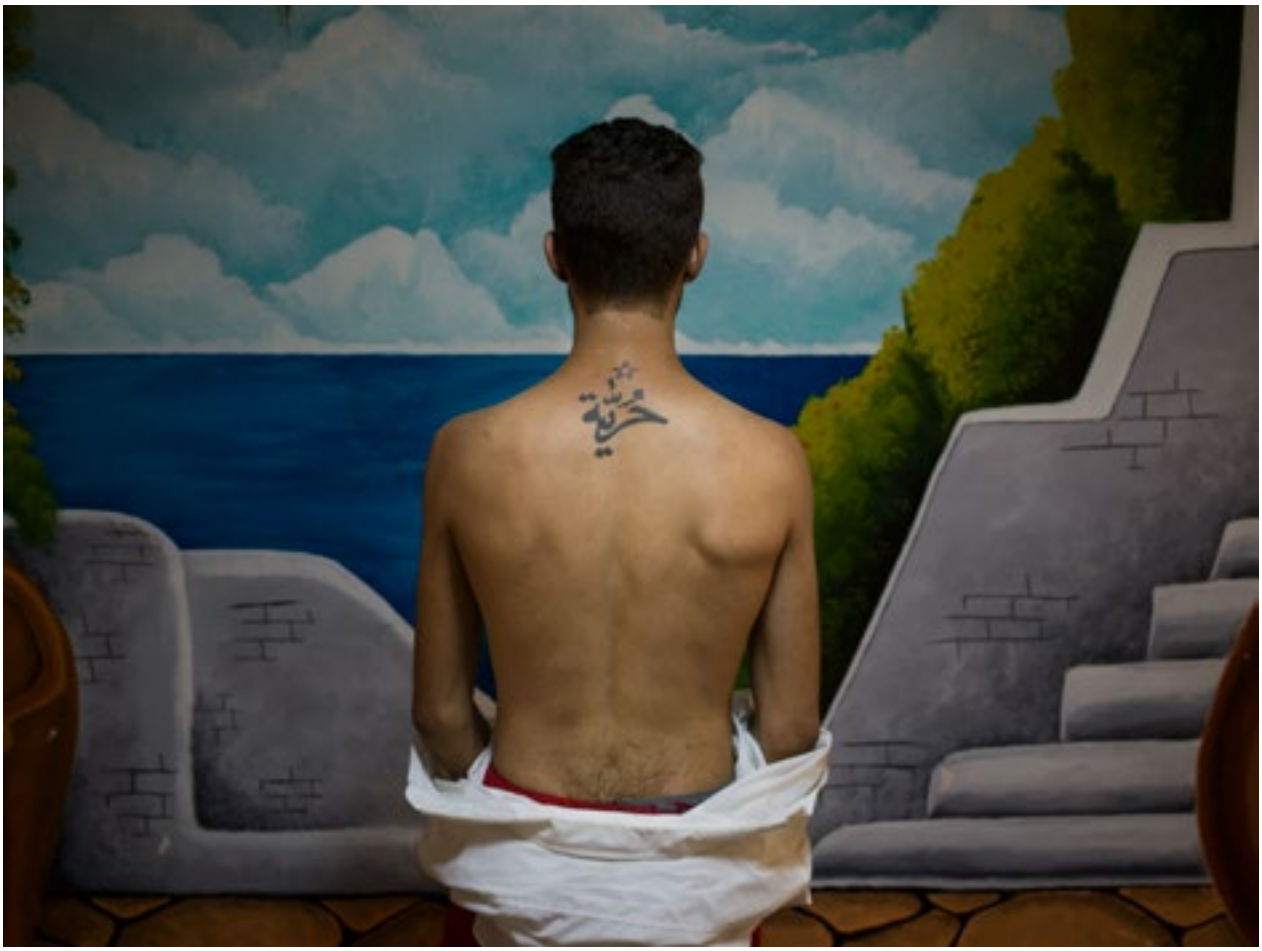
Asma Kaouech

bodies that move, express themselves and struggle. 'During the sit-ins and demonstrations, people started to use street theatre, art and culture as a new tactic to defend human rights and to attract people's attention.' When the FRA first emerged in 2011 it was just a movement, but 2 years later, it became an association, after having developed its anarchic practices in cafés. 'Our main task was to combat marginalisation in the heart of the country, in neighbourhoods and among the poorest,' explains the lawyer, who has vast experience in oratorical art, mime and performances which make a deep impression and which can become a form of street fighting. A peaceful struggle whose aim was for everyone to be able to see themselves reflected in other people and in their weaknesses, hopes, anger and confusion. Three actions were then carried out concurrently: workshops all over Tunisia, lasting around 10 days, bringing together some 30 young people who were expected to 'perform' on the theme of human rights; artistic performances on the same subject, organised with professional actors; and finally, in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, activities in refugee camps to offer social, cultural and humanitarian support to marginalised people. Having gained this experience on the ground, Asma quite naturally came to direct her action towards the prevention of radicalisation. 'Tunisia is the biggest exporter of young jihadis,' the young woman says. 'Our project is called "We are here". Human rights are linked to peace; it must therefore be preserved by means of this work done in advance. We have an office in the centre of Tunis, where I work virtually full-time. There are five of us between the ages of 20 and 29 who are employed there. We receive funding from the United Nations and the European Union.' Preventing radicalisation. These words resonate strongly in Asma's mouth. 'Our office was set on fire in 2014, on the anniversary of the revolution. I felt that I was in danger. "Performers" have also been physically attacked by Salafists while on stage. The artists were sent to prison, not the Salafists. They remained at liberty.'

The subject is a sensitive one. In recent years Tunisia has experienced attacks unprecedented in its history, as for example on 26 June 2015 when a terrorist disguised as a holidaymaker, his Kalashnikov hidden in a parasol, killed 39 people in cold blood and injured as many again near Sousse. On 18 March of the same year, at the Bardo Museum in Tunis, 21 tourists were killed by gunmen. And on 24 November 2015 a terrorist attack targeted a bus belonging to the presidential guard. These three attacks were claimed by Da'esh before a fourth similarly deadly attack was carried out on 7 March 2016 in Ben Guerdane near the border with Libya, in which 50 people were killed, including around 30 jihadis.

Asma and her friends know the details of these tragedies. Through their actions to help young unemployed people tempted by crime or on the verge of radicalisation, they seek to overcome these impulses of death, which are indicative of the young people's desperation. Newsha Tavakolian's lens has managed to capture wonderfully well both the positive and

the negative aspects of this vital undertaking. On the positive side there are young people that Asma took to visit the Bardo Museum to show them, through mosaic art, how great a history they had and what a source of pride it should be. Without her, without her commitment, these excluded young people would never have had the idea of visiting such an enlightening institution, treating it as if it were alien or taboo to them. Another positive aspect is the energy displayed by painted faces and bodies engaged in improvised theatre on a street corner or in a Tunis park, with the aim of sharing with a curious audience the story of their lives, their suffering, their anguish and the humiliations that have brought them to their knees. These inspire hatred in them, sometimes to such a point that they want to kill or, like Mohamed Bouazizi, to commit suicide. Also positive are the drawings made by the same marginalised young people when Asma and her team asked them to imagine the house of their dreams. 'I realised that radicalisation had nothing to do with Islam,' stressed the photographer. 'These young people are angry because they feel excluded from prosperity. Their frustrations are due to the lack of opportunities to escape, other than by selling drugs. Opportunities and material security elude them. They draw large houses in order to denounce the inequalities and injustices of which they consider themselves to be victims.' The exercise is therapeutic. Some of them draw a house isolated from others, as if to underline more clearly that they are separate and will never genuinely become part of society. Once they have put down their felt-tips, the members of the association encourage discussion, give explanations, listen and provide reassurance. The young people can freely express themselves without feeling judged or rebuked. This is prevention by means of kindness and empathy, values that struck Newsha throughout her reporting with Asma. The negative side is the faces of young people threatened by radicalisation. In the case of both boys and girls, their expressions are signals of distress. They may sometimes look resigned, passive or else inquiring: Asma is familiar with all of this. It is with the aim of wiping these looks from their faces that, together with other young people, she fights for freedom of expression in Tunisia, so that these excluded people can finally find reasons to live rather than die or kill themselves. 'I am very proud of young people in Tunisia,' says this upholder of the objectives of the revolution: 'dignity, freedom, work'. She does not abandon hope. Did four Tunisian civil society organisations not receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for their major role in the success of national dialogue? 'We have become household names in the country,' rejoices Asma. Tunisia has a bright future ahead of it.



Tunisia, Tunis.
An actor belonging to the company promoted by Fanni Raghman Anni shows off his tattoo, which means 'freedom' in Arabic.

Following double page: Tunisia, Tunis.
Women, mostly from the poorest neighbourhoods of Tunis, observe the young actors taking part in a street performance.

Left-hand and right-hand pages, following double page: Tunisia, Tunis.
Street theatre performed by young actors working with the Fanni Raghman Anni association. The play concerns the revolution of 2011 and the violence that followed it.

Tunisia, Tunis.
Asma supervising a theatre workshop.

Tunisia, Tunis.
A young actor rehearsing.

Tunisia, Tunis.
A boy lying on the branch of a tree. Unemployed and with no prospects for the future, some young people turn to radical Islamist groups.

Tunisia, Tunis.
Asma Kaouech and a teenager in the Bardo National Museum.

Tunisia, Tunis.
In the old quarter of Tunis.

Left-hand page and top right: Tunisia, Tunis. *Bus taking children and teenagers belonging to low-income families to visit the Bardo National Museum.*

Right-hand page, at bottom: Tunisia, Tunis. *Portrait of the Tunisian opposition politician Chokri Belaïd under a bridge in the centre of the city.*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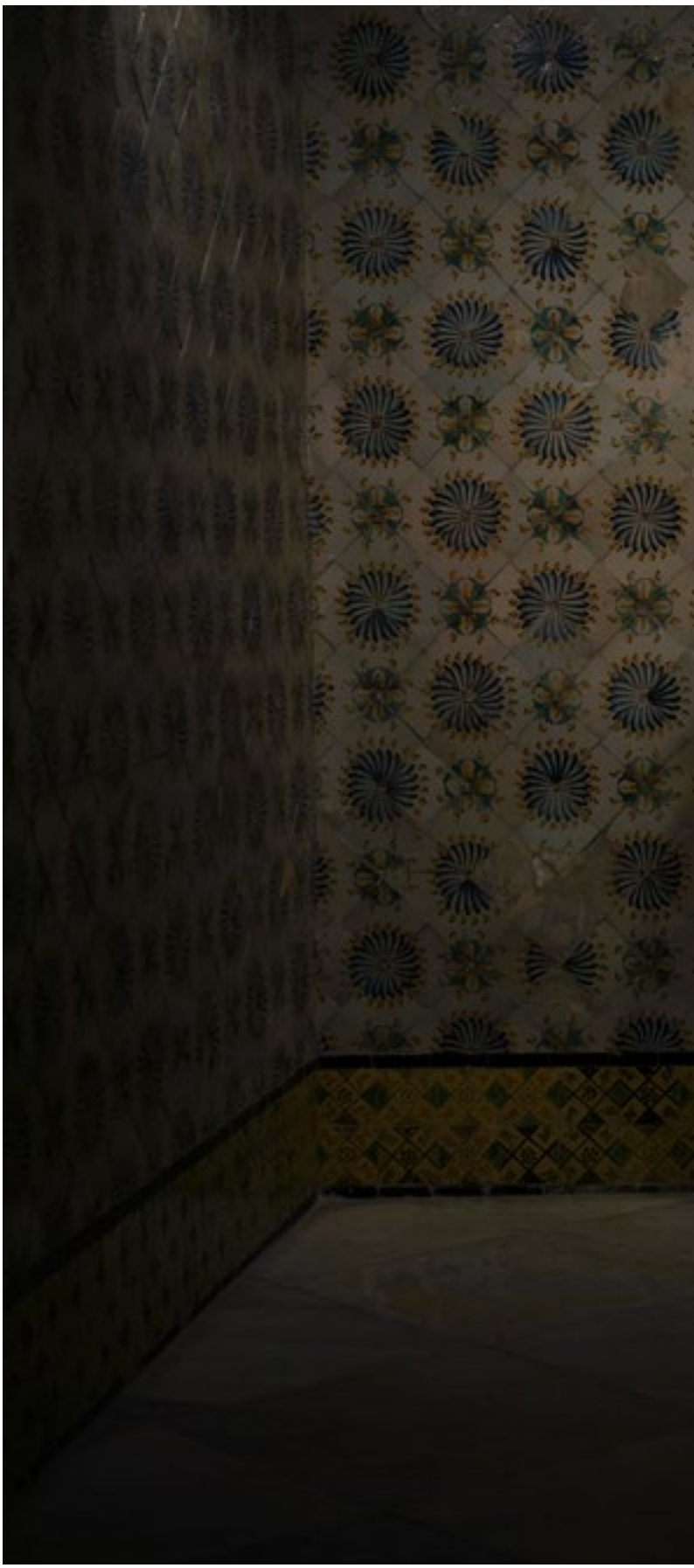
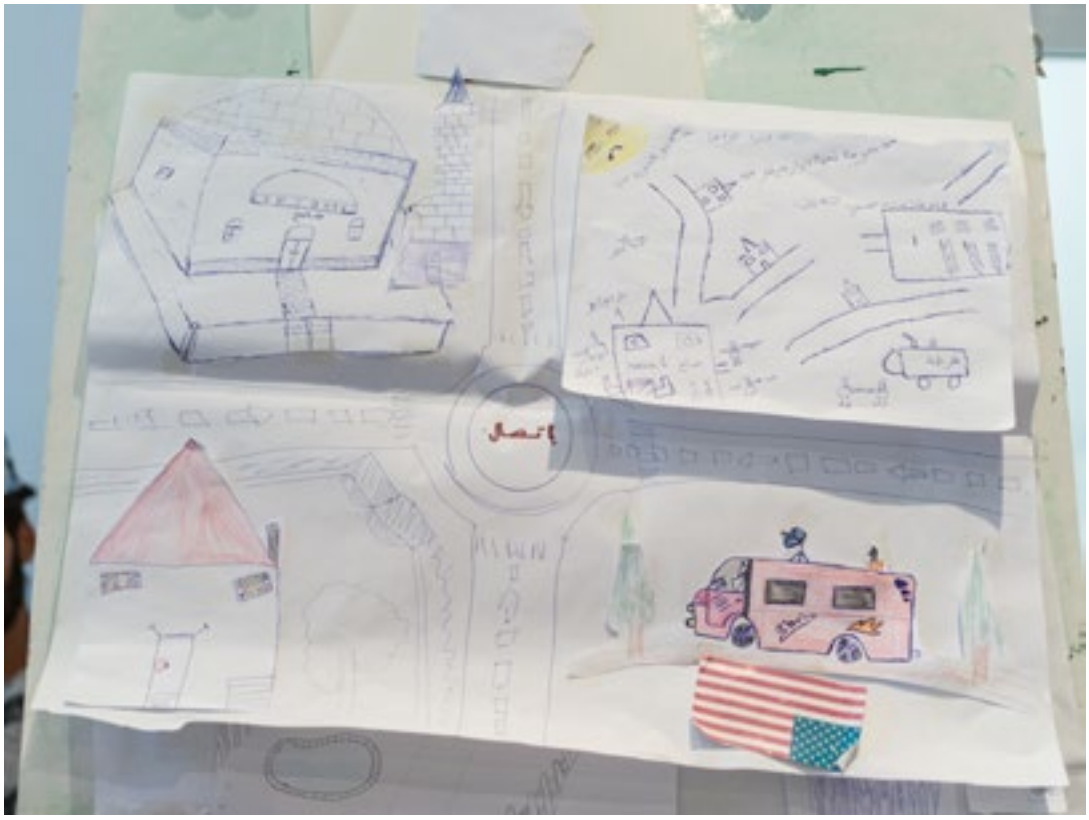
Tunisia, Tunis.
In the medina.



Tunisia, Tunis.
A teenager at the Bardo National Museum during one of the workshops organised by Asma Kaouech.



Left-hand and right-hand pages:
Tunisia, Tunis.
Young people attending a workshop organised by the Fanni Raghman Anni association. Participants are asked to design the house of their dreams. Afterwards, they discuss their ideas and are encouraged to express what they feel. Most of them have drawn large houses, thus denouncing the social inequalities and injustices of which they see themselves as victims. One of them draws a house in which he is alone. Another says: 'I cannot imagine an ideal city, because I do not know what it would look like even in a dream.'

Left-hand and right-hand pages:
Tunisia, Tunis.
Portraits of young people participating in workshops organised by Fanni Raghman Anni.

Following double page: Tunisia, Tunis.
Asma Kaouech during a protest against corruption in politics.

Tunisia, La Marsa.
A family on La Marsa beach, to the northeast of the capital.

Ameha Mekonnen

Ethiopia

by Enri Canaj

To get straight to the point, terror reigns in Ethiopia. For 25 years, the ruling coalition has been violating human rights in the same way as Colonel Mengistu and his junta did during the 'Red Terror' of his Marxist-Leninist dictatorship in the late 1980s. This suffocating climate, this all-encompassing dread and this feeling of constantly being followed, listened into and under threat is part of daily life for Ameha Mekonnen, a 45-year-old lawyer.

He has been waging a lone — or almost lone — battle, since in Ethiopia there are not so many people fighting to protect the freedoms that the authoritarian regime will not even contemplate granting: freedom of thought, freedom of expression and freedom to criticise, to demonstrate and to object. Albert Camus wrote that he only felt innocent when in a crowded football stadium, at the theatre or in front of a newspaper press. Ameha is totally innocent, and yet there are only four places he feels safe: in his car, in his office at the Human Rights Council — the only independent human rights organisation in Ethiopia —, at a family hotel in Addis Ababa and lastly at home with his family — his wife, who is also a lawyer, and his two daughters aged seven and four.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, August 2017.
In the office of the human rights lawyer and Sakharov Prize Fellow Ameha Mekonnen.

The Albanian photographer Enri Canaj, who spent 6 days with Ameha, witnessed the risks inherent in his work. 'I wanted to show the hope he embodies for everyone he defends and gets out of prison — the bloggers and the journalists. It was amazingly invigorating to see him in action. But I also wanted to show his everyday life, his daily struggle and the difficulties that arise. By helping people in danger, he places himself in danger.' Enri Canaj was unable to work as he would have wished. He had to make do with photographing Ameha indoors and in his car. Taking pictures in public was out of the question. Both men spoke very little on the phone and maintained

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Natnael Feleke and Getachew Shiferaw of the Zone 9 bloggers group.

discreet contact. Ameha was very worried. As was Enri, who had to conceal the real reason for his being in Ethiopia; he had even thought of saying he had come to photograph wildlife. Ameha described how he had recently organised a fundraising event for his organisation at a hotel in Addis Ababa. The event was all set to start when the police burst in and stopped everything.

Despite all this, Ameha Mekonnen makes no attempt to hide from the authorities, which is what earned him Enri's admiration. Enri was able to meet five of the nine bloggers and journalists who had spent over 1 year in prison. Ameha had secured their release, but they had no jobs and thus could no longer support themselves. No one wanted to employ them, even if the charges of terrorism brought against them were false — the regime does not look kindly on people who extend a helping hand to these former prisoners. The group told the photographer about the terrible prison conditions and cramped, suffocating cells. Ameha also introduced Enri to a young woman blogger from the Zone 9 group who had been imprisoned for 14 months and mistreated. 'Ameha decided to immediately act as her lawyer', says the photographer. 'He thought of his daughters and could not bear the thought of the same thing happening to them one day. His family is a pillar of strength and what motivates him to work with such fervour. I also wanted to portray all that in my photos: his courage, his values and his dedication as a lawyer, but also his devotion as a father.' While Enri was frustrated at being unable to capture stunning shots of Ameha for security reasons, there was one incident that lingers in his memory. One day, as Ameha was on his way to meet fellow committee members, the lift broke down. He always walks with a cane and had to go up the stairs slowly, step by step, with the end of his cane striking the floor. 'It was a perfect metaphor for his battle for human rights.'

To say that Ameha is courageous in his defence of human rights would be an understatement. Ethiopia has been in the grip of unrest and bloody repression since November 2015, with power lying in the hands of the Tigrayans, who are an ethnic minority in the country. The Oromo, who are the ethnic majority, are opposing the expropriation of their lands in the interests of foreign companies. The government has responded on more than one occasion with violence, which, according to Amnesty International figures, has left 800 people dead with thousands of demonstrators arbitrarily arrested and detained. The situation has deteriorated since 9 October 2016, when the government declared a state of emergency. That state of emergency was renewed in March 2017 before being lifted on 4 August. Prior to that, almost 30 000 people were arrested, including many journalists and opposition leaders. The few activists to speak to the press strive to remain anonymous, while the former prisoners find their degrading treatment hard to forget. 'Not content with hitting us, the police forced us to crawl like snakes on gravel, to stare at the sun and to jump like kangaroos for hundreds of metres

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen on the way to his office in the Bole district.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen going to a restaurant near his work.

with our feet tied together', wrote the Ethiopian blogger Seyoum Teshome, as reported by Émeline Wuilbercq in *Le Monde Afrique* of 26 May 2017. Their crimes? Denouncing corruption at the highest level and protesting against the trafficking of land to the detriment of people already excluded from a share in the country's wealth as well as against blatant inequalities and the deterioration of living conditions for the very poor. While critical of the government, Ameha refuses to attack it from the standpoint of the ethnic antagonism that exists between the ruling Tigrayans and the other ethnic groups. 'That approach is contrary to my beliefs', he stresses. 'I see the people and the governing party as two separate entities'.

This highly committed man is walking a tightrope. Behind his genuine humility — 'there are many other human rights defenders whose names should be put forward before mine' — lies a tenacity that means he does not shrink an inch in the face of intimidation and latent threats. He states his beliefs clearly and directly: 'I am fighting for freedom of expression. What is happening here in Ethiopia is very serious. There is nothing at all wrong with our constitution in terms of human rights. But our government sees no need to abide by that constitution! The members of our organisation are constantly harassed, and three of them are regularly thrown into prison. Terrorism is given a broader definition in Ethiopia than anywhere else I know in the world. Those in power view each and every one of us as a terrorist! That includes journalists and opposition leaders whose only offence is to have stated opinions that conflict with those of the government. I could also end up in prison simply for speaking with you. I live under constant threat, but that does not stop me from speaking out in public to denounce wrongdoing. The work I do goes beyond what a lawyer would normally do. I am adamant that any infringement of human rights should be public knowledge.'

Ameha is completely clear-headed. He has all the facts at his fingertips and is constantly playing the ringmaster to the government's lion in defending his clients — most of whom are in prison. He visits them there and works tirelessly to ensure their rights are respected. Some of the prisoners are from Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom. Nothing would be possible without the Human Rights Council, which despite its very limited resources has three lawyers among its permanent staff of five. 'What I do is legal work', says Ameha, 'but I don't take a meek approach to upholding my clients' rights'. This is a euphemism for saying that his 'full-on' approach is likely to put him in great peril someday. Until then, he will carry on. That is his mission in life. His *raison d'être* is to ensure that no one dies in fear or despair in Ethiopia, that no one dies through ill-treatment or for arbitrary reasons and that no one dies for their views.

Ameha's commitment to upholding fundamental rights was forged in 2006. At the time he was a lawyer in the service of the government. One day, the government decided to

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Meeting of the Zone 9 bloggers group. From left to right: Natnael Feleke, aged 30, held for 1 year and 6 months; Atnaf Berahane, aged 28, arrested in 2014 and held for 1 year and 5 months; Mahlet Fantahun, aged 33, arrested in 2015 and held for 15 months; the journalist Getachew Shiferaw, aged 32, arrested on several occasions and whose case is still being heard.

punish a leading professor for remarks he had made to his students. Ameha refused to toe the line. His reluctance to do so brought retaliation and many problems: he was banned from completing his legal training and acquiring a master's degree. He had made up his mind. He left his job in order to entirely devote his energies to defending people charged with 'crimes of opinion'. 'I am not politically motivated', he explains. 'There are currently 36 people accused of terrorism who are depending on me. At the Human Rights Council, where I work as a volunteer, I am responsible for three areas: the fundraising committee, the committee responsible for external relations and the committee for human rights education.' Despite his responsibilities, he is always calm and relaxed when at home with his family. He sees his country's future in his daughters' eyes. It is a future he wishes to be peaceful, calm and joyful. 'I am full of hope. That is why I am staying in Ethiopia', he says, and then repeats: 'I do not deserve this recognition.'

Left-hand page: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
In Ameha Mekonnen's office.

From left to right and top to bottom: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.

In the offices of the Human Rights Council, photos of people killed or wounded by the authorities — crimes for which no one has yet been prosecuted.

In Ameha Mekonnen's office. In 2015, Ameha joined the Human Rights Council as vice-president. The organisation's motto: 'All human rights for all'.

Ameha Mekonnen and one of his colleagues in the Human Rights Council offices.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Mahlet Fantahun and Atnaf Berahane.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
View of the city.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Natnael Feleke spent 1 year and 6 months in prison. 'I was lucky', he says; after being released he found work — something still proving very difficult for the other bloggers.

From left to right: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen on the roof of the Human Rights Council building.

Following double page: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen in a suburb of Addis Ababa in the late afternoon.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen's suit in a cupboard in his room.

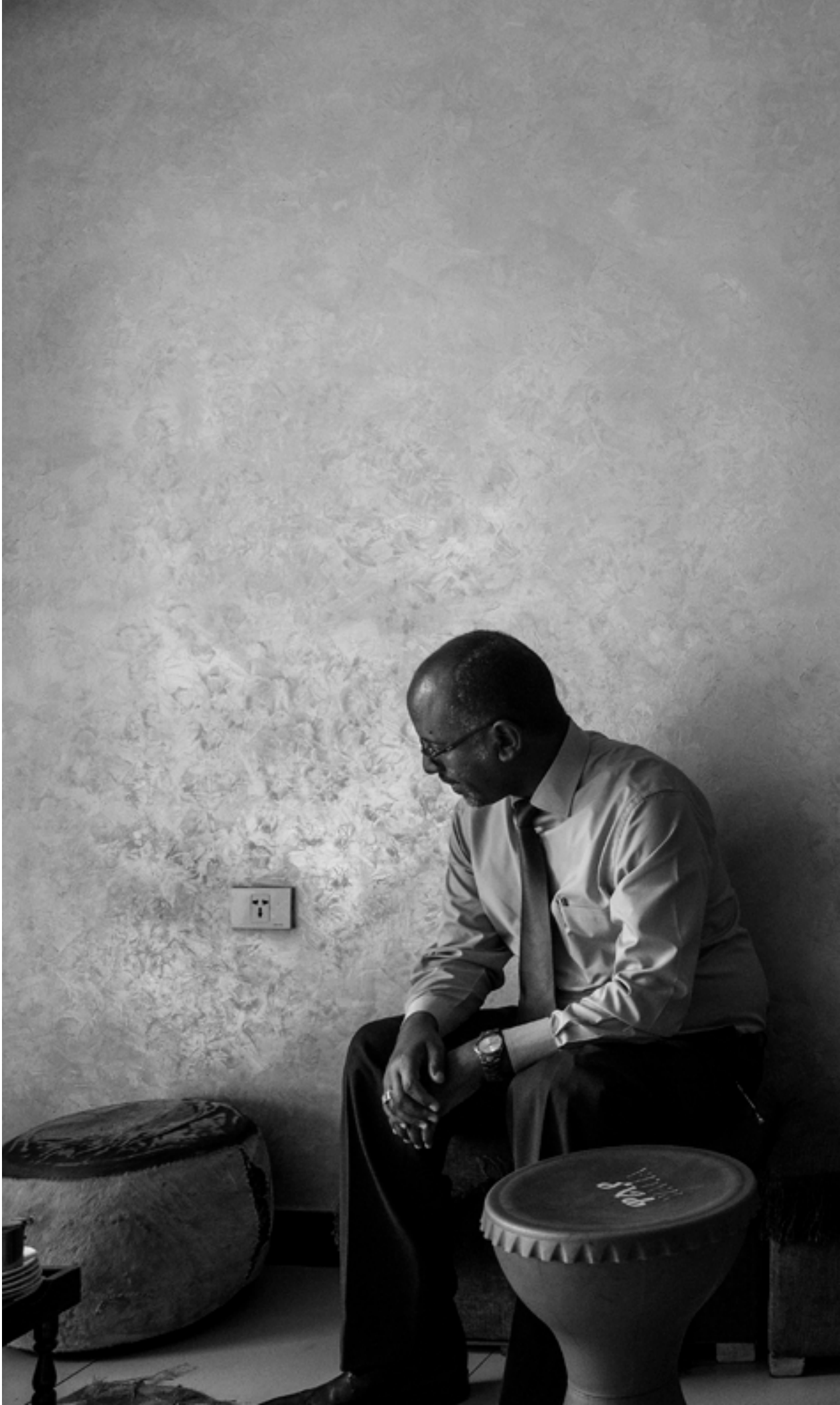
Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen and his children watching television.

Following double page: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha's family in the courtyard of his house one Sunday afternoon.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
In Ameha Mekonnen's living room.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha, his wife and their youngest daughter at mealtime.

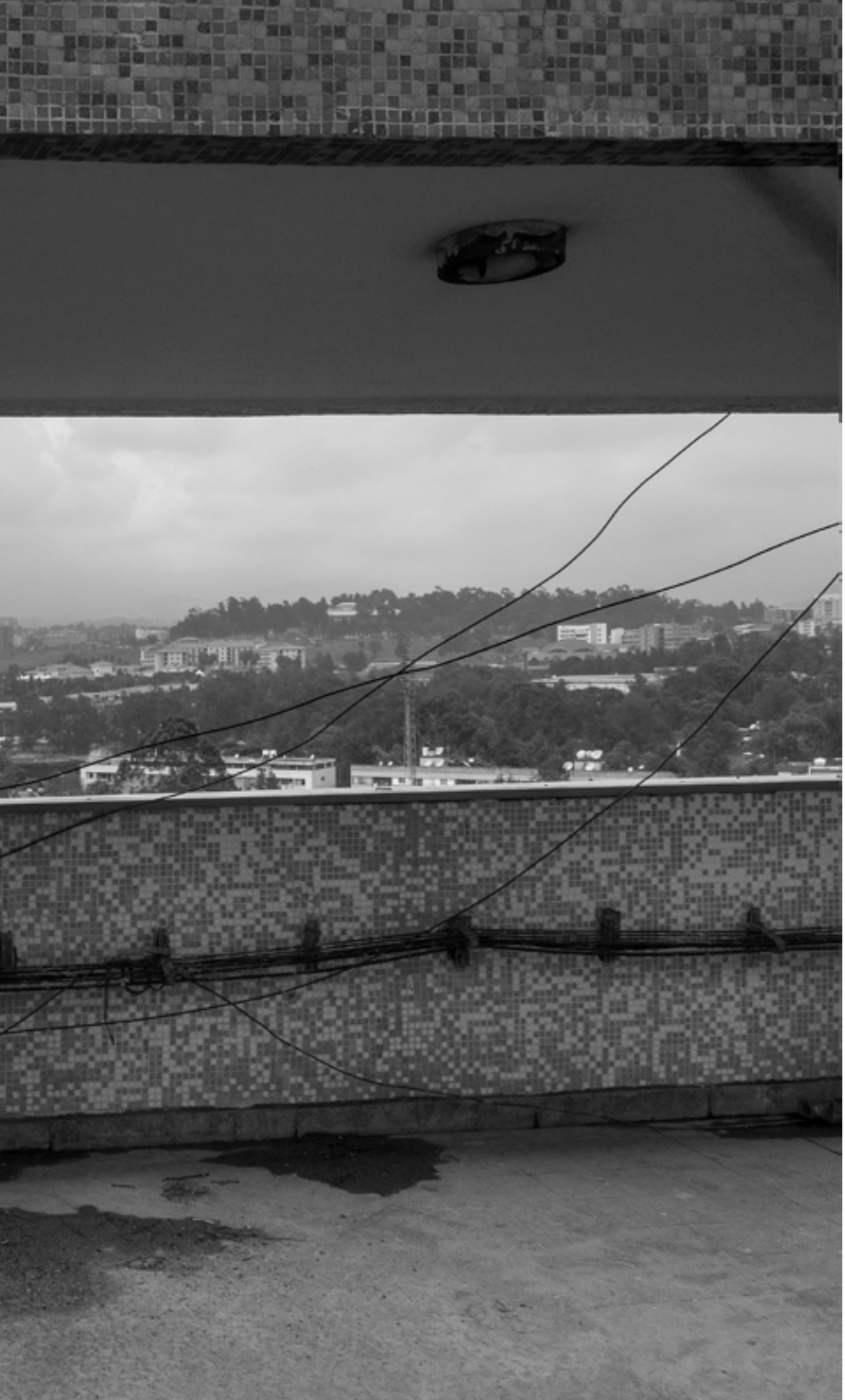
Following double page: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen during his lunch break at a restaurant near his office.



Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen driving to his office in the district of Bole.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
Ameha Mekonnen in a family hotel he knows well. It is one of the few places he feels safe.

Following double page: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
On the roof of the Human Rights Council building.



Jadranka Miličević

Bosnia

by Bieke Depoorter

To get to know Jadranka Miličević, to understand her and grasp the depth of her commitment, you first need to remember the hell she comes from. Just a few words are all it takes to recall a conflict that killed more than 200 000 people: the siege of Sarajevo; the Srebrenica massacre; the wars in the Balkans. The agony of Bosnia and Herzegovina brought on by the murderous re-awakening of nationalism that left the former Yugoslavia in ruins.

One of the bloodiest and deadliest episodes of the second half of the 20th century to follow the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet communism. It cannot be stressed enough: between 1992 and 1995, just 2 hours by plane from Paris and Berlin, on our very doorstep, Europe succumbed to a barbarity that it was incapable of stopping by itself. It fell to the United States, with the Dayton Agreement signed in Ohio in December 1995, to end the ethnic fighting. One of the first things that struck Bieke Depoorter, the photographer who met Jadranka, now 60, was that she talks, talks and talks. She keeps talking, telling and recalling, convinced that one of the most effective ways to fight for peace is to remember the horrors that took place. It was like yesterday, not even 25 years ago; barely a generation ago. And to think that it could start all over again if we drop our guard, if voices are not raised to retell ad nauseam what happened in this part of the Balkans. Thousands of women were raped; men, women and children were forcibly displaced, attacked or murdered. Ethnic cleansing on a massive scale in the name of a racial purification that echoed a previous era. Atrocities perpetrated on all sides by paramilitary groups and private militias, civilian against civilian, brother against brother, like wolves. So yes, Jadranka likes to talk; in fact, she is a bit of a chatterbox. She believes in the power of words against the inertia of forgetting. To share stories over and over again is to prevent them from disappearing from our collective memory. Jadranka's combative life story has been told in seven books and two films. There is no cult of personality, though; far from it. It is her way of operating and making what she does more credible, leading by example.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, August 2017.
Jadranka Miličević, human rights activist and Sakharov Prize Fellow, visiting the home of a Roma family.


Volim te!
BELIEVE

Previous double page:
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vareš.
Elda Šišić, the daughter of Lejla Omerović.

In 1992, on the eve of the conflict, Jadranka was living in Sarajevo. A normal life with a husband and two children. 'I was working in a bank. I was middle class. When the fighting started I left Sarajevo to take refuge in Serbia. The moment I became a refugee is the moment I also became a human rights activist. I wasn't going to wait for someone to come and help me. I was the one who wanted to help other people. But I had left with a feeling of guilt. I left my husband in Sarajevo. I couldn't *not* do anything.' In December 1992, she joined 'Women in Black', a pacifist and feminist organisation in Belgrade. That was the start of a struggle which continues to this day. 'I began my new life,' recalls Jadranka. 'The only life I love. I felt as if I had lost 30 years, the first 30 years of my life.' Through Women in Black, Jadranka forged ties with other 'peace guardians' in Germany, Spain, Italy and Hungary. Together, they set up support networks for abused women. They gather and exchange the experiences of women living in conflict zones such as Bosnia and Croatia, women who Jadranka calls 'friends'. 'We published works in English, illustrated with testimonials.' Always the same obsession, the same leitmotiv: publish in order not to forget, and speak so as to preserve the peace. She helped establish the CURE Foundation in Sarajevo, a feminist and activist NGO which promotes gender equality and the positive development of society through educational and cultural programmes. Jadranka now helps set up local branches of CURE and provides training for people to meet their own material needs. In small groups, participants are taught how to sell honey or lavender-scented cushions and are provided with advice and the tools to survive in an environment where, even after the war, women are largely neglected. Especially Roma women. It was this suffering that led Jadranka to join CARE, another NGO entirely dedicated to supporting Roma women facing discrimination.

CURE and CARE; Jadranka's life is bound up in these two organisations, which she runs primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. A full-time activist, 24/7. No personal life, no private life. There is only time for her outreach activities, training, project development and applications for funding, including from the EU. 'We never see our mother,' says one of her sons. 'She's always travelling to do her workshops.' 'That's her life,' Bieke Depoorter says. 'It's the only thing that matters. She doesn't want to call the people she helps "beneficiaries". Most end up becoming her friends.' You could say they are her other family, if not her real family. 'Together, we left Sarajevo to go on a tour of nearby villages,' Depoorter adds. 'It was very important for Jadranka. She wanted me to photograph her in these places. Every year, at the end of July, she goes to Srebrenica with several members of the CURE Foundation and the Women in Black group to visit the memorial to the victims. She is determined to hold on to the memory of those atrocities, whatever the cost.' Jadranka says gravely: 'I wanted to show Bieke these places. I know some people who lost their entire family. A friend of mine lost 56 family members here.' It is thanks to

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vareš.
Jadranka visiting Lejla Omerović, who lives in a remote village near Vareš. In 2014, Lejla's house was partially destroyed by flooding. The CURE Foundation came to her aid by raising funds to help repair her house, but more money is still needed before the work can begin.

the initiative of women like Jadranka that the Srebrenica–Potočari memorial was inaugurated in 2003, 8 years after the massacre. 'We are pushing the government to build places of remembrance. We are also helping war widows who live alone to exercise their rights. And, of course, we are trying to find the bodies of those who were killed. The Srebrenica–Potočari memorial lists 8 372 names, but only 6 800 sets of remains have been found and identified. Widows and mothers are still waiting to properly mourn their loved ones. Even after all these years, the pain is still very real. How can we get back to a normal life when the whereabouts of all these people who were killed remain unknown?'

For Bieke Depoorter, this was not an easy assignment. She has deep admiration and respect for Jadranka, for her ceaseless and committed activism, her staunch feminism and her stubborn desire to give power to women so that they can take control of their own lives, be independent and fully exercise their rights. Nevertheless, the photographer had to work with what Jadranka let her see. Wherever she travels, whether it is to the United States or Egypt at the time of the

revolution, Depoorter seeks to establish a close relationship with the people she captures through her lens. For her, a photograph is a conversation. 'The most important thing is the personal relationship,' she says. 'Often, they don't want to be photographed. In Bosnia I tried to explain to Jadranka the approach I wanted to take, because she was worried that I would show the poverty of their homes. On the last night, I could do what I wanted and in the way I preferred. Sitting on the bed of someone who has invited me. Finding myself alone with a family. Establishing a climate of confidence, which builds trust.'

Depoorter's photos are full of humanity. For example, those of Lejla, who lives alone in a village. Raped during the war, beaten by her husband, abandoned by her family; her life has been a struggle. 'It's her courage that

has given her the strength to be happy today,' says Jadranka, who is full of affection for the young woman. Through CURE, Lejla was given a sewing machine, which she uses to make and sell handicrafts. In 2014, Lejla's house was flooded. Jadranka's NGO once more intervened to help the young woman and protect her livelihood. She does this tirelessly, day in and day out. Whether in Sarajevo, Montenegro or Serbia, she devotes herself to supporting Roma women through CARE. At 5 p.m. the first part of her day comes to an end and she moves on to her work for CURE. 'So far we have helped 15 000 Roma and Romanian women. With our help they have been able to go to the doctor, and to have mammograms. We collect money to fund schools, so that even the poorest people can keep their homes.' As long as she has the strength, she will continue the work. 'Being an activist, taking care of other people, is what has allowed me to survive,' she concludes.

Left page:
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Visoko.
Mirsada Bešić's house.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vareš.
Elda Šišić, the daughter of Lejla Omerović.

Following double page: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Visoko.
Mirsada Bešić's house is the only one in the area with running water.
Her neighbours come to her to stock up.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Visoko.
Harun with the Bešić family's cow.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vareš.
Lejla Omerović and her family in a field.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sokolac.
Jadranka talking to Jovana Boljanić, a young feminist, and her father Bogdan. Jovana and Jadranka met at one of Jadranka's workshops. Jovana launched the activist organisation Art Queer. To begin with, Jovana's father and brother opposed her activism and she would have to go to meetings in secret. Now, Jovana's father is more supportive and lets Jadranka visit the family home for the first time.

Following double page:
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sokolac.
Jovana Boljanić in her bedroom, a place where she feels free to be herself. She keeps her private possessions here, including her rainbow flag, which, despite everything, she still conceals from her brother and father.


08

Previous double page:
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sokolac.
Jovana wears a red apron, a souvenir from a workshop run by Jadranka, which she attended 7 years ago. Since then, the two women have remained in contact. Jovana's home town is very conservative; she says she was the first girl there to wear jeans.

Above: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo.
Asja, Jadranka's assistant.

Above: Bosnia and Herzegovina
Jadranka setting off on her annual visit to the memorial in Srebrenica.

Following double page:
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Srebrenica.
Every year, Jadranka visits the Srebrenica–Potočari memorial together with members of the CURE Foundation and Women in Black to commemorate the genocide.

Bosnia and Herzegovina
Jadranka travels throughout Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia to run her workshops.

Above: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo.
Jadranka talking to Majka Mejra ('Mother Mejra'). Mejra lost her two children and her husband during the war. Her family was imprisoned in 1998 and then murdered. She has spent years trying to find their bodies. Today she helps other families to locate their relatives who went missing.

Two following double pages:
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kakanj.
In Nuna Zemina Vehabović's house. Nuna launched the 'Centre for Mother Hope' project with a friend, but now she runs it on her own. She is also in the local government and is involved in defending the Roma in Kakanj, of whom there are more than 2 600 living together in a part of the town.


Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee
Ff Gg
Kk
Pp
Vv

Above and right-hand page, top:
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kakanj.
In Nuna Zemina Vehabović's house.

Above: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo.
In a Roma family home.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kakanj.
In Nuna Zemina Vehabović's house.

Following double page: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo.
Jadranka at home.

They defend our freedoms

by Éric Fottorino

Human rights. Two short words with a long history. Two short words which, armed only with the force of an ideal, do so much to prevent human beings from preying on one another. How many ideals and struggles are encapsulated in this term? How many tortured faces have been banished from the world of the living? How many charters and resolutions, protocols and pacts, conventions and petitions are there? How many hopes and battles against the arbitrary? How many places on this planet where the force of law has finally won out over laws imposed by force?

These are always uncertain victories, which, lest we forget, are constantly undermined by complacent, empty rhetoric of the 'never again' variety. The formal agreements binding all nations did not do anything to prevent a series of genocides throughout the 20th century, even though the preamble to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is very clear as to what our aim should be: 'Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people'. This prefigured Article 1 of the declaration itself, which bears the stamp of Eleanor Roosevelt and the French lawyer René Cassin: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' The Shoah was followed by the slaughter perpetrated by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the Rwandan genocide and the mass killings of Bosnians carried out by Serb soldiers at Srebrenica. Other massacres in Latin America, in Darfur, in Congo, in Iraq, in Yemen and in Syria — the list goes on — have provided further proof of the willingness of regimes and countries to trample under foot fundamental human rights, which the international community continues, in the face

Previous double page: **Moises Saman**
Libya, Zawiyah, 2011.
A pro-Gaddafi activist displays a portrait of the dictator.

Below: **Larry Towell.**
Palestinian Territories, Gaza, 1993.
Children playing with plastic guns.

of all the evidence, to proclaim as universal, inalienable and indivisible.

A list of the most serious instances of human cruelty towards others would highlight at least three types of large-scale repression which have gone on simultaneously since the end of the Second World War: state communism, totalitarian and imperialist, as exemplified by the Soviet gulag and its inmates, known as zeks; Moscow's snuffing out of the revolts in the satellite countries of the former USSR — Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968 —; China's Cultural Revolution, which claimed the lives of 1 million people between 1966 and 1968; or the crushing of the student uprisings at Tiananmen Square and the massacres of peaceful Tibetans. Then there are the colonial wars, which, from Vietnam to Africa, decimated civilian populations, turned children into cannon fodder and women into sexual objects and forced millions of ordinary people into exile. I am thinking of the Vietnam War, of course, and of the war in Algeria, which at the time were merely seen as local conflicts. Lastly, there are the Latin American dictatorships, Vargas's Brazil, Pinochet's Chile and General Videla's military junta in Argentina. In the 1970s, these regimes provided the most glaring examples of human rights violations. Who could have forgotten the young opponents of the regime who were thrown into the sea from helicopters, or the determined struggle by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo — dubbed the 'madwomen of the Plaza de Mayo' by the military — to find their children who had been kidnapped dur-

Alex Webb
Nicaragua, Puerto Cabezas, 1992.
Child belonging to the Miskito minority.

ing Argentina's long night of terror? In 1992, these courageous women were awarded the Sakharov Prize, which this year is celebrating the 30th anniversary of its inception.

Reading the list of winners is enough to be reminded that the work of defending human rights takes many forms: upholding democracy, safeguarding freedom of thought, combating torture and all forms of discrimination, condemning arbitrary decisions to deny people freedoms on religious, racial or political grounds or for reasons linked to their sexual orientation. Awarded for the first time in 1988 to Nelson Mandela and Anatoly Marchenko (posthumously), this prestigious distinction does not only reflect the European Parliament's determination to defend fundamental rights. It is also intended as a mark of support for the men and women who take great risks to advance the cause of freedom in their respective countries. Throwing the spotlight on them is often also a way of protecting them from their enemies and offering them conspicuous backing. Because in almost all parts of the world, defending freedoms and democracy is a dangerous activity which costs many activists their lives. Winners of the Sakharov Prize include heroes who were previously anonymous and have now become the public face of a struggle: Denis Mukwege, who saved the lives of so many women in the Democratic Republic of Congo who had been appallingly mutilated; the young Pakistani woman Malala Yousafzaï; or the two young Yazidi women from Iraq, Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bachar, who narrowly escaped the worst of the horrors perpetrated by Da'esh before leading the fight against the trafficking of women. Mothers, artists, anti-torture and pro-peace activists, representatives of ethnic minorities and the United Nations as an institution: from the start the Sakharov Prize has made bold and eclectic choices when choosing recipients who embody the struggle of the human face against the inhuman.

From the first decade of this century onwards, every major protest movement has been triggered by violations of human rights and human dignity. The Arab revolutions would perhaps never have broken out if, on 17 December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, the young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi had not set himself on fire in an act of desperation and protest at the iniquitous system established by Ben Ali and his clan. Without his cart and scales, he was nothing. The conflict in Syria has its deep roots in the sufferings of the 13-year-old boys who scrawled 'Bashar out!' on the walls of Damascus. The Syrian president went on to commit further massacres against his own people, even going as far as to use chemical weapons containing sarin gas to kill thousands of innocent people in Goutha in 2013 and in Khan Cheikhoun, in the north-west of the country, 4 years later. The agony of the city of Aleppo in late 2016 offered further proof — if any were needed — of the dehumanisation of govern-

Following double page: **Hiroji Kubota**
North Korea, Chongjin, 1986.
Giant portrait of President Kim Il Sung at the entrance to the Kim Chaek ironworks.

ment forces; all these atrocities were perpetrated under Russia's complicit gaze. Among the thousands of images of the disaster, one that still stands out for many people around the world is that of Anas al-Basha, the 'clown of Aleppo', who entertained children as the bombs fell around him before he was killed by an air strike 'in a place where the darkness is blackest and where the dangers are most deadly', as his brother put it at his funeral.

Our journey is not over yet. The Democratic Republic of Congo is regularly the scene of massacres perpetrated by militia groups and the army, who act with complete impunity as the country descends ever further into chaos. Attacks, beatings, kidnappings and displacements — these are just a few of the human rights violations committed in the African countries where armed conflict has been a part of everyday life for many years, from Nigeria to Cameroon, under the violent hand of Boko Haram, from Mali to Somalia, from Sudan to Chad. Let us not forget that to the east of the Congo, in the Great Lakes region, more than 6 million people have lost their lives since the Second World War, making this part of Africa one of the greatest killing fields of contemporary history.

As for Latin America, it remains a place where life is cheap. 'In 2016, the Central American "northern triangle" — Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras — was one of the most violent regions in the world,' as the most recent report by Amnesty International stresses. 'More people were killed there than in most conflict zones globally. El Salvador's homicide rate of 108 per 100 000 inhabitants was one of the highest in the world.' Although the situation in Colombia has improved after an agreement was reached between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, proof that reconciliation is still possible even after 50 years of conflict, Venezuela is descending into dictatorship under President Nicolás Maduro, against a backdrop of an economic crisis, the muzzling of democratic institutions and a violent clampdown on opponents of the regime.

A map of recent flagrant human rights violations should also highlight the less-publicised repression of the Hmongs in Laos and of minorities in Turkmenistan, a country which rebuffs all attempts to shed light on the freedoms enjoyed — or not enjoyed — by its people. Lastly, as we are all well aware, the Mediterranean has become a graveyard for migrants from Libya, Mali, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, and an end to these tragedies is not yet in sight. Mention should also be made of the violations that escape the media's gaze and of the defenders of freedoms whose work is done in places beyond the reach of the information society.

Does this endless catalogue of suffering and defeat mean that fundamental rights are inexorably being undermined? Things are not as simple as that and for precisely that reason they are not as bad as they seem. What we are talking about? The former French ambassador for human rights, François Zimeray, offered a clear and dispassionate definition:

Christopher Anderson
Chile, Santiago, 1995.
Military parade in honour of Augusto Pinochet in front of the presidential palace.

'Human rights,' he wrote, 'are not a matter of ethics or even values. Symbols do nothing to encourage people to uphold them, indignation even less so. They are rights born out of political compromises and, therefore, are imperfect. Rights which do or do not exist and which are upheld or violated. The right not to be tortured, the right to a fair trial, the right to equality between men and women, the right of children to a childhood: upholding human dignity means upholding all these rights. It is this purpose which gives human rights their moral force.' (Zimeray, F., *J'ai vu partout le même visage. Un ambassadeur face à la barbarie du monde*, Plon, Paris, 2016).

By this yardstick, the human rights situation improved steadily over the period from the Nuremberg trials (1945-1946), at which the leading members of the Nazi regime were held to account, to the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002, the high water mark of universalism. Not that these 50 years, as we have seen, have not had their share of bloodshed. But new rights have continually been acknowledged as we have built on the 30 articles which made up the 1948 universal declaration, which said nothing about the situation of children. As years have passed, new forms of protection have been agreed on for refugees and stateless persons, for women and for children. Economic, social and cultural rights have been proclaimed, and the struggle to end discrimination has been stepped up and given a more specific focus in the United Nations, the Council of Europe and other multilateral bodies. As regards the ICC, the creation of a body that seeks to prevent atrocities before they can occur must be seen as a major advance. This philosophy sets the ICC apart from other special courts, for Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, for example, which were established after disastrous events had befallen the countries in question — an approach completely at odds with the very concept of law.

Other recent achievements include the endorsement of the right of intervention in 2004-2005, which international law explicitly recognises as the responsibility to protect. This major step forward was followed by a setback in the wake of the international intervention in Libya. Western forces went beyond the legal mandate conferred on them, ushering in brutal regime change. It is not certain that the right of intervention will emerge unscathed from the Libyan adventure, even if intervention there was essential.

Quite apart from the constant violations perpetrated by authoritarian regimes, the precious concept of human rights today faces another real threat: the challenges to the principle of universality. Many countries in Asia and the Arab world, not to mention the United States, are seeking to narrow the definition of human rights. They are invoking dubious arguments based on cultural differences and special circumstances to justify the redefinition or even abolition of certain rights. A concept developed by the former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, 'Asian values' are now being cited by the Chinese

Previous double page: **Thomas Dworzak**
Russia, Grozny, 2002.
Girl with balloons. Behind her, the destruction caused by the two wars in Chechnya.

authorities in support of their assertion that specific local circumstances override international standards. 'These special circumstances,' François Zimeray also wrote, 'imply that civil and political liberties are less essential than the freedom to produce, consume and obey.' In other words, there are human rights and there are human rights, double standards, a hierarchy of norms in which national rules take precedence in the name of tradition and custom, of each to their own and of everyone for themselves. The same determination to water down the principle of the universality of human rights can be observed among the leaders of the Muslim countries which make up the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The Islamic Charter of Human Rights published in 1990 makes some beneficiaries of these rights, where women are less equal than men. But autocratic regimes do not have a monopoly on such attempts to undermine the concept of universal human rights. Without going as far as to do away with them altogether, the United States — under the presidency of George W. Bush and now that of Donald Trump — have hollowed out fundamental rights by employing practices justified by what they see as higher causes. The acts of torture perpetrated by the US army in Iraq or the human rights abuses documented at Guantanamo Bay provide ample evidence of this relativism. But can a right be sacrificed with impunity in the name of another right?

The principle of universality is also being challenged by three African countries — Burundi, Gambia and South Africa — which have announced their intention of withdrawing from the ICC (more accurately from the Rome Statute) on the pretext that the court in The Hague targets African leaders. This accusation, made in bad faith, essentially serves to highlight the impunity that many of the leaders enjoyed for decades. 'The African Union continued to call on states to disregard their international obligations to arrest Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir despite his being wanted by the ICC on charges of genocide,' to quote Amnesty International's scathing criticism. 'In May 2016, Uganda failed to arrest him and hand him over to the ICC, failing hundreds of thousands of people killed or displaced in the Darfur conflict.'

These setbacks show that universal human rights are now coming up against two increasingly powerful adversaries: the sovereignty of the community and the ideology of the clan. There is a real danger that these restrictive approaches will put an end to the primacy of the individual or will cause us to lose sight of the fact that there are rights which are granted to each individual for the sole reason that he or she is alive and a citizen of the world, a fully fledged member of the human race. The battle is not lost, however. It is a battle that must be fought every minute of every day. In the front line are the people who, wherever they live and wherever they suffer, make their contribution to achieving the common goal of defending human rights. That commitment is shared by the 30 winners of the Sakharov Prize who, for the last 30 years, have been throwing open the doors of hope and ensuring that they are not slammed shut once again. Defending human rights means, first and foremost, defending their defenders.

The Sakharov Prize

Awarded for the first time in 1988 to Nelson Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is the highest tribute paid to human rights work by the European Union. It gives recognition to individuals, groups and organisations that have made an outstanding contribution to protecting freedom of thought. Through the prize and its associated network the EU supports laureates, who are strengthened and empowered in their efforts to defend their causes.

The prize has so far been awarded to dissidents, political leaders, journalists, lawyers, civil-society activists, writers, mothers, wives, minority leaders, an anti-terrorist group, peace activists, an anti-torture activist, a cartoonist, long-serving prisoners of conscience, a film-maker, the UN as a body and even a child campaigning for the right to education. It promotes in particular freedom of expression, the rights of minorities, respect for international law, the development of democracy and implementation of the rule of law.

The European Parliament confers the Sakharov Prize with its EUR 50 000 endowment at a formal plenary sitting in Strasbourg towards the end of each year. Each of the Parliament's political groups may nominate candidates, as may individual Members (the support of at least 40 Members is required for each candidate). The nominees are presented at a joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Development Committees and the Human Rights Subcommittee, and the members of the full committees vote on a shortlist of three. The final winner or winners of the Sakharov Prize are chosen by the Conference of Presidents, a European Parliament body led by the president, which includes the leaders of all the political groups represented in the Parliament, making the choice of laureates a truly European choice.

The Sakharov Prize laureates

2017 Democratic opposition in Venezuela

2016 Nadia Murad Basee Taha, Lamiya Aji Bashar

2015 Raif Badawi

2014 Denis Mukwege

2013 Malala Yousafzai

2012 Nasrin Sotoudeh, Jafar Panahi

2011 Arab Spring: Mohamed Bouazizi, Ali Ferzat, Asmaa Mahfouz, Ahmed El Senussi, Razan Zaitouneh

2010 Guillermo Farinas

2009 Memorial

2008 Hu Jia

2007 Salih Mahmoud Mohamed Osman

2006 Aliaksandr Milinkevich

2005 *Damas de Blanco*, Hauwa Ibrahim, Reporters Without Borders

2004 The Belarusian Association of Journalists

2003 United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and all the staff of the UN

2002 Oswaldo Jose Paya Sardinas

2001 Izzat Ghazzawi, Nurit Peled-Elhanan, Dom Zacarias Kamwenho

2000 *¡Basta Ya!*

1999 Xanana Gusmao

1998 Ibrahim Rugova

1997 Salima Ghezali

1996 Wei Jingsheng

1995 Leyla Zana

1994 Taslima Nasreen

1993 *Oslobođenje*

1992 *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*

1991 Adem Demaci

1990 Aung San Suu Kyi

1989 Alexander Dubček

1988 Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Anatoli Marchenko

The role of the European Parliament

EU citizens, according to opinion polls, believe that human rights are the value the European Parliament should defend as a matter of priority. Human rights are embedded in the EU treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as in the EU's external relations policies, including the 2015-2020 action plan on human rights and democracy. In its relations with non-EU countries, the European Union is bound to work for democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. The European Parliament is a key actor in defending and promoting democracy, freedom of speech, fair elections and universal human rights.

The European Parliament not only awards the annual Sakharov Prize, it also upholds and defends human rights through: resolutions on urgent human rights matters; an annual report on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policies on the issue; parliamentary dialogue and diplomacy with counterparts and authorities in non-EU countries; hearings on human rights issues in its committees; participation in electoral observation missions worldwide; joint actions of the Sakharov Prize Network; the Sakharov Fellowship for human rights defenders; and other human rights actions in partnership with national parliaments and civil society.

In its human rights urgency resolutions, adopted at every Strasbourg plenary session, the Parliament takes a position and turns the spotlight on human rights abuses around the world. It also reiterates its unequivocal positions on the prevention of torture and against the death penalty, the protection of human rights defenders, conflict prevention, women's and children's rights, the protection of minorities and the rights of indigenous peoples and people with disabilities all over the world. The European Parliament's resolutions often serve as the basis for action by the EU's Council of Ministers, the European Commission and the European External Action Service, and at times have an immediate impact on the actions of the governments concerned.

The European Parliament oversees the EU's external relations as its legislative powers allow it to block the conclusion of EU agreements with other states if there are serious breaches of human rights and democratic principles. The Parliament insists on strict compliance with the human rights clauses that are systematically included in such agreements. In April 2011 the Parliament called for the EU to suspend negotiations for an association agreement between the EU and Syria and, in September 2011, the EU cooperation agreement with Syria was partially suspended 'until the Syrian authorities put an end to the systematic violations of human rights'.

In the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the development cooperation policy, EU law states that its objective is 'to

develop and consolidate democracy and rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'. This objective has been explicitly incorporated, largely thanks to the European Parliament. Every year the Parliament adopts its own report on the annual report from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the Commission on the main aspects and basic choices of the CFSP.

The Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) is the body that is mainly responsible for parliamentary work on human rights and provides a regular forum in which Members of Parliament (MEPs), international actors, experts and civil society propose and assess EU and international action on human rights issues. The DROI also regularly joins or invites other Parliament committees for such discussions. Its reports and resolutions are adopted by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. The Committee on Development also holds regular discussions about human rights in developing countries. Committee delegations also address human rights issues during country visits.

The Parliament has strengthened its role in the defence of human rights by supporting parliamentary democracy and parliamentary political dialogue, with its standing delegations holding hearings with civil society representatives from non-EU countries and sending ad hoc delegations to assess the human rights situation on the ground. The main forums for political dialogue between the European Parliament and members of non-EU countries are the EU–African, Caribbean and Pacific States party to the Lomé Convention's Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly and the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly with eastern European partners.

The European Parliament has used its budgetary powers to substantially increase the resources earmarked for programmes dealing with democracy and human rights. It has also successfully fought to maintain the functioning of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, a key financial and policy instrument to support civil society and human rights defenders, particularly those in danger of losing their lives.

Complementing its human rights work, the Parliament is committed to supporting free and fair elections in countries outside the EU as these are essential for creating democracy, bringing legitimacy and raising public confidence in institutions. MEPs regularly lead and take part in the EU's election observation missions, aiming to ensure that people's right to choose their leaders is fully respected.

Following double page: **Nikos Economopoulos**
Turkey, Yozgat, 1990.
Political rally.

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