

HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH



**THE SWEDISH FOUNDATION IN  
SUPPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH  
HRW SWEDEN IMPACT REPORT  
(EFFEKTRAPPORT)  
SEPTEMBER 2019**

# ABOUT THE SWEDISH FOUNDATION IN SUPPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

**Name:** Insamlingsstiftelsen The Swedish Foundation in Support of Human Rights Watch

**Organisation number:** 802478-1885

**Legal Number status:** Insamlingsstiftelse

Human Rights Watch Inc. is one of the world’s leading independent organisations dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. In September 2015, it established Insamlingsstiftelsen The Swedish Foundation in Support of Human Rights Watch (hereinafter “HRW Sweden”) in Stockholm. HRW Sweden aims to bring Human Rights Watch’s work to the attention of the Swedish public, the private sector and the government, and intensify advocacy to these stakeholders on key human rights issues both in Sweden and around the world, and to continue and expand high-level research on human rights in areas of critical interest to Sweden. HRW Sweden has enabled the first formal presence of Human Rights Watch in Scandinavia—a critical step in enlisting Sweden’s strong human rights culture to effect lasting improvements for victims of abuses worldwide. HRW Sweden collaborates closely with Human Rights Watch, and shares its mission and purpose.

To accomplish its aims, HRW Sweden organises several larger public and smaller private events throughout the year, assists in publicising Human Rights Watch research through Sweden’s media, supports a Swedish-language website (<https://www.hrw.org/sverige>), and engages with Swedish decision-makers in government and other sectors regularly as part of the organisation’s advocacy work.

## HRW SWEDEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH’S WORK

Human Rights Watch Inc. is a nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organisation established in 1978 and headquartered in New York that closely coordinates with a network of 12 independent sister charities that share its name (hereinafter “Human Rights Watch”), including HRW Sweden. This network encompasses roughly 450 human rights professionals, including country experts, lawyers, journalists, and academics of diverse backgrounds and nationalities.

Human Rights Watch is known for its accurate fact-finding, impartial reporting, effective use of media, and targeted advocacy, often in partnership with local civil society groups. Each year, Human Rights Watch publishes more than 100 reports and briefings on human rights conditions in some 90 countries, generating extensive coverage in local and international media. With the leverage this brings, Human Rights Watch meets with governments, the United Nations, regional groups like the African Union and the European Union, financial institutions, and corporations to press for changes in policy and practice that promote human rights and justice around the world. HRW Sweden participates in these activities whenever effective strategy calls for its involvement. For additional information about Human Rights Watch research on Sweden, please go to the Sweden country research page at <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/sweden>.



# HOW HRW SWEDEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH WORK

1. ***We investigate.*** HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch are committed to systematically researching and analysing human rights conditions worldwide to uncover abuses. Researchers interview victims, witnesses, local rights activists, and government officials so that they can form an accurate picture of what happened. They also review media and academic reports, and domestic and international law and policy papers to gain a further understanding of the situation.
2. ***We expose.*** All researchers in the Human Rights Watch network, including those serving HRW Sweden, publish their findings in the form of reports and articles. These are then made accessible to the public as well as local authorities to raise awareness of the abuses. The publications are available in multiple languages and formats and are often referenced in news articles worldwide.
3. ***We bring change.*** Following the identification and publication of human rights abuses, advocates for HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch work closely with local authorities and organisations to achieve accountability and put an end to the abuses that they have discovered. The ultimate goal of all advocates in the Human Rights Watch network is to ensure that human rights are upheld worldwide and to promote justice and change.



Belkis Wille, Senior Middle East North Africa Researcher, interviewing witnesses to a July 2015 Saudi-led coalition airstrike in Sanaa, Yemen, which killed 23 civilians. © 2015 Ole Solvang/Human Rights Watch

# ACHIEVEMENTS IN SWEDEN

Since opening the Stockholm Office in September 2015, HRW Sweden has hosted a range of events to grow its local community and further deepened its relationships with existing and potential supporters, as well as with key advocacy targets and media contacts. HRW Sweden was very pleased to be selected as a beneficiary of the Swedish Postcode Lottery starting in 2016. Using funds raised in Sweden, the Board of HRW Sweden has decided to support several projects this past year, including:

## Growing Our Presence in Sweden

In the past year, we have focused on reinforcing advocacy efforts and deepen relationships with the media, local groups, and the Swedish public. We implemented advocacy strategies on issues on which Sweden can make a difference. We worked both in Stockholm and New York to convince the Swedish government to play a constructive role in United Nations Security Council work on Syria, to promote accountability for chemical weapons attacks and respect for international humanitarian law, including access and protection of humanitarian relief efforts. Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth [met with Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström](#) in May to stress the importance of safe returns and accountability in Myanmar, and prioritise the issue during Sweden's chairmanship in the Security Council in July 2018. We have also highlighted the deteriorating human rights situation in China, including the arbitrary detention of Swedish citizen Gui Minhai. Human Rights Watch Senior China Researcher Maya Wang visited Stockholm in September, on the day we released "[Eradicating Ideological Viruses](#)," a report documenting China's campaign of repression against Uighur and other Muslims in the Xinjiang region in northwest China. In meetings with migration officials and experts in Sweden, we raised our concerns about sending asylum seekers back to Xinjiang. Afterwards, the Swedish Migration Board decided to halt all deportations of Uighurs to Xinjiang. The decision was based on an [analysis of the human rights situation in Xinjiang](#), produced shortly after Maya Wang's visit, with references to Human Rights Watch research.

Our supporter base in Sweden is growing steadily. In the past year, we engaged the Swedish public on human rights issues at home and abroad through a series of events, including film screenings, briefings and dinners. In May, we hosted a breakfast meeting on technology and human rights, with presentations by Executive Director Kenneth Roth and Director of Geospatial Analysis Josh Lyons, with supporters from Sweden's technology and financial sectors. This network has been of great help in the development of our tech work and of a technology-focused special project application that won approval by the Swedish Postcode Lottery. We concluded the year with our first-ever film [screening](#), of *This is Congo*, at Bio Capitol. We followed the film with a message from the producer and a panel discussion with our Congo activist, Deputy Africa Director Ida Sawyer. These and other outreach events have deepened our relationship with the general public, as well as with existing and new supporters.

We have also been working to diversify our supporter base. In 2018, we launched a Young Professionals Network (YPN) in Stockholm for people aged 18-35. The YPN spreads awareness of human rights issues and engages other young people. Also, in 2018, our Circle of Friends founded in 2016 developed into a formal Human Rights Watch Stockholm Committee, which now has 18 members. We are delighted to work with the Stockholm Committee to reach out to new constituents, expand our networks, and plan various awareness-raising and advocacy events in Sweden.

# IMPACT AROUND THE GLOBE

## Ending the Shackling of People with Psychosocial Disabilities

In much of the world, people with mental health conditions—psychosocial disabilities—are stigmatised. Lack of adequate community-based support services contributes to their social isolation. Often, they do not receive care based on informed consent. Many end up shackled—chained or locked up in small, confined spaces—for months or years. Human Rights Watch’s research and advocacy in places like [Ghana](#), [Somaliland](#), and [Indonesia](#) are starting to have an impact on this issue, moving governments to strengthen monitoring, develop community-based mental health services, and commit to ending shackling.

We have seen incredible progress in Indonesia, where we have been calling on the government to enforce its ban on shackling and ensure access to mental health care since 2016. After the release of our initial [report](#) and social media campaign, [#BreakTheChains](#), Indonesia’s minister of health committed to providing mental health medication in all 9,500 community health centres across the country. We published an [op-ed](#) in October 2018 highlighting the government’s important progress in rolling out the community outreach program, which has played a vital role in ending shackling in Indonesia by collecting data, raising awareness, and providing mental health services. As of May 2019, the program had reached 30 million households.

Most recently, as a direct result of our joint advocacy with our local partner the Indonesian Mental Health Association, Indonesia’s National Human Rights Commission, National Commission for Violence Against Women, National Commission for Child Protection, the Ombuds institution, and the Witness and Victims Protection Agency have all signed an agreement to monitor places of detention including faith healing centres, social care institutions, and mental hospitals.



Sodikin, a 34-year-old man with a psychosocial disability, watches television with his family at their home in West Java, Indonesia. Sodikin was shackled for more than eight years in a tiny shed outside the family home before being released in May 2016. © 2018 Andrea Star Reese for Human Rights Watch



We have been able to keep the pressure on the government solely thanks to our collaborations with local disability rights advocates. We will continue to monitor progress in Indonesia, in addition to addressing isolation and shackling in countries where the practice persists, including Nigeria and the Philippines. In addition to combatting myths and stereotypes about mental health, we will work with our partners to identify good practices for deinstitutionalisation, alternatives to shackling, and community inclusion of people with disabilities, across various regions.



Community health workers from Puskesmas Cilandak in South Jakarta, Indonesia, conduct a home visit to provide follow-up mental health services to a local resident. © 2018 Andrea Star Reese for Human Rights Watch

## Reporting on Conflict and Refugee Rights in the Middle East and Europe

Over the past year, long-running armed conflicts continued to rage throughout the Middle East and North Africa, putting millions of civilian lives at risk. Governments and non-state armed groups in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the region violated human rights by engaging in [indiscriminate attacks](#), arbitrary detention, and unlawful restrictions on humanitarian aid. In this challenging landscape, Human Rights Watch worked to end violations, safeguard the rights of refugees and displaced persons, and promote accountability and the rule of law.

In **Iraq**, we [exposed](#) abusive conditions in a “secret” prison in Mosul where individuals were wrongfully detained on a range of false charges. Following up on this research, we released a [short report](#) exposing widespread torture and abuse throughout Mosul prisons, abuse which violates the Convention against Torture, which Iraq ratified in 2011. Due in part to these publications and our follow-up advocacy, Iraqi authorities launched a formal investigation into these abuses and committed to holding officers who were implicated in these acts to account.

Since the start of the conflict in **Syria**, we have documented the government's use of [chemical](#) and [incendiary weapons](#), as well as the crisis of displacement resulting from the government's offensives. We documented the civilian cost of the US-led coalition's battle against ISIS, including by reporting on unlawful [airstrikes](#) and the humanitarian conditions for displaced persons. We are pressing for accountability and compensation for victims. As displaced families attempt to return home, we have been documenting abuses in areas re-taken by the government, which include the use of urban planning laws to confiscate the property of residents, widespread restrictions on access for displaced residents, and demolitions in areas previously affiliated with the opposition. Such measures restrict returns.

In addition to documenting conditions that cause refugees to flee, we worked to protect the rights of refugees as they journeyed towards a safe and secure home. After we exposed [mass evictions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon](#), as well as [deportations and expulsions of Syrian refugees in Jordan](#), the overall number of collective evictions and deportations in both countries dropped considerably, [according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR). In **Turkey**, we continued to expose and push for an immediate end to the mistreatment of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. In July 2018, we published a [short report](#) documenting Turkey's refusal to register newly arrived Syrian asylum seekers, which has led to unlawful returns to Syria and the denial of health care, education, and other critical services. Using these findings, we pushed UNHCR and the EU to make public calls for Turkey to end these unlawful and abusive practices.

Our [January 2019 report](#) documented **Libya's** continued detention and abuse of migrants attempting to travel from Libya to Europe in search of safety. In our report, we exposed inhumane conditions throughout detention centres, which included severe overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, poor quality food and water that has led to malnutrition, lack of adequate health care, and disturbing accounts of violence by guards, including beatings, whippings, and use of electric shocks. We are advocating for a move from traditional detention models and have been working both within Libya and throughout the EU to address the root causes of these abuses—including growing anti-migrant sentiments throughout EU member states. As a result of these meetings, and our continued advocacy, the EU has acknowledged their responsibility to help end these abuses and move towards ending detentions of migrants in Libya altogether.

We [continued](#) to [demand the transfer of asylum seekers](#) from **Greek** islands onto the mainland and, more broadly, for fair reception and asylum processes that adhere to international human rights standards. In July 2018, we published a [report](#), [video](#), and [news feature](#) exposing widespread denials of education and health care for asylum-seeking children living within “hotspot”—or overcrowded—camps on Greek islands. We followed these pieces up with a [joint letter](#) in March 2019—authored with 24 partner organisations—advocating for an EU-led intervention to the humanitarian crisis present on the islands. Our body of work on this issue contributes to our larger, coordinated advocacy campaign aiming to end the entrapment of asylum seekers on the islands and to demand improved conditions throughout the process of requesting and gaining asylum.





Crew members of the Aquarius ship help a man onboard after a rescue. Human Rights Watch produced a [multimedia feature](#) on a two-week rescue mission in the Mediterranean. In the piece, one of our staff members tells the story of her time aboard the Aquarius ship with the humanitarian organization [SOS MEDITERRANEE](#) in October 2017. © 2017 Anthony Jean

In **Italy**, growing xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment is putting lives at risk, as the government continues to limit access to asylum and to refuse rescue boats as they attempt to enter Italian ports. Our [January 2019 report](#) on Libya’s abuse of migrants, mentioned above, focused on the ways in which the EU is both allowing and contributing to these violations. Italy—where the majority of migrants departing from Libya to Europe arrive—has abdicated virtually all responsibility for coordination of rescue operations at sea in a bid to limit the number of people arriving on its shores. Once “rescued” or intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard, individuals are placed into arbitrary, indefinite detention where they face a serious risk of torture, forced labour, sexual violence, and extortion.

In March 2019, we [published a Plan of Action](#), jointly with Amnesty International, to address the disembarkation and relocation of migrants rescued at sea. The plan of action calls on European governments to establish a predictable system for ensuring swift disembarkation followed by a fair distribution among EU member states of responsibility for rescued persons. We have been advocating with France, Germany, UNHCR, the European Commission, and European Parliament—gathering momentum and support for the implementation of this plan. We will continue our Italy and EU-based advocacy throughout the next year to ensure assistance to persons in distress at sea and their disembarkation in a place of safety.



## Technology: Building the 20/20 Lab

In the past seven years, we successfully pioneered the use of cutting-edge geospatial analysis within the framework of an international human rights operations. Today, our researchers are increasingly calling on our tech tools to aid in their fieldwork, and they are integrating the use of those tools when they form their research plans. We recently hired our second geospatial analyst and launched a recruitment process for a technologist and an expert on open source investigations. The vision for the 20/20 Lab is to increase our capacity to conduct three innovative modes of research:

- remote sensing, using satellite imagery and our four donated drones
- open source and online investigations, including social media analysis and video forensics
- data analysis to expose patterns of rights violations, such as discrimination

Our use of these new methodologies is gaining steam. In the last few months, we used satellite imagery to [expose the trail of destruction from a dam collapse in Brazil](#). We leveraged our research to push the Brazilian government to monitor and effectively enforce compliance by public and private actors with its regulatory and environmental standards. We used open source investigation strategies to [document](#) that Sudan’s security forces killed at least eight protesters and injured dozens while dispersing peaceful protesters. To do this, we culled information from social media, cross-checked events with other media sources, spoke to witnesses, and for some pieces, we went back to the activists who sent the material and asked them to explain the sources of information and the basis for considering it authentic. We look forward bringing in more senior staff to the organisation, such as a Chief Technology Officer, to help lead our technological investments.

In June we launched Human Rights Watch’s Technology Campaign Cabinet, a small group of close supporters committed to growing the 20/20 Lab and broader research on technology, such as digital rights, mass surveillance, and artificial intelligence. The Tech Cabinet will help connect us with new sources of funding, as well as key contacts and advisers in the tech-for-justice landscape.

## Protecting Rohingya and Ethnic Minorities in Myanmar

Over the past year, Human Rights Watch continued to investigate and expose the Myanmar government’s responsibility for its massive campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya Muslims, one of the largest and most vulnerable [stateless populations](#) in the world. Since 2017, over 740,000 Rohingya have fled from Myanmar’s Rakhine State into Bangladesh to escape murder, rape and the destruction of their villages. Today, more than 1 million Rohingya reside in precarious, overcrowded camps in Bangladesh—55 percent of whom are children. Conditions remain dire for the estimated 500,000 to 600,000 Rohingya still in Rakhine State, including 125,000 Rohingya who have been confined in detention camps since 2012, arbitrarily deprived of their liberty.

We have focused the bulk of our recent Myanmar work on documenting and sustaining global attention to the Rohingya crisis. To mark the first anniversary of the August 2017 atrocities, we released a [report](#) and [video](#) documenting the experiences of Rohingya refugees languishing in Bangladeshi camps, with limited access to safe shelter, food, clean water, health care, or education. We continued to document violations and put enormous effort into pressing the UN and governments to bring those responsible for atrocities in Myanmar to account.

Our sustained work has helped to spur targeted sanctions by the US, Canada, and EU against several military commanders, an arms embargo by many Western nations, and a comprehensive and highly damning report by the UN-backed Fact-Finding Mission to Myanmar. We also helped to spearhead the creation of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) by the UN Human Rights Council to build cases against suspects for use in future international prosecutions.

While there is currently no path to justice within Myanmar’s legal system, our global advocates are working to strengthen sanctions and bring the worst perpetrators to justice. We are [pressing the UN Security Council](#) to refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. While referral is unlikely in the short term, we are working to raise the political cost for states that stand in the way—notably China and Russia. We are also exploring mobilising a country to take a case to the International Court of Justice against Myanmar for a breach of the Genocide Convention. Such a case could take many years but would send a clear signal on the need for, and hopefully help to secure, accountability for the atrocities committed in Myanmar.

We will continue to monitor conditions in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, work to pave a path toward justice, and ensure that any repatriation plans account for safe and voluntary return.



Survivors of the Tula Toli massacre in Rakhine State, Burma. The Burmese army carried out systematic killings and rape of several hundred Rohingya Muslims in Tula Toli village in Rakhine State on August 30, 2017. The massacre was part of the military’s campaign of ethnic cleansing that forced more than 740,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. © 2017 Anastasia Taylor-Lind for Human Rights Watch



## Safeguarding Women and Girls Against Violence in Afghanistan

In 2009, the government of Afghanistan passed a watershed law, the Elimination of Violence against Women Act, aimed at protecting girls and women against violence, including murder, assault, and rape. The law established tough new punishments for perpetrators of violence and dramatically expanded the list of abuses against women that constitute criminal offences. Despite this major step forward, violence against women in Afghanistan remains widespread.

In research carried out over the past two years, Human Rights Watch found that Afghan women seeking justice after facing violence continue to face formidable obstacles. Police routinely refuse to register cases and instead tell women who have been the victims of domestic violence to return to their husbands. In May 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan—which was established to assist the government and people of Afghanistan in laying the foundation for sustainable peace and development—reported that even the most serious cases of murder and rape often never reach the courts.

Afghan authorities routinely turn victims away or pressure them to accept mediation, which does not provide justice to female victims of serious crimes, offering victims only a promise from her abuser not to repeat the crime. In some cases, mediators themselves inflict abuse, for example by ordering girls or women to be given as compensation for murder, forcing women and girls to marry men who raped them, or excusing murder in the name of “honour.” Girls and women are routinely subjected to “virginity” tests, even though the Afghan Supreme Court has ruled that such tests are not allowed.

Human Rights Watch has investigated cases of violence like these in the cities of Kabul, Herat, Bamiyan, and Mazar-e Sharif. We have interviewed dozens of survivors of violence about their ordeals and the obstacles they have faced in seeking justice. Among the many barriers to justice, women reported how family members threatened or cajoled them to drop a case, how the police refused to take their statements, and how prosecutors and judges pressured them to reconcile with their abusers.

We have met with officials in the Afghan attorney general’s office who have been leading reform efforts in order to share our findings and recommendations about the major shortcomings in the system, particularly at the provincial level. We have also met with prosecutors and judges and made recommendations on how enforcing accountability measures would contribute to major reforms.

We plan to release a report on our findings late this year to expose the obstacles to justice facing Afghan women and girls and to help ensure that they receive the full protections that the law affords them. We will use this report’s release to urge donors to keep judges and police accountable and to ensure that the Afghan government’s actions amount to more than paper promises.

# EVALUATION OF HRW SWEDEN'S PROGRESS

HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch are committed to rigorous, transparent, and consistent monitoring and self-evaluation. When looking at impact, the Human Rights Watch network determines whether it has met its goals to bring about positive change for those facing human rights violations. HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch consider input on progress from key interlocutors, local human rights partners, and critics. They gauge how effectively they have allocated resources. To ensure that the Human Rights Watch network reaches the highest standards of accuracy and objectivity in its research and achieves the greatest impact from its advocacy, it engages in self-evaluation throughout the year.

Often, since it takes a great deal of time to bring entrenched human rights abuses to an end, HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch consider interim criteria for evaluation. These include whether they have succeeded in generating prominent Swedish media coverage about abuses they investigate; whether the Swedish or other governments act on our findings by protesting the abuses or exerting diplomatic or economic pressure on the abusive government; whether we succeeded in building or protecting Swedish opposition to abuses; whether and how Swedish and other governments engage with the Human Rights Watch network or adopt and implement new policies to address the abuses it identifies and documents; and whether efforts are reflected in support from public media and Swedish donors.

On these criteria, there have been considerable accomplishments in the past year. HRW Sweden arranged more than 100 advocacy meetings with key decision-makers in Sweden. HRW Sweden also held several events to raise funds and showcase Human Rights Watch researchers and their work, including its Voices for Justice Dinner in Stockholm that raised a record high. In the past year, HRW Sweden continued to foster partnerships with other non-governmental organisations and built up a team of staff and fully engaged operations in Stockholm.

HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch recognise the critical role of partnerships and beneficiaries in all their work, including the planning and evaluation process. When the Human Rights Watch network evaluates its work it regularly speaks to victims, partner groups, advocacy targets, media, and others. Their feedback is invaluable in helping the organisation further improve its strategies on a project basis and design and implement subsequent projects to be undertaken by HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch.



Cover: Flavia Pinto, the head of Azemap – an organization that supports people with albinism, holds a toddler whom she is in the process of adopting. The child’s father was convicted of attempting to sell him. Human Rights Watch [recently exposed](#) how children living with albinism in the central Mozambican province of Tete are widely discriminated against, stigmatized, and often rejected at school or even by their own families.

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