

Media Highlights 2023



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The Human Rights Foundation's (HRF) work is covered by top global media outlets, reaching millions of people worldwide.

In this media booklet, you'll find some of the most noteworthy articles authored by or written about HRF in the last year.



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BY THE NUMBERS

58



Languages

71 Billion

Global Impressions

141



Countries

15.4K

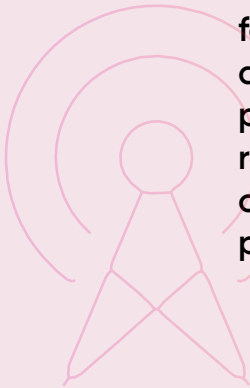
Media Mentions

\$664 Million

Earned Media Value

BROADCAST AND TELEVISION

HRF's work is consistently featured in top media outlets around the world. Besides print and online formats, HRF regularly makes appearances on television, the radio, and podcasts. Here's a snapshot:



Feb. 3, 2023



Garry Kasparov: Putin's attempts to restore Russia's lost empire destined to fail



June 15, 2023



Paul Rusesabagina speaks out after prison release



June 15, 2023



A Special Interview with Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe



June 15, 2023



CNBC covers Financial Freedom track at Oslo Freedom Forum



June 17, 2023



Masih Alinejad continues the fight against the Iranian regime



Sept. 19, 2023



1 year after Mahsa Amini's death, Iranian activists still fighting for freedom despite regime's cruelty

BBC WORLD SERVICE Sept. 20, 2023



Human Rights Group Projects Human Costs of the Fashion Industry

Statues of Liberty

On the Liberty Sculpture Park, decrying the Chinese dictatorship and celebrating Chinese freedom strugglers

Outlet
National Review

Author
Jay Nordlinger

Date
Feb. 6, 2023



Tank Man, by Weiming Chen, photographed on January 17, 2023 (Jay Nordlinger)

Sculpture parks are rare enough — certainly as compared with art museums — but the Liberty Sculpture Park is rarer still. It has a theme: the oppression of the Chinese government and the heroism of Chinese people who actively oppose it.

The park is in Yermo, Calif., in the Mojave Desert, about twelve miles from the town of Barstow. Yermo is known as “the Gateway of the Calicos,” i.e., the Calico Mountains.

There is a Marine base here — specifically, the Yermo Annex of the logistics base at Barstow.

And next to the park is EddieWorld: a gas station, but not just any gas station. This one has been called “the Disneyland of Gas Stations.” EddieWorld is, in fact, the largest gas station in California. There are many eateries inside, including Jedediah’s Jerky. Also, the place boasts “the cleanest restrooms on I-15.”



From the highway — and from EddieWorld — what stands out in the park is a huge bust, in the shape of the coronavirus molecule. On inspection, the bust is half Xi Jinping (the boss of the Chinese Communist Party, and therefore of China) and half skeleton. This artwork was unveiled on June 4, 2022.



The date June 4 is not accidental. That is the date of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. It is a date very important to dissidents.

Weiming Chen is the sculptor of the coronavirus bust and of virtually all of the other works in the park. He was

done more than one coronavirus bust. The first was unveiled in the park on June 4, 2021. Several weeks later, it was burned to the ground. Chen and his friends said that this crime was committed by agents of the Chinese government. Dissidents would say that, wouldn’t they? Yes, but...

In March 2022, the U.S. Justice Department charged five people with “stalking, harassing, and spying on U.S. residents on behalf of the PRC secret police.” Three of those people are connected with machinations against Chen. One of them has pleaded guilty, and the other cases are pending.

It took seven months to produce the first coronavirus bust. It took another seven months for Chen and his helpers to produce the second — identical to the first, except in one respect: It is made out of steel, the better to thwart arsonists. The bust weighs ten tons. (Its predecessor was of fiberglass.)



Weiming Chen, mid-construction (Jonas Yuan)

For Jonas Yuan, a young intellectual who assists Weiming Chen, I have a question. "Forgive me, but why would the Chinese government – the mighty Chinese government – care about a little sculpture park in a faraway desert?" Yuan answers, "They're so petty."

A perfect answer. In addition to monstrous – genocidal – the Chinese Communists are petty.

Chen maintains a studio about nine miles from the sculpture park. This morning, he and his team are welding a wave, which is to be part of a sculpture commemorating the "freedom swimmers": people – thousands of them – who swam from mainland China to Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Many of them, of course, did not survive the effort.



Weiming Chen at work

For lunch, Chen takes his team and me to Peggy Sue's 50's Diner. Did these Chinese-born people ever think they would be eating hamburgers in the California desert? Life is convulsive that way.

After lunch, we visit the park. Next to the coronavirus bust, Chen has left the

first one – the ruins of it. In a way, the ruins make as powerful a statement as the second, and intact, bust.



One of Chen's other sculptures depicts Li Wangyang, a Chinese democracy activist. He was arrested at Tiananmen Square, then imprisoned for 21 years. A year after his release, he was found hanged in a hospital room. The authorities said, naturally, "Suicide." But they changed their line to "accidental death." Dissidents have little doubt he was murdered.

On a plaque, Chen has a quotation from Li: "Everyone is responsible for the fate of the nation, and I will not yield, even if I am to be beheaded."

Another of Chen's sculptures is a giant "64" – just that number, silver, rising in the sky. It stands for "June 4."



(Photo by Jonas Yuan)

Still another shows the "Tank Man," that unidentified yet iconic person who, on June 5, 1989, stood in front of a column of tanks.



For Jonas Yuan, I have another possibly rude question. "Isn't the park a little remote?" Yes, but the land out here is affordable. Moreover, says Yuan, we are roughly midway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas – a busy corridor. There's EddieWorld. Plus a Tesla Supercharger.

An increasing number of people are visiting the park, says Yuan, with a "big proportion" of them Chinese, or Chinese American.

There is an aspect of the park that comes from visitors. On a fence, they hang various artworks, or signs – humble, homemade things. The signs speak of the visitors' personal experiences or feelings. For instance, one sign decries the sexual violence of the Hong Kong police.

Another sign shows what purports to be the logo of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (a world-famous institution). Instead of a horse, there is a deer, a buck. Jonas Yuan explains. There

is an old saying in China: "This is a horse." You are looking at a deer – an animal that is plainly a deer – but your mouth says, "This is a horse." Why? Because the political authorities demand that a deer be a horse. Up is down, black is white – and a deer is a horse.

This is the culture of the lie, into which the whole population is coopted.



Back at the studio, I have a leisurely talk with Weiming Chen. He was born in Hangzhou, in 1956. Hangzhou is a city in east-central China, about 100 miles southwest of Shanghai. Chen's birthday is December 28. So was Liu Xiaobo's, he points out. Liu was a year older than Chen, born in 1955.

Liu Xiaobo was a leader of the Chinese democracy movement and a

political prisoner. In 2010, he received the Nobel Peace Prize, in absentia. He had been in prison since 2008. He died in 2017, surrounded by Red Guards.

Behind Weiming Chen, as we are sitting, is a bas-relief, sculpted by him. It shows Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize medal, and an empty chair. Such a chair was present at the Nobel ceremony, to symbolize the absent laureate.



Chen's mother taught art and music in a high school. "Do you like music?" I ask Chen. He does. But a piano, or even a violin, was expensive. Pencils and paper — they were cheaper. This influenced the young Weiming Chen toward art.

His father taught physical education at a university. He was taken prisoner in 1957, the year after Weiming was born. The elder Chen was a victim of Mao's "Anti-Rightist Campaign." (A "rightist," remember, was anyone suspected of having criticisms of the Communist Party. University personnel were especially suspicious.)

Weiming's father was kept in prison for over 20 years — until 1978. Two of

Weiming's siblings were sent to the countryside, for "reeducation through labor." The Chens were a typical Chinese family.

Growing up, Weiming could not dream of going to a university. He was from a "bad family," you see. But when Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, loosened the country, Weiming had a chance. He took it, to go to the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

Why sculpture, and not some other medium? Because, in books, Chen saw the Sphinx. And ancient statues of Buddha. And the Statue of Liberty. And Mount Rushmore. He was excited by these monumental works. This is much better than oil painting, he thought.

His sculptor heroes are Michelangelo and Rodin. How about political heroes? "Reagan," he says — and all the great dissidents who have arisen in China.

After graduation, Chen taught art, and then he worked in a sculpture studio. Unlike Western cities, he says, Chinese cities have sculpture studios — official ones. Chen worked in one of these. Employees of such a studio make pieces for squares and parks, serving the party — celebrating Mao, for instance.

Chen wanted to go to America but could not obtain a visa. He applied to many, many countries — and the coun-

try that took him was New Zealand. He left China for New Zealand in 1988. Did he think he was leaving China forever? He did think that, yes. In 2007, he was able to come here to America.

Shortly after he arrived in New Zealand, he was commissioned to make a brass sculpture of Edmund Hillary, the great mountaineer, born in Auckland. Sir Edmund himself attended the unveiling.

Chen's catalogue is large, but I will mention a few other pieces. He made a sculpture of the Goddess of Democracy — the symbol of the Tiananmen Square protesters. It was housed at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He made a bas-relief of the massacre. That was housed at another Hong Kong university, Lingnan.

He also made a sculpture called "Burning Tibet." It depicts one of the self-immolators in that country. It stands in Dharamshala, India, the capital of the Tibetan diaspora.

In recent years, Beijing has cracked down on Hong Kong, making it a PRC city like any other. It perhaps goes without saying that Weiming Chen's pieces at those universities have been removed.

I ask him, "Are you half artist, half dissident?" Not quite, he answers. He is an artist first. "But an artist always wants to be free. So a dictator is his natural enemy."

He is a very unusual fellow, Weiming Chen, and a brave one. From 2012 to 2014, he made three trips to Syria, where he worked with the Free Syrian Army. Why? He says that foreigners have supported Chinese people in their effort to break free of the Communist dictatorship. He wanted to show Syrians that not all Chinese people support the Assad dictatorship, though Beijing does. He thought it was a matter of conscience, and national honor.

It was in 2016 that Chen, with partners, purchased the property in Yermo: 36 acres. His first piece for the Liberty Sculpture Park was a bust of Crazy Horse. Yes, Crazy Horse, the Oglala Sioux leader of the 19th century. It is the only piece in the park that is not explicitly Chinese. Chen wanted to "show respect," he says, to the pre-colonial inhabitants of America. He also admires the fighting spirit of Crazy Horse.

When I ask what his personal favorite is — his favorite piece in the park — he gives an answer I was not expecting: "Crazy Horse."



Chen plans to be working here at the park for the rest of his life. There will be more sculptures. He also hopes to raise enough money to build a museum, which will tell the stories of “people who have struggled for freedom in China,” as he says.

“Why have you done this?” I say. “Is the park an act of devotion? An act of protest? An act of the heart?” Chen says, “I want to record real history — true history. Because the Chinese government tells everyone history that is wrong. History that is not real. They say that the coronavirus comes from American soldiers. They say that no one died at Tiananmen Square. I use art — sculpture — to tell real history.”

If I know one thing about dissidents — and I have sat with a great many of them, from all over the world — it’s that, as a rule, they detest a lie.

At the end of our conversation, I ask Chen a standard question: “What should Americans know about China that they may not know?” He says, “They don’t know how evil the Chinese Communist Party is. Many people think of evil as something that’s in a movie, not in real life.”

China’s rulers, says Chen, “care only about power. Not human beings. People are just material to them” — material to be shaped and pushed around and smashed.

Weiming Chen is a serious artist whose life has led him to activism. “Dictators always want to control you,” he says. “We should do some things, not just talk some things. Make something like a park.” He has, and a unique and bold one.



Weiming Chen at the entrance of his park

Russia Has Stifled Another Putin Opponent. Here’s How The West Might Help Him

Outlet
Op-Ed
CNN

Author
Casey Michel

Date
April 28, 2023

Editor’s Note: Casey Michel is the head of the Human Rights Foundation’s Combating Kleptocracy Program. He is the author of “[American Kleptocracy: How the US Created the World’s Greatest Money Laundering Scheme in History](#),” and is at work on a book investigating foreign lobbying in Washington. The views expressed in this article are his own. Read [more opinion](#) at CNN.

Some [70](#) US lawmakers [wrote](#) to Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week, urging the Biden administration to press Russia for the release of imprisoned dissident Vladimir Kara-Murza.

That correspondence probably won’t prompt Russian President Vladimir Putin to free his longtime critic, but it just might help cast a spotlight on the plight of Kara-Murza, which deserves far more international attention than it has generally received.

Much public notice justifiably has been paid in recent months to other individuals who have been unjustly imprisoned by Putin’s ruthless regime. The outrageous detention last month of [Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich](#) has prompted vocal demands for his release from his employer and from the US State Department and generated international headlines.

Meanwhile, an [Oscar-winning](#) documentary has called attention to the terrible plight of imprisoned opposition leader [Alexey Navalny](#), whose [deteriorating health](#) is cause of grave concern. [In comments posted on Twitter](#) this week, he wrote that his situation may even be worsening, saying that Russian authorities told him they are [planning to prosecute him](#) on terrorism charges that could mean decades more in prison.

While the West must continue to call for the release of those two high-profile political prisoners, it should not

overlook Kara-Murza. Although he is respected for his work as a [Washington Post](#) columnist and has been honored with the [Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize](#) – reaction to his plight as a Russian prisoner has seemed strangely muted.

Russian authorities charged Kara-Murza with treason in October 2022, after being detained in April of that year. His arrest [followed a speech](#) he gave the previous month to the Arizona House of Representatives in which he called out Western “appeasement” of Putin. After a [show trial](#), a Russian court sentenced him earlier this month to a staggering 25 years in prison, the [harshest sentence](#) meted out to a government critic since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year.

Since his arrest, the [US, Canada and Latvia](#) have issued fresh sanctions against Russian nationals. And last month, the US [State](#) and [Treasury](#) Departments announced a number of sanctions against those involved in Kara-Murza’s prosecution and detention, accusing them of “serious human rights abuse[s].” But the response elsewhere has been surprisingly lackluster – especially by the United Kingdom Kara-Murza is a citizen of Britain, in addition to holding a Russian passport.

Last week, after months of seeming inaction, the British government [condemned](#) Kara-Murza’s conviction and sentencing. It announced [sanctions](#)

against various individuals it accused of having a hand in his detention and prosecution, as well as two FSB security service agents it said played a role in his [two near-fatal poisonings](#).

“The UK will continue to support Mr. Kara-Murza and his family. I call on Russia to release him immediately and unconditionally,” Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said in a statement announcing the sanctions.

But in various public statements, including in an interview with the BBC, Kara-Murza’s wife Evgenia [lamented](#) that it took a draconian prison sentence against her husband to spur London to act.

“It only saddens me that it took a year of unlawful detention, a horrific sentence of 25 years in a strict regime and a very concerning deterioration of my husband’s health for the British government to move to a somewhat stronger response,” Evgenia Kara-Murza [told](#) the British broadcaster.

London’s less-than-robust response points to a disheartening problem: An apparent lack of coordination among Western allies in responding to the incarceration of such a prominent opposition figure, as Russia lurches toward totalitarianism.

The Biden administration launched its [“Without Just Cause”](#) campaign aimed at highlighting the plight of political prisoners – including Kara-Mur-

za – around the world. US lawmakers in the US Congress have issued a range of congressional [resolutions](#) and [individual statements](#) highlighting Kara-Murza’s plight.

But efforts to call attention to the plight of those who are unjustly imprisoned and to undertake concerted action to help them have been, at best, scattershot. The disjointed Western response to Kara-Murza’s plight only works to Russia’s advantage.

The disjointed Western response to Kara-Murza’s plight only works to Russia’s advantage.

After more than a year of war, certain Russian officials and various oligarchs have been sanctioned by certain Western governments while others are not – a helter-skelter response which helps only them circumvent existing sanctions. And even when sanctions are applied, they don’t always seem to have the desired effect, as we learned this week amid headlines about a Russian deputy defense minister whose socialite former wife apparently is living the high life in Europe – even though her ex-husband has been sanctioned.

It’s long past time to create a coordinating body to ensure that Western sanctions packages are aligned and airtight. A [proposal](#) for a Trans-Atlantic Anti-Corruption Council lays out the perfect framework for such a body. It would bring together officials

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and experts to further align anti-corruption policy on both sides of the Atlantic, and is precisely what’s needed if America, Britain, the European Union and Canada are to present a unified front on the sanctions regime.

We know that the threat of being sanctioned [still strikes fear](#) in the heart of Russian officials and oligarchs. It’s possible that they recalled a similar case from over a decade ago, after the imprisonment and death in custody of Russian figure Sergei Magnitsky. That led US lawmakers to pass the well-known and broadly successful 2012 [“Magnitsky Act”](#) sanctions program which Russians came to revile.

The law was signed by then-President Barack Obama as a retaliation against the human rights abuses suffered by Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer and auditor who discovered hundreds of millions of dollars in graft and fraud involving the Kremlin. Magnitsky, who was arrested without charge after blowing the whistle,

Somehow it seems – despite all the attention Moscow has drawn over the past year for its invasion of Ukraine and the increasingly authoritarian leadership of President Vladimir Putin – that the West still treads gingerly with the Russian dictator, even amid his egregious human rights abuses and blatant violations of international law.

ultimately died during his detention under suspicious circumstances.

A 2016 measure, the [Global Magnitsky Act](#), expanded on the original law, and has succeeded in targeting [hundreds](#) of corrupt individuals and entities around the world since its enactment, according to the US government. A number of [European countries](#) have also passed their own versions of the Magnitsky Act.

Somehow it seems – despite all the attention Moscow has drawn over the past year for its invasion of Ukraine and the increasingly authoritarian leadership of President Vladimir Putin – that the West still treads gingerly with the Russian dictator, even amid his egregious human rights abuses and blatant violations of international law.

The US senators have gestured at least toward trying to help Kara-Murza, a man who had survived two poisonings suspected to have been

carried out by the Russian regime, and who as a result has [lost feeling in both feet and one of his arms](#).

The letter by US lawmakers is a small step, but it is at very least, a start. Washington should now follow it up with more robust action, including declaring Kara-Murza “wrongfully detained.”

The US government should encourage Western allies to take similar stringent measures against Putin’s regime and to pledge to improve coordination on sanctions moving forward. It might yield results in the form of fewer detained dissidents – and could even lead to the long-overdue freedom from prison for Kara-Murza.

Profile of the Oslo Freedom Forum

At the Oslo Freedom Forum, dissidents and rights defenders seek solidarity as their movements struggle.

Outlet
POLITICO

Author
Nahal Toosi

Date
June 18, 2023



Refugees from the civil war in Sudan arrive in Madrid, Spain, on April. 24, 2023. | Spanish Defence Ministry via AP

OSLO, Norway – Gatherings of human rights activists tend to feature commitments to the cause mixed with a lot of gallows humor – after all, many such advocates have survived and persisted in their roles despite imprisonment, torture and surveillance by authoritarian regimes.

But on a sunlit June night in this Nordic capital, at the annual Oslo Freedom Forum last week, it was hard to avoid a more pessimistic tone.

Dissidents and human rights campaigners led toasts and implored each other to keep the faith in their quest to end tyranny. They admitted, however, that they were running short on hope amid the rise of increasingly nimble, tech-savvy adversaries.

"The state of the modern human rights movement is rather dire," said Ramy Yaacoub, who works on Middle East issues for the Open Society Foundations, a grant-making network founded by liberal billionaire financier George Soros. "Back in the day, human rights groups were ahead of the curve. But autocratic regimes have learned from that. They're investing in their tactics, and they're coordinating."

Conversations with more than a dozen attendees last week suggest that a global movement that flowered post-World War II, and saw major victories amid the fall of the Soviet Union, now sees itself at a crossroads.

If activists fail to find new methods, they say, dictators are likely to grow even more emboldened.

For Yaacoub and 1,400 others gathered at the forum, the last 15 years have been marked by far more failures than successes. Even what seemed like initial victories often morphed into losses. Just a few years ago, for instance, [democracy campaigners in Sudan celebrated the ouster of a dictator](#); today, military leaders who took advantage of that moment have plunged [the country back into war](#).

"We can't even point to Tunisia anymore," bemoaned Andrea Prasow, executive director of The Freedom Initiative, referring to the north African

country's return to autocracy after years of being the sole democratic success of the Arab Spring.

Prasow said she's having a harder time convincing funders to support the work of her organization, which focuses heavily on freeing political prisoners, as positive results feel too few and far between. "It's a long game," she tries to explain to them.

The advocates have no intention of abandoning their collective and individual fights. But the conversation here in Oslo centered on the need to rethink the human rights movement's actions and tools at a moment when autocracy has gained strength worldwide and technology offers both promise and peril. They know that while autocratic regimes are refining their methods, the countries that say they support human rights, such as the United States, can be unreliable when their own interests are at stake.

Sanaa Seif has learned from bitter experience. More than a decade ago, she joined groups who successfully called for the overthrow of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak. But the Arab country is now under the arguably more brutal dictatorship of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the recipient of billions worth of U.S. security aid. Seif's brother, Alaa Abd El-Fattah, is a political prisoner there.

"I started with a very powerful movement. Since then, it's been defeat

But the conversation here in Oslo centered on the need to rethink the human rights movement's actions and tools at a moment when autocracy has gained strength worldwide and technology offers both promise and peril.

and degradation," Seif said. "Now, I really believe we should dream big, but we should be very pragmatic about our expectations."

There's no solid way to quantify the reasons for the activists' frustration; no single data set captures every win or loss in a field that draws everyone from advocates for political prisoners to those crafting anti-corruption laws.

One frequently cited source is Freedom House's "worldwide freedom index," a measure of democracy's strength. It has been [on a downward slide for 17 years](#).

Other [data sets are fragmented at best](#), so rights activists are left with anecdotes. Those are usually depressing: Afghanistan is back under control of the Taliban, meaning women and girls' rights are severely curtailed; Iran's Islamist regime has largely snuffed out a protest movement over the past year, partly by

ramping up executions; and many voices say democracy in the United States, still a beacon of hope for this crowd, faces danger, amid moments like the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Many human rights activists applauded the United States and its European and Asian allies for supporting Ukraine as it tries to repel Russia's invasion, a major topic at this year's forum.

But some said that the war has become an excuse for Western leaders to go easy on abusive governments elsewhere in the world.

Azerbaijan's strongman, Ilham Aliyev, should face far more economic sanctions from the United States and other governments, argued Leyla Yunus, a one-time political prisoner from the country. But, because Russia's war on Ukraine has hurt energy markets, the "West needs Azerbaijan's oil and gas, and our dictator enjoys it," Yunus said.

The State Department declined to comment on U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan or other specific cases cited in this story. And in the case of Azerbaijan, any U.S. desire to penalize the country has been further complicated by recent diplomatic efforts to resolve [a long-running conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia](#).

A State Department spokesperson, however, referred POLITICO to a recent comment from Secretary of

State Antony Blinken on the issue more broadly. “Human rights are always on the agenda for the United States. It’s who we are,” Blinken said.



Iranian-Canadian artist Simin Keramati sits in the PaykanArtCar during its unveiling at the Oslo Freedom Forum on June 13, 2023. The car is adorned with women’s hair, serving as a visual representation of support for the “Women, Life, Freedom” protest movement against Iran’s Islamist regime. | Fredrik Naumann/AP Images for PaykanArtCar

Such claims do not assuage rights activists. Democracies always put their own domestic “economics before human rights,” said Victor Navarro, a journalist and former Venezuelan political prisoner who was at the conference.

In the United States, President Joe Biden is hosting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi this week for a state dinner, despite growing concerns about the Modi government’s autocratic actions and persecution of Muslims. In the past, U.S. officials have stressed that they talk to India privately about human rights issues, but they also consider it a critical partner in the U.S. rivalry with China.

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have increasingly [questioned](#)

[whether the modern human rights movement is succeeding.](#)

Some argue that the “name and shame” tactic so often used by rights groups doesn’t sway autocrats the way it might have in the past. They just don’t seem to care that much about how they are viewed.

Scholar Jack Snyder argued in a [2022 essay for Foreign Affairs](#) that some strongmen have successfully cast promotion of human rights as the work of elitist, out-of-touch “bullies who push alien agendas to replace popular national self-determination.” (He included in the group former U.S. President Donald Trump, who praised many dictators and is seeking a second term.)

The solutions proposed by academics and activists range from focusing more on economic fairness and inequality issues to greater cross-border collaboration among rights organizations.

At the Oslo conference, activists were also increasingly focused on the potential of using new technology to help their causes. Some are sending cryptocurrency to dissidents in authoritarian countries as a means of supplementing their resources.

But tyrants have also learned to use technology to surveil, outwit and further oppress their populations. And authoritarian regimes are collaborating with each other on the

tech front — regimes in the Middle East are now [using Chinese surveillance tools](#). Iran and Venezuela have signed [a series of cooperation agreements](#) on science, technology and beyond in part to defy U.S. sanctions on both countries. The arrival of powerful new versions of artificial intelligence is only adding to rights activists’ worries.

Dictators also have learned to put a veneer of legality and respectability over their actions, dissidents note. More autocrats know not to win so-called elections by 99 percent anymore, but a more reasonable figure that comes [even after plenty of manipulation](#).

The activists in Norway could not think of many successes in recent years. Some pointed to growing awareness of far-right extremism, the release of some political prisoners (though that’s often accompanied by new arrests) and efforts by social media companies to prevent online radicalization.

And they stressed that raising awareness of rights abuses still matters. The Chinese crackdown on Uyghur Muslims would be even more severe were it not from the global outrage directed at Beijing, said Gulbahar Haitiwaji, a Uyghur previously detained in one of China’s internment camps.

“The criticism didn’t free everyone, but it did help some people regain their freedom,” she said.

The Oslo Freedom Forum’s goals include connecting dissidents and activists so they can both trade ideas and know that they aren’t alone in their fights.

The Oslo Freedom Forum’s goals include connecting dissidents and activists so they can both trade ideas and know that they aren’t alone in their fights.

Political prisoners at the event, which is organized by the New York-based Human Rights Foundation, bond with others who’ve endured similar experiences. Much of the program involves presentations from dissidents who’ve survived everything from solitary confinement to assassination attempts.

There’s a wellness room for people who need to decompress amid trauma-triggering conversations. But there also continues to be humor in the face of adversity.

One speaker mentioned how nice it was to be in Norway and not tailed by security forces.

“You know, I miss them,” Mzwandile Masuku, a Swazi human rights lawyer, joked of his usual pursuers. “I wonder what they are doing.”

Bolivia's jailing opposition leaders on absurd 'terrorism' charges

Outlet
Op-Ed
New York Post

Author
Jhanisse Vaca Daza
and Javier El-Hage

Date
Jan. 13, 2023



Supporters of opposition leader and governor of Santa Cruz Luis Fernando Camacho, hold a Bolivian flag and Santa Cruz flag as they protest at a roadblock in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

A Dec. 28 police operation involving over 40 heavily armed officers – most of them in plain clothes and wearing masks – [violently arrested Luis Fernando Camacho](#), one of Bolivia's most important opposition leaders and governor of the region with the country's largest city, and swiftly moved him to La Paz in a military helicopter.

It seemed more like the arrest of a drug kingpin than of a democratically elected governor driving back home for lunch from a day in the office.

Twenty-four hours later, Camacho, 43, was preliminarily sentenced to at least four months' pretrial detention in Chonchocoro – Bolivia's notorious maximum security prison in El Alto – as he awaits trial on charges of "terrorism."

The arrest has spurred country-wide demonstrations and police repression against his base in Santa Cruz, and set another terrible precedent for the political persecution of high-level government critics in a country with a judiciary notorious for doing the bidding of authoritarians.

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The arrest has spurred country-wide demonstrations and police repression against his base in Santa Cruz. AFP via Getty Images

Videos of Camacho's arrest shared by local media showed the politician handcuffed on the side of the road; the windows of the car in which he was traveling smashed.

He's charged over taking part in the "Coup d'Etat I" – as the government calls the case – in November 2019 against then-President Evo Morales, who actually resigned (and fled the country) after nearly 14 years in power.

International observers from the Organization of American States concluded that the results of the 2019 presidential election – where Morales was illegally seeking his fourth consecutive term – were largely fraudulent, saying he tampered with vote tallies to avoid a run-off vote and thus secure the presidency. The European Union concurred.

But divisions among the opposition allowed Morales' party to regain power in the next election, in less than a year.

Camacho did play a key role in the massive country-wide nonviolent protests that led to Morales' resignation, by tapping into Santa Cruz's long-held regionalist sentiment against the overbearing La Paz-based central government, galvanizing the country's regional opposition and coordinating with country-wide civil society groups who were equally tired of Morales' authoritarianism.



Camacho was preliminarily sentenced to at least four months' pretrial detention. REUTERS

As then-president of Santa Cruz's Civic Committee, Camacho openly promised the beleaguered national police force better working conditions after Morales's corrupt rule came to an end – a move that, atop a month-plus of civil disobedience, helped spur a police mutiny vital in forcing Morales's hand.

He also brokered alliances with indigenous Potosi-based miners (whose leader, Marco Pumari, is now also arbitrarily imprisoned) and the historic La Paz-based "Central Obrera Boliviana."

None of this comes close to making him a "coup plotter" or a "terrorist." He and millions of Bolivians were just audacious in exercising what was left of freedom of expression and association in a strongman-weary country.

Yet [the "Coup d'Etat I" case](#) is also the pretext to imprison transitional President Jeanine Áñez, [sentenced in June to 10 years](#) for making "decisions contrary to the constitution" and for "dereliction of duty." (She was initially charged with terrorism, sedition and conspiracy.)

Ambiguous offenses like "terrorism" or "sedition" are often used to persecute the opposition. Bolivia's judicial system is one of the world's worst. This year, the World Justice Project ranked it as 130th out of 140 countries in its Rule of Law index.

Bolivians know President Arce Catacora's Movimiento Al Socialismo Party won't be afraid of using the country's subservient judiciary to enact revenge. It's closely allied to Cuba's totalitarian regime, the kleptocratic dictatorships in Venezuela and Nicaragua as well as Iran and China.

MAS seeks to avenge the international embarrassment of having crumbled over proven allegations of fraud and the abuses suffered at the hands of Áñez's government (led by authoritarian government minister Arturo Murillo), which was itself notorious for persecuting MAS leaders for "terrorism."



Camacho's charged over taking part in the "Coup d'Etat I" in November 2019 against then-President Evo Morales. REUTERS

For truth and justice to prevail in the region, and to have free and fair elections, Latin American countries must have some semblance of the rule of law. Opposition leaders can't

be thrown arbitrarily into jail on vague charges because the powers that be decided so.

Pumari, Áñez and Camacho are but the latest examples of the lawlessness and ruthlessness with which the Arce regime is handling high-profile political opponents. Consider it just the beginning.

Jhanisse Vaca Daza is the co-founder of Rios de Pie, a Bolivian nonviolent citizen movement and an activism outreach specialist at the Human Rights Foundation. Javier El-Hage is HRF's chief legal officer.

Make Russia Pay

Outlet
Op-Ed
The Atlantic

Author
Casey Michel

Date
May 28, 2023



For months, the West has fretted over the prospect of paying for Ukraine's reconstruction. Russia's war has inflicted an estimated [\\$400 billion](#) in rebuilding costs, a tally that rises every day. Western leaders, already alarmed by inflation and the threat of recession, have understandably blanched over the bill. But many of them are disregarding a solution that would cover most of Ukraine's costs and help deter future aggression not only from Russia but from dictatorships around the world. A year ago, Western governments [froze](#) some \$300 billion in state assets from Russia's central bank. Now they could seize the funds and give them to Ukraine.

The biggest question is whether this would be legal. As critics have noted, a seizure of this magnitude has never been attempted. Moreover, little precedent exists for the United States to confiscate the assets of a nation with whom [\(despite the Kremlin's claims to the contrary\)](#) it isn't at war.

But Russia has unleashed a kind of rank imperialism the world has rarely seen since the Cold War, committing war crimes and—as [manifold evidence suggests](#)—genocide, all against a harmless neighbor. Because of its unjustifiable aggression and atrocities, Moscow has forfeited any moral right to funds stashed abroad.

The reasons to seize them are legion. Confiscating the Russian funds—which are spread across various Western economies—would serve a crucial role in ending the fighting, beating back Russian imperialism, and ensuring a viable economic future for Ukraine. And it would send a clear threat to regimes that might otherwise be willing to breach international law and destabilize continents for their own gain, as Moscow has.

Seizing these assets would also help fix an overlooked issue facing Ukraine: investor hesitancy. Investors [remain wary](#) of bankrolling projects that could be targeted by Russian drones and artillery. But the frozen funds could cover nearly 75 percent of Ukraine's costs and significantly reduce the burden on potential financiers, making the country a more appealing investment destination.

In the U.S., much of the legal debate has focused on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), a 1977 law that defines the president's abilities to regulate international commerce during national emergencies. Although the IEEPA has historically been used to authorize more conventional sanctions—including in [Iran](#), the [Central African Republic](#), and [China](#)—some scholars, most notably Laurence H. Tribe and Jeremy Lewin, have argued that it could also be used to seize the tens of billions of dollars in Russian assets currently in U.S. reserves.

That proposal has generated [legal pushback](#), although advocates are undeterred. The nonprofit Renew Democracy Initiative told me that it has commissioned a study of the "legal foundations for seizing frozen Russian assets and transferring them to Ukraine," which will be led by Tribe. (The initiative is chaired by Garry Kasparov, who also chairs the Human Rights Foundation, where I direct a program on combatting kleptocracy.)

Even if U.S. law offered clear justification, though, it couldn't be used to touch any of Russia's assets frozen in Europe, which are [far more valuable](#) than those in the U.S. Fortunately, international law appears to offer such justification.

As Philip Zelikow and Simon Johnson [wrote in Foreign Affairs last year](#), Russia's obvious culpability for the war entitles Ukraine to claim compensation from Russia. Because "the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a wrongful, unprovoked war of aggression that violates the United Nations Charter," Zelikow and Johnson argue, any state (not just Ukraine) can "invoke Russia's responsibility to compensate Ukraine, and they can take countermeasures against Moscow—including transferring its frozen foreign assets to ensure Ukraine gets paid."

Despite many policy makers' impression that Russian assets are untouchable, Anton Moiseienko, an international-law expert at the Aus-

tralian National University, recently [showed](#) that they aren't immune from seizure. "To extend protection from any governmental interferences to central bank assets would equate to affording them inviolability," Moiseienko wrote, which is reserved only for property belonging to foreign diplomatic missions. The protection afforded central-bank assets "is not as absolute as is often thought."

That is, in the eyes of international law, Russian assets aren't inviolate. In fact, the only real remaining obstacles to seizing them are debates surrounding domestic laws and domestic politics. As Moiseienko wrote, "Political and economic circumspection, rather than legal constraints, are the last defense against [the assets'] confiscation."

This is particularly true in the U.S., where plenty of hesitancy remains even after more than a year of war. As *The New York Times* [reported](#) in March, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen believes that seizing Russian assets could reduce faith in the American economy and the U.S. dollar. Other critics think it would threaten U.S. assets and investments in other countries.

These points all have a certain merit. And so, too, do concerns about such a move prompting the Kremlin to escalate. In all likelihood, though, Putin's regime has already written off these funds, not least because they'll almost certainly never be returned while he's in power. Moreover, seizing them is

[The war] is setting a precedent for other autocrats, who are eager to see whether Putin's revanchism will work—and eager to emulate any success he finds, especially if his crimes go unpunished.

hardly as escalatory as, say, the West sending Ukraine [F-16s](#) or [long-range precision rockets](#).

But at a broader level, these criticisms misunderstand the significance of the war and what it may lead to.

Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine is an assault on the geopolitical order. A nuclear power launched a militarized annexation, entirely unprovoked, against a neighbor that had long ago given up its arsenal. In the months following the invasion, the Kremlin has been accused of [torture](#), [beheadings](#), and manifold [crimes against humanity](#). And it has been responsible for more bloodshed than any conflict in Europe has exacted since World War II. It is led by a dictator [wanted for arrest](#) by the International Criminal Court, and who is driven solely by a deranged, messianic imperialism.

If this war doesn't justify seizing a nation's assets, I'm not sure what would. Repairing the damage it has caused is well worth the risks that have occupied Washington.

Some Western leaders still hold out hope for a negotiated peace and argue that we should keep Russia's assets frozen to be used later as a bargaining chip. But [Putin cannot be negotiated with](#). And given the alternative—that these funds remain frozen in perpetuity as Russian munitions continue demolishing Ukrainian cities—the argument against seizing these assets gets weaker by the day.

The unprecedented nature of Putin's crimes, the allowances of international law, and Ukraine's growing need all point in one, clear direction. Russia's frozen assets are not spoils of war; they are rightfully Ukraine's. It's time for the Biden administration and the rest of the West to put them to use.

[Casey Michel](#) is the head of the Combating Kleptocracy Program at the Human Rights Foundation. He is the author of [American Kleptocracy: How the U.S. Created the World's Greatest Money Laundering Scheme in History](#).

Designer and activist Louise Xin urges us to ‘wear our values’ with her latest fashion show

Two years after the designer’s first show and Vogue Scandinavia debut, we catch up with Louise Xin as she continues to change the world one dress at a time.

Outlet
Vogue Scandinavia

Author
Josefin Forsberg

Date
June 18, 2023

In less than two years, Louise Xin has garnered multiple accolades, held an opening speech at the UN conference in Albania and staged the first-ever fashion show in the European Parliament in 2023 focusing on forced labour and modern slavery. Her meteorite journey was, according to the designer, catapulted by Vogue Scandinavia’s article [‘Louise Xin is changing the world one dress at a time’](#) detailing her debut.

“This autumn will mark two years since my debut fashion show,” says Xin, who notes that the article was an important step on the journey towards a more transparent and ethical fashion industry. “Honestly, I couldn’t believe it myself,” she continues. “It was the very first time a major fashion magazine spoke about Uyghur forced labour.”

Now the activist designer takes to Oslo Freedom Forum to stage the next fashion show for her eponymous rental couture brand. Hosted in Høymagasinet, the show is part of the Human Rights Foundation’s ‘Wear Your Values’ program. The program encourages difficult dialogues in the



Photos: Emma Grann

fashion industry, promoting transparency and human rights in global supply chains. All while bringing awareness to the stunning hidden social costs of the fashion industry.

Norwegian model and climate activist Ada Martini and Uyghurian models Sano Turdiev and

Ayesha Erkin took centre stage, swathed in overblown 3D floral appliqués, sculpted folds and enticing prints, at the runway show dedicated to human rights. The soundtrack, created by renowned film music

The program encourages difficult dialogues in the fashion industry, promoting transparency and human rights in global supply chains. All while bringing awareness to the stunning hidden social costs of the fashion industry.

producer Eric Rosse, set the tone. Based on the harrowing testimony of an Uyghur woman, Gulbahar, the story has been rewritten as poetry by artist XOY and was performed by celebrated Swedish actress Sofia Karemyr.

“Through this journey,” Xin says, referencing her work to shine a spotlight on injustices, “I have come to understand that change is not only possible but inevitable.”

The ‘manual of repression’ shared by modern tyrants

Practices such as arbitrary detention, torture, or the use of artificial intelligence to control dissidents are common in most authoritarian regimes, according to activists gathered at the Oslo Freedom Forum

Outlet
El País

Author
Patricia R. Blanco

Date
July 19, 2023



From left to right, Russian President Vladimir Putin; the president of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro; the president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega; and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Tyrants learn from each other, share information, and observe the tactics of repression used by the world’s dictators and autocrats to reproduce in their own countries. Arbitrary arrests of dissidents, torture in prisons, attacks on activists’ family members, or the use of artificial intelligence to control the population are repeated almost systematically in most authoritarian regimes. “From Egypt and Iran to Russia and Venezuela, dictators copy and cooperate with each

other,” warns Iranian journalist and dissident Masih Alinejad. Her denunciation coincides with the account of the dozens of defenders of human rights gathered last June at the [Oslo Freedom Forum](#), the activist convention organized every year by the [Human Rights Foundation \(HRF\)](#). Their testimonies make up what could be considered a guide to the actions of modern dictators and autocrats, a set of traditional forms of repression reinforced by the options offered by new technology and the constant concern over their public image.

Arbitrary arrests

The arbitrary detention of activists, journalists, or opponents without legitimate reasons or without due process is “a fundamental weapon of autocratic regimes,” says Félix Maradiaga. He is one of the 200 Nicaraguan political prisoners whom [Daniel Ortega’s regime banished to the United States last February](#) after depriving them of their nationality. “They know that by arresting dissidents they divert attention from political movements, which are forced to pause for a while and stop talking about reforms in education and health or addressing issues such as corruption,” he continues. His own experience is proof: after announcing his pre-candidacy for the presidency of the country in 2021, he was arrested on charges of “treason” and spent “611 agonizing days in one of the most atrocious maximum-security prisons in Latin America.”



Nicaraguan opponent Félix Maradiaga, during his speech at the Oslo Freedom Forum on June 13.

The aim of these arrests, according to Venezuelan journalist Victor Navarro, is to spread terror. “Autocratic regimes feed on fear and are strengthened by silence,” he summarizes. He too was detained “arbitrarily.” “I worked in social reintegration, but in Venezuela offering opportunities can be considered a crime,” says the activist, who was accused of “treason” and “terrorism.” “About 35 police officers broke down the door of my house,” he recalls. He was locked up for five months.

Uighur Gulbahar Haitiwaji, on the other hand, had “never been involved” in political or social activities. But Xi Jinping’s regime found her guilty of “disloyalty to the Chinese government,” as part of [Beijing’s crackdown on members of the Muslim minority](#) – some 11.6 million people – in the Xinjiang autonomous region. “I lived in France with my husband and daughters and, following a call from my former employer, I planned a two-week return trip [to Xinjiang]... I had no idea what was waiting for me there,” recalls the woman, who spent three

years in so-called “re-education centers,” internment camps where Beijing exercises its crackdown on Uighurs.



Gulbahar Haitiwaji, at the Oslo Freedom Forum, on June 13.

Torture

[Beatings, rape and inhuman and degrading treatment](#) are a constant in the testimony of those who have been arrested for political reasons. “In prison I suffered things that I am not yet prepared to talk about in public,” says Nicaraguan Maradiaga.

[Torture](#) is first and foremost an attempt at “dehumanization,” Navarro says. “I was number 25510806,” the code he was assigned after entering Venezuela’s Helicoide prison. The aggressions, he reveals, were continuous. “They wouldn’t let me sleep; I heard another prisoner being suffocated, the sound of rape...,” recalls the activist, who says he went 129 days without seeing sunlight.

A red bracelet on Haitiwaji’s ankle reminds her that she survived torture in Xinjiang detention centers. The officers squeezed her shackles so

tightly that they made her bleed. And in the midst of the pain, she says she whispered: “My poor ankle, you have suffered so much for me, if I ever manage to leave this place I promise that I will adorn you with a beautiful chain.” It was one of the many times the woman was interrogated in one of the so-called “tiger chairs”: “They put a black hood on us, handcuffed our hands and ankles.” But those were not the only times she was tortured: “I was chained to a bed for 20 days and the humiliation I felt was unbearable. I struggled for 10 days not to relieve myself in front of them. In the end, with a very strong pain in my stomach, I relieved myself in tears.”

The one who cannot recount the torture he suffered is Alaa Abd El-Fattah. This blogger and intellectual symbol of the Egyptian opposition has been imprisoned for almost four years after being convicted in an express trial for allegedly spreading false information on social networks. But one of his sisters, Sanaa Seif, speaks on his behalf and says that the situation is so terrible that her brother had even thought about suicide: “He said that his life was unbearable, because the worst thing was not torture, but that they deprived him of everything that gave meaning to his life, such as sunlight, music, and books... He said he lived like an animal.”

Attacks on family members

In their strategy of spreading terror, dictators and autocrats strive to show that a dissident’s activism puts their family at risk. This is what happened to Haitiwaji. “They questioned me about my life in France, they showed me a photograph of my daughter covering herself with an East Turkestan flag [symbol of the Uighur independence movement] during a protest,” recalls the woman, who ended up signing a confession in which she declared that she had “gathered people to disturb the social order.”

Sanaa Seif did end up in prison three times for demanding her brother’s freedom. Aware of the pain that the detention of a loved one inflicts on families, she recounts how she combed her hair and put on makeup to try to look her best during the 20-minute visit with her mother or sister that the authorities allowed her once a month.



Sanaa Seif, on June 14 in Oslo. Behind her, an image of a demonstration in which she demanded the freedom of her brother Alaa.

Beyond the arrest itself, the [psychological damage caused to families by the detention of a family member is very profound](#). “When they arrested me, my mom was told to look for me at the morgue,” Navarro laments. Sharing a similar anguish is Evgenia Kara-Murza, wife of Russian journalist and President Putin’s political opponent Vladimir Kara-Murza, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for high treason because “his voice was a danger to Putin’s regime.” “The pain of having someone you love in prison is immense,” she says.

Kleptocrat practices

“It happens in Sudan, in Yemen, in Russia, in China, in Iran... They are kleptocrat regimes,” says Casey Michel, HRF’s program director against systems of governance that prioritize the enrichment of the rich at the expense of the public interest. [Kleptocracy](#) is, according to Casey, one of the hallmarks of authoritarian systems, but warns that it is “a transnational phenomenon.” “Autocracies and dictatorships use the financial secrecy of places like Delaware [United States] to take money out of their country, whether it’s Equatorial Guinea or Angola, and enjoy it wherever they want,” he complains.

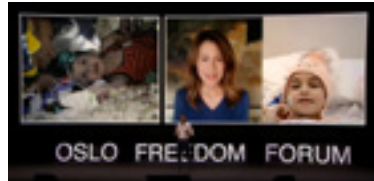
This is well known to activist Ketakan-driana Rafitson, the only judge in Madagascar who has resigned due to interference in justice, has spent her entire life dedicated to the fight against corruption. "This is the source of extreme poverty in my country," she stresses, a state in which 75% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day. "Successive leaders chose corruption as a way to govern the country," she laments. And, as an example, she gives a figure that she considers unaffordable: "In 2013, one of the candidates for the presidential elections spent \$43 million (€38.3 million) on a single campaign, in a country where people go hungry." "If 36 candidates participated in the 2018 elections, how much money was wasted?" she asks.

The big mistake, according to Thor Halvorssen, founder of HRF, is "to believe that there are different dictatorships, right and left, socialist and

The big mistake, according to Thor Halvorssen, founder of HRF, is "to believe that there are different dictatorships, right and left, socialist and capitalist, when the reality is that it is a question of good and evil," he states.

capitalist, when the reality is that it is a question of good and evil," he states. This classification, "whose objective is to divide people," leads one to think, according to Halvorssen, that [Venezuela's](#) regime is, for example, socialist. "But it's not, because everyone in power is a millionaire or a billionaire," he says.

The care of the international image



Abdulrahman Almajwas, speaking at the Oslo Freedom Forum. The background screen shows the girl Sham Sheikh, while she was trapped in the rubble of her home (left) and an image of the video call she had with Asma al-Assad. OSLO FREEDOM FORUM

Asma al-Assad, the wife of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, held a video call last March with Sham Sheikh Mohammed, a nine-year-old Syrian girl who survived the earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria on February 6, while she was receiving treatment in a hospital in Abu Dhabi. "She was trapped for more than 40 hours," says Syrian activist Abdulrahman Almajwas, co-founder of the White Helmets, the Syrian volunteer organization specializing in rescues. The hurtful thing about that call is that the girl

Assad phoned lived "in northern Syria, [an area that has been attacked and bombed by Damascus for the last 10 years](#)," explains Almajwas, who also criticizes how dictators try to "clean up their crimes before international public opinion."

But the most recent illustrative example of how authoritarian regimes try to whitewash their image is, for Sanaa Seif, the celebration of the United Nations Climate Summit in the Egyptian town of Sharm el Sheikh in November of last year. "Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's regime didn't want the stories of political prisoners to spread, so I took the risk of flying there," she said. Her brother was on hunger strike at the time to demand improvements in his detention conditions. "Climate activists from all over the world chanted the name of Alaa and [British Prime Minister] Rishi Sunak, [German Chancellor] Olaf Scholz and [French President] Emmanuel Macron called for his release," she recalls. Her brother's prison conditions suddenly improved.

The use of new technology

Rwandan activist Carine Kanimba's mobile phone was infected with [Pegasus spy software](#). The young woman, daughter of Rwandan opponent Paul Rusesabagina, the famous former manager of the Hotel Mille

Collines — which Hollywood immortalized in the film *Hotel Rwanda* — has been protesting since 2020 that her father was kidnapped from his home in San Antonio (Texas) and taken to Rwanda, where he was convicted of terrorism and sentenced to 25 years in prison. Resesabagina, an opponent of President Paul Kagame, "would never have traveled" to the African country, says his daughter, who with the help of several organizations says she discovered that the Rwandan government had been "tracking the whole family."

"All dictatorships do the same things, although they seem to be very different; for example, now they have started using artificial intelligence and facial recognition cameras," explains Serbian activist Srdja Popovic, promoter of the student mobilizations that precipitated the fall of former Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic, and current director of the Center for the Application of Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS). So it was for Haitiwaji. "When they arrested me, they took blood samples, scanned my face and irises and recorded a sample of my voice," she says.

And dictators share these systems, warns Nathan Law, one of the leaders of Hong Kong's so-called umbrella revolution. "China has taken advantage of the preoccupation of the narrative that prioritizes security over freedom and sells technology that

serves to identify people,” warns the young man, currently exiled in London. This software, remember, has only one purpose: to suppress protests and ensure the survival of the regime.

Grassroots organizations must provide humanitarian aid in Ukraine

U.N., large NGOs aren't cutting it.

Outlet
Op-Ed
Washington Times

Author
Elle Ota

Date
Aug. 21, 2023



Grassroots Humanitarian Aid for Ukraine Illustration by Greg Groesch/The Washington Times

The town of Chasiv Yar is 3 miles from Bakhmut, the front-line city where Ukrainians are slowly repelling the invading Russian army. Chasiv Yar once had a population of over 10,000. Today, virtually every building has been hit by artillery or missiles. Rooftops are caved in, and exteriors are charred. There's no running water, no electricity.

Even more unsettling than the constant sound of artillery is that civilians are still living here and all along the front lines in towns and villages like it. Many are older adults who refuse to leave – they say if they could survive Stalin, they can survive this – but some are younger and have no option.

Last month, I visited Chasiv Yar and five other villages along the front lines in the Donetsk region with Renegade Relief Runners. The Ukraine-based 501(c)(3) organization, known as 3xR, is focusing on delivering aid to isolated villages cut off from the main humanitarian corridors.

World Humanitarian Day is designed to reinvigorate the news of humanitarian crises worldwide, including the war in Ukraine, where Russian dictator Vladimir Putin and his army frequently target civilians, bomb schools and hospitals, and use land mines to terrorize the local population.

But there's a fundamental problem with how the international community thinks about humanitarian aid, which then affects the organizations we choose to support. What has become overwhelmingly clear is that we need to start prioritizing grassroots organizations and civil society over the United Nations and other large international organizations.

Even a year and a half into the invasion, 3xR still finds villages that have yet to receive humanitarian aid.

Part of the problem is that large international nongovernmental organizations and the U.N. often focus on urban centers over these more isolated, high-risk places. These villages are too near the front line, and the Russian army likes to target humanitarian aid missions.

After the Russians destroyed the Kakhovka Dam and flooded the city of Kherson, displacing thousands of people, Russia targeted aid workers to dissuade them from coming. Volunteer aid workers told me that in the weeks following the attack, it was more dangerous to be an aid worker than it was to be a soldier.

Many of these villages are also quite isolated. They're far from major cities, and the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine are now heavily mined. Roughly 174,000 square kilometers are contaminated by land mines — more than any country in the world — and will take decades to clear.

It can be dangerous for residents to travel to neighboring towns. Even if they wanted to leave, many villagers have no means of transportation because the Russian army stole their cars. One man who lived under Russian occupation told me the soldiers would run over civilians' cars with tanks when they got bored.

The ones that are most equipped to deliver aid to villages near the front lines are local, Ukraine-based organizations that are familiar with the terrain, as well as specific community needs.

Despite the significantly increased risks these groups face, they receive an unimaginably small fraction of humanitarian funding. Seventy-one percent of international humanitarian funds go to the U.N., and 16% go to

the Red Cross and other international NGOs.

The Ukrainian groups doing the most intrepid work receive 0.0003% of funding.

The U.N. reallocates some of this money to local NGOs in Ukraine, but it also does what it does best: It raises bureaucratic hurdles in terms of transparency and reporting that smaller organizations simply can't overcome.

As a result, the funding continues to circulate among larger organizations that may be doing good work but have limits on where they can go.

The smaller, Ukrainian-based organizations end up scouring Ukraine and nearby Poland for supplies. Many rely on the generosity of friends and neighbors, and word-of-mouth from supporters. Some dip into their personal savings.

Renegade Relief Runners' mascot is a raccoon armed with a paper towel roll and a trash can lid.

"We're like raccoons when it comes to humanitarian aid," co-founder Julia Abratanska tells me. "We'll take any leftover supplies we come across, and find people who desperately need them."

3xR and many local groups it works with are determined not to let anything go to waste — especially

when they have witnessed firsthand so many villagers near the front lines with nothing. I observed shouting matches over soap and other necessities because there were not enough supplies to go around. Ms. Abratanska and 3xR deliver most supplies within a week of receiving them due to high demand.

Meanwhile, medical supplies and food kits amass, untouched, in warehouses across Europe. This discrepancy has fostered cynicism and burnout.

The program encourages difficult dialogues in the fashion industry, promoting transparency and human rights in global supply chains. All while bringing awareness to the stunning hidden social costs of the fashion industry.

This is why it's imperative that we support civil society. Local humanitarian groups, advocates, journalists — these are the people risking their lives to ensure human dignity in Ukraine and protect the country's democratic future.

Oleksandr Leonidovych Duka, founder of the humanitarian aid group Here

& Now, survived the occupation of Borodyanka in March 2022 with his wife and young daughter. He risked his life shuttling food, water and medicine to his neighbors, despite the deliberate killing of humanitarian aid workers by Russian soldiers. Now, he does the same for villagers on the front lines.

"Even before the start of full-scale war, I understood that it was up to each of us," Mr. Duka told me.

"I founded a small movement of like-minded people who are fruitfully working for our victory. Right now, the main thing is to survive and help others to survive, to defeat the [Russian army], and then continue to build a free and strong, and most importantly, independent Ukraine!"

Elle Ota is program officer for the Human Rights Foundation.

Google Axes Bad Reviews of Tracker Exposing Uyghur Forced Labor

Outlet
Bloomberg

Author
Margi Murphy

Date
May 28, 2023



Google offices in Dublin, Ireland.
Photographer: Paulo Nunes dos Santos/Bloomberg

[Alphabet Inc.'s](#) Google has removed hundreds of negative reviews for a tracker that identifies apparel brands linked to forced Uyghur labor after its creator said the reviews were part of a disinformation campaign.

The Human Rights Foundation's [Uyghur Forced Labor Checker](#) had been experiencing a spate of unusual activity in recent months, with the number of downloads fluctuating dramatically, according to Claudia Bennett, the nonprofit's legal and program officer. The tool, a Google Chrome extension, alerts internet users if a retailer or business whose website they are visiting has links to forced [Uyghur](#) labor.

Human Rights Foundation [won a Webby](#) People's Voice award in public service and activism in 2022. In May, the organization's legal department alerted Google

to a barrage of one-star ratings, which they suspected were part of a computer bot attack. The reviews in question came from accounts using similar cartoon avatars as profile pictures, had nonsensical first and last names, and spoke in broken English, according to screenshots seen by Bloomberg News.

"Malicious slander," one of the reviews stated. "Leakage of privacy," claimed another. A third said, "Isn't it too boring."

A Google spokesperson said the company carefully monitors the Chrome Web Store and removes reviews that violate its policies, including those removed from the Uyghur Forced Labor Checker. It wasn't clear who was behind the negative reviews.

The US has accused China of forcing Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region to work under [what officials have described](#) as a broader campaign of genocide.

Bitcoin And Human Rights: A Common Ground For Activists Worldwide

Outlet
Forbes

Author
Javier Bastardo

Date
Aug. 30, 2023



MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA - MAY 19: Alex Gladstein speaks on stage during Bitcoin Conference 2023 at Miami Beach Convention Center on May 19, 2023 in Miami Beach, Florida. (Photo by Jason Koerner/Getty Images for Bitcoin Magazine)

Human rights activism is one of the most dangerous and necessary ways of building political movements worldwide. Still, these activists face incredible persecution by their local governments, sometimes leading to financial exclusion or worse. Activists could improve their actions and agendas through Bitcoin and cryptocurrencies, due to its decentralized nature.

There are some cases of people using Bitcoin to resist authoritarian regime persecution. And an international organization is trying to gather all these efforts and teach more activists how to improve their activities and resistance through decentralized technologies.

[The Human Rights Foundation](#) is a nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, founded in 2005 by Venezuelan human rights advocate Thor Halvorssen Mendoza. It has been openly promoting and working around Bitcoin since 2013, when it helped a group of Ukrainian activists understand how to use bitcoin for their financial goals.

"We started receiving bitcoin donations in 2014, and it's something that I continue to see pop up in the human rights field over the next few years. In 2017, we started actually having a Bitcoin Human Rights Foundation program. Then three years later, we launched the Bitcoin Development Fund, which gives money for open source projects focusing on Bitcoin", HRF Chief Strategy Officer Alex Gladstein told me in an interview.

For Gladstein, the link between bitcoin and human rights activism is clear: You need a way to keep your activities alive, even if your local government doesn't want them.

"If you are a human rights activist, you need a way to receive donations and make payroll and pay people without the government being able to stop that. That's extremely important. This idea of decentralized censorship-resistant money is very important if you want to do stuff that the government doesn't want you to do", Gladstein argued.

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A Fund To Develop Freedom Through Bitcoin

The Bitcoin Development Fund has been active since 2020, and there are several developers and activists who received a financial impulse to keep building their tools. This fund focuses on improving Bitcoin's decentralization, privacy, and resilience, but it even grants resources beyond technical goals.

The first fund grant was received by developer Chris Belcher to implement his CoinSwap protocol, conceived to improve Bitcoin's privacy. But besides backing developers like Belcher, HRF's fund opened to other kind of efforts. For instance, researcher and privacy advocate Janine Roem received a grant for her privacy-focused newsletter, and even some translation efforts like Arabic_HODL's project received part of these grants.

But it didn't stop there. This year, in late July, the HRF announced a 20-bitcoin bounty program, with several specific challenges like building a mobile wallet integration of privacy-focused Bitcoin technology like Silent Payments, more self-custodial Lightning Network wallets or even some decentralized communications products based on Nostr, a popular protocol among bitcoiners. These challenges will be open until the end of 2024.

Your Favorite Fashion Brand Is Using Slave Labor. Wake Up!

Outlet
Op-Ed
Newsweek

Author
Claudia Bennett

Date
Sept. 8, 2023

In August, [Bloomberg](#) reported what we at the Human Rights Foundation already knew: The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was sending in bots to attack our award-winning [Uyghur Forced Labor Checker](#) to deter you from downloading it and discovering the truth behind where your clothes are made and, more importantly, who makes them.

That's what our Google plug-in does—it lets you know when your shopping cart might be filled with items made by one of the 1.5 million Uyghurs the CCP has forced into concentration camps and asks you to think twice about your purchases.

That dress you're pining over from New York Fashion Week? It was made by a 16-year-old girl whose family doesn't know where she is or if she is even alive. That T-shirt Gigi Hadid wore on the runway? Made by a man in his 50s who has been tortured, raped, and is under constant surveillance. That coat you saw someone wearing to the afterparty? Made by a woman who used to be a teacher but is now being forced to eliminate her identity as a Uyghur Muslim.

The Uyghur people have their own language, their own culture, and their own identity distinct from the Han Chinese. The CCP is trying to erase their identity, and they're doing so by subjecting them to political indoctrination and grave human rights abuses. They are "reeducated" and made to learn Mandarin Chinese. They are forced to have abortions, use intrauterine devices, and receive sterilizations. And they are mandated to work non-stop



Caption: Supporters of the East Turkistan National Awakening Movement rally in front of the White House to commemorate the 13th anniversary of the 2009 Urumqi Massacre on July 5, 2022, in Washington, D.C. The group is also calling on governments to support the Uyghurs' right to self-determination by recognizing East Turkistan (Xinjiang, China) as an occupied country. DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES

with little to no pay. Most notably, picking cotton and working in clothing factories.

The CCP doesn't want you to know these things. In fact, they do everything in their power to ensure you don't by silencing activists and persecuting their families. The first and most obvious reason is that they're trying to eliminate the entire Uyghur population and want to do so without any backlash. And the second is

That's what our Google plug-in does—it lets you know when your shopping cart might be filled with items made by one of the 1.5 million Uyghurs the CCP has forced into concentration camps and asks you to think twice about your purchases.

that they have ties to major Western fashion brands, and they don't want that to change.

Do you see the connecting thread?

[One in five pieces](#) of cotton clothing worldwide is linked to Uyghur forced labor. Either Uyghurs were forced to pick the raw material, the cotton, or they cut the fabric and made the clothes that you are wearing.

Fast fashion brands like [Shein](#), [Nike](#), [Zara](#), and many others, meanwhile, have been in the spotlight due to their use of Uyghur forced labor. Consumers have [boycotted](#) these brands. They have been ridiculed on social media and in [the news](#). And mass [protests have](#) occurred to raise awareness of their supply chain.

But you will likely see a Uyghur original on the runway in New York this week. That's because high-end and luxury brands have, for the most part, gone under the radar when it comes to cotton picked by forced labor—until now.

The luxury fashion industry is no stranger to mishaps, criticism, or scandals. But when it comes to forced labor, they're trying to skirt responsibility—even as [brand representatives](#) insist it won't be "tolerated." They simultaneously admit when pressed they don't source their own raw materials. So how could they possibly know where it comes from?

It's not enough to live by your values; you must wear them, too. Lives depend on it.

Blissful ignorance is appalling when lives are at risk.

[Democratic governments](#) worldwide have called the CCP's actions a genocide. But their responses and efforts have been lackluster. The U.S. enacted the only legislation in the world that addresses this issue: the [Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act](#) (UFLPA). The UFLPA was enacted in 2022 and [prohibits goods produced in the Uyghur region](#) from being sold in the U.S. unless there's clear and convincing evidence that they weren't picked by slaves.

Yet clothes made by Uyghurs continue to be sold in the U.S. en masse. There's practically a Zara on every block in New York City. Moreover, for an individual shipment to trigger the reporting requirement, the amount [has to exceed \\$800](#). So that \$200 Shein order you just bought won't get flagged.

This means it's entirely up to you, the consumer, to demand to know where and how your clothes are made.

Don't be fooled by the pretty colors, sparkles, or the newest trend unveiled during New York Fashion Week. It's not enough to live by your values; you must wear them, too. Lives depend on it.

Claudia Bennett is a legal and program officer at the Human Rights Foundation.

2023 PaykanArtCar Honors the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran

Outlet
ARTnews

Author
The Editors

Date
Sept. 21, 2023



IMAGE COURTESY OF PAYKANARTCAR

Since the brutal murder of a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, at the hands of Iran's morality police, Iran's women have led a revolution—now known as the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement—against Ayatollah Khamenei. Around the world, women have led protests against the “mandatory hijab” law that requires women to cover their hair. It was Mahsa Amini's crime of showing a few strands of her hair that led to her murder by the morality police.

Building on the award winning success of its first art car in 2021, PaykanArtCar, a nonprofit organization, partnered with the renowned Iranian artist Simin Keramati to launch the 2023 edition of its art car in support of the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement.

The Paykan was the first automobile produced in Iran and it is an iconic source of national pride for all Iranians. Despite being no longer in production, the Paykan is a ubiquitous presence to this day on the streets of Tehran and across Iran.



IMAGE COURTESY OF PAYKANARTCAR

PaykanArtCar enlists talented Iranian artists and the power of art to turn the iconic Paykan into a vehicle in support of human rights in Iran. In 2021, PaykanArtCar partnered with the artist Alireza Shojaian to launch its first art car in support of LGBTQ+ rights in Iran. Shojaian's gripping depictions of scenes taken from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh's epic poem The Book of Kings brought attention to and protested the brutal treatment of the LGBTQ+ community within Iran. The 2021 PaykanArtCar was awarded the Vaclav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent in recognition of its profound effect in support of the LGBTQ+ community.

For PaykanArtCar's second edition, the organization worked with the renowned multidisciplinary Iranian-Canadian artist, Simin Keramati.

Keramati donated her time and talent to create a protest symbol that reflects women around the world cutting their own hair in solidarity with the women of Iran who are forced to cover their hair under a hijab. Keramati's contribution is visceral and disturbs the conscience. She incorporates cut human hair to fully adorn a 1970 model Paykan for this year's PaykanArtCar.

Speaking about her work, Keramati remarked that "the presentation of the hair, face, and body of Iranian women has always reflected the patriarchal nature of the government ruling over Iran."

She added that through her work with PaykanArtCar, which first began in July of 2022, her goal was "to acknowledge the resistance of Iranian women of every background and ethnicity and their fight for their rights."



IMAGE COURTESY OF PAYKANARTCAR

The repression of women in Iran is so great that the mere showing of a few strands of hair outside a hijab can result in arrest, imprisonment, torture, and death. Yet, within Iran, there is significant resistance to the

Céline Assaf-Boustani, President of the Human Rights Foundation, described the PaykanArtCar as a "wonderful and creative way to highlight the Women, Life, Freedom revolution."

government's imposition of these restrictions. The courageous women of Iran have stood in protest against the theological dictatorship of the Ayatollah.

Women around the world have supported the revolution in Iran. The respected diaspora leader Masih Alinejad, who founded the NGO My Stealthy Freedom in 2014 to fight against the mandatory hijab, has now teamed up with PaykanArtCar to launch its second artwork.

"Following the murder of Mahsa Amini, the Islamic Republic's systematic and brutal oppression of Iranian women finally began to receive the global attention it deserves. The Iranian women are on the frontlines of fighting the gender apartheid regime in Tehran and global solidarity is very important to support their sacrifice. The global community must act. PaykanArtCar exists to carry the message of resistance to the international community.

PaykanArtCar unveiled Keramati's work in Oslo, Norway, on June 13, 2023, the first day of the Oslo Freedom Forum.

Céline Assaf-Boustani, President of the Human Rights Foundation, described the PaykanArtCar as a "wonderful and creative way to highlight the Women, Life, Freedom revolution." Assaf-Boustani noted how "the Iranian people need the support of everyone around the world who have the luxury of living in a democracy."

Dr. Hiva Feizi, PaykanArtCar's executive director, was on hand with Keramati and Alinejad to reveal the art car in front of the large crowd.



IMAGE COURTESY OF PAYKANARTCAR

Commenting on the project to ARTnews, Feizi said, "Tragically, international attention is increasingly diverted elsewhere, leaving these courageous protestors at the mercy of a regime." She added that "Through this incredibly impactful new artwork created by Simin Keramati, we want to bring the world's attention back to where it belongs and play our part in galvanising support for the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution."

The PaykanArtCar will continue to be featured and exhibited around the world in support of the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution.

Keramati's work is the latest in a series commissioned by PaykanArtCar LLC, a nonprofit that commissions Iranian artists to use this legendary vehicle as their canvas in support of human rights in Iran.

Former ambassador to the United Nations Mark D. Wallace, the chief executive officer of PaykanArtCar, said: "Regrettably, Simin's commission and planning foreshadowed the horrific killing of Mahsa Amini and the outrage that ensued over the mandatory hijab laws and repression of Iran's women. The many strands of hair in Simin's work mirrors the countless acts of brutality against women in Iran and the women who have cut their hair in solidarity to this oppression. The work is disturbing to the conscience, and it should be. It stands against horrific brutality."

