

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Steadfast in protest

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders launches its Annual Report 2010

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Paris-Geneva, 13 September 2010. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), which supports, monitors and protects human rights defenders throughout the year, is publishing today its 2010 Annual Report. The report focuses on the year-round fight for human rights throughout the world.

The annual report and the media kit are available at:

Link Report: http://www.omct.org/pdf/Observatory/2010/annual_report/OBS_a_report2010_eng.pdf or <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/2010/OBS2009UK-full.pdf>

Link Media Kit:

http://www.omct.org/pdf/Observatory/2010/annual_report/media_kit_obs_report2010_eng.pdf or <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/2010/DPOBSUK-defLD.pdf>

One who speaks of democracy and rule of law in contemporary societies immediately refers to the right of peoples to choose freely their leaders by vote. A right explicitly guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the implementation of which requires the combination of different elements - respect for freedoms of association and expression, transparency, freedom of information, freedom of assembly - without which no election could be recognised as free and fair. If many elections took place worldwide in 2009, many of these processes did not meet these requirements. Drawing up a detailed inventory of the situation of human rights defenders in the world in 2009, the annual report of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, denounces the increasing repression faced by rights defenders on all continents, with the approach of elections. More generally, this report illustrates forcefully the difficulty and danger of promoting the exchange of ideas, pluralism, protection of fundamental freedoms and the democratic ideal.

Muzzling of the opposition, media subservience, constitutional amendments designed to maintain in power current heads of states: during elections that that took place throughout 2009, it appears that few leaders have agreed to play the game of pluralism. *"In this context, human rights defenders, who strive daily to ensure that rights and freedoms are guaranteed, have been subjected to considerable pressure, when they did not pay with their lives for their commitment"* declared Souhayr Belhassen, President of FIDH. *"The role they have played in these electoral processes accentuated an already pronounced repression against them"* she added.

"This Annual Report shows that even in the most accomplished democracies - or those which consider themselves as such - vigilance must remain the order of the day, and shows that the defence of fundamental rights can be questioned anytime, for purposes of efficiency of questionable policies, or of a greater control of social bodies. It shows how defenders, everywhere, play an important role as a bulwark against arbitrariness and abuses, and that they remain, more than ever, a cornerstone of the rule of law", concluded Eric Sottas, Secretary General of the OMCT.

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