



Annual Report 2012

Mission

The mission of Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) is to actively promote and protect human rights of minorities and marginalised groups and to enhance their socio-economic empowerment by educating, advocating and influencing.

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Foreword

by Global Human Rights Defence Chairman Sradhanand Sital

2012 was a commemorative year for Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD). Our commitment to protect the human rights of minorities in South Asia was rewarded with a significant grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The funding enabled us to implement the programme 'Raising Voices for Minority Rights', which builds on the principle of non-discrimination - the right of every individual to fully participate in society regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual preference.

The aim of the programme is to train and empower human rights defenders in South Asia, thereby increasing the quality and quantity of fact finding investigations. It also involves raising public and institutional awareness to help strengthen minorities within civil society. Additionally, we have been working on expanding our network substantially in the two key countries of operation, Pakistan and Bangladesh. This increased co-operation with partner organisations has given us a better insight into the human rights situations in South Asia.

We will continue to increase our support to local organisations in South Asia with the aim to improve human rights situations.

As we approach our 10th anniversary in 2013, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have supported Global Human Rights Defence in both South Asia and Europe. I look forward to continuing this joint endeavour supporting the rights of minorities.

Sradhanand Sital

GHRD Chairman



About Us

Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) promotes and advocates human rights in areas where minorities and marginalised groups are targets of regular human rights violations and where global attention for these abuses is lacking. Key countries of operation are Pakistan and Bangladesh, two of the most perilous countries for religious, sexual and ethnic minorities. In India and Nepal GHRD is involved in local projects promoting and advocating human rights.

The work of GHRD is based on three pillars:

- Human rights monitoring and advocacy
- Human rights education and awareness raising
- Human rights empowerment



This approach enables GHRD to provide holistic support to grassroots communities by investigating human rights situations of minorities, educating local communities of their rights and supporting them in their fight for these rights, as well as empowering local communities to raise these issues to higher authorities.

Local observers monitor and report situations of human rights violations as they occur. They interview victims and witnesses, and approach local authorities on cases. GHRD adopts a bottom-up approach partnering with grassroots organisations and engaging civil society to influence decision makers through awareness raising and advocacy.



Awareness Raising



GHRD conducted research and co-produced the documentary "Bangladesh: Culture of Impunity"

Education



Capacity building conference for South Asian human rights activists in Nepal

Advocacy



GHRD held advocacy meetings during the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan

Lobbying

2012 closed with a weeklong European lobby tour with human rights activists from Bangladesh and Pakistan who spoke at events and meetings in both London and The Hague.

A historic meeting, co-chaired by Lord Avebury and MP Anne Main, took place at the Palace of Westminster. Bangladeshi leaders from both the ruling and the opposition parties debated a range of political issues from how to ensure free and fair elections in 2013 to minority persecution. Despite continuous requests from the Chair, the provision of a caretaker government to oversee the elections remained the main topic and issue of disagreement.

The meetings gave hope for strengthened co-operation between the two main parties and their commitment towards protecting minorities in the future. The question remains how they will turn these plans into concrete actions once the parties have returned to Dhaka. Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) will continue to monitor the process.

Two days later, a panel discussion between four human rights activists from Bangladesh and Pakistan took place in The Hague. The most prevalent topic was: how to prevent violence against minorities during the upcoming elections in both countries in 2013. The speakers emphasised the importance of civil society collaboration between the two countries in order to move towards reconciliation for future generations in Bangladesh and Pakistan. The panel discussion was preceded by a preview screening of the documentary *Bangladesh: Culture of Impunity*.

The speakers were:

- Shahriar Kabir** - President International Forum for Secular Bangladesh, Expert witness at Bangladesh War Crime Tribunal
- Sameena Imtiaz** - Executive Director Peace Education and Development Foundation, Pakistan
- Khushi Kabir** - Coordinator Nijera Kori, Bangladesh
- Senge H. Sering** - Director Institute for Gilgit Baltistan Studies based in Washington, Member of the Board of Directors of the Gilgit Baltistan National Congress

EU Lobby Tour



H.T. Imam, Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, receiving the first copy of GHRDs Human Rights Report, 2012.

Pakistan

“ With upcoming elections in 2013, GHRD stepped up its activities in Pakistan in 2012. Information gathered through fact finding missions and interviews with members of minority communities were used to raise awareness of minority issues in Pakistan

With upcoming elections in 2013, Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) stepped up its activities in Pakistan in 2012. Information gathered through fact finding missions and interviews with members of minority communities were used to raise awareness of minority issues in Pakistan during press conferences, door-to-door information distributions, trainings, street theatre performances and rallies.

Throughout the year, GHRD supported local partner organisations to raise minority issues through press conferences and rallies. For example, on the Pakistani National Minorities Day, and on the anniversary of Shabbaz Bhatti's death where over 150 people protested against the discrimination of minorities and called for government commitment to change.

GHRD hosted a two day human rights fact finding and investigation training in April. Minority rights observers, volunteers, community leaders and activists from various regions in Pakistan participated.

In 2012, Pakistan's human rights record was scrutinised by the international community during its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR), held at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. GHRD submitted a shadow report in advance of the UPR and discussed the report directly with European states. The day prior to the review, GHRD held a side event and panel discussion entitled *Ending bonded labour in Pakistan - From legal rights to real change*, in partnership with Trócaire (Caritas Ireland) and Anti-Slavery International.

In December 2012, Pakistani civil society representatives came to London and The Hague to discuss concerns for minorities in light of the upcoming elections in 2013. The representatives met with policy makers, parliamentarians and civil society organisations. The meetings culminated in a high level event and debate entitled *Religious Extremism and Minorities in South Asia* in The Hague.

Blasphemy Charges Laid Against Rimsha Masih

The case of Rimsha Masih, a young girl arrested on blasphemy charges, received high media coverage in 2012. She was incarcerated for three weeks after an angry mob had surrounded her family home demanding she be punished for allegedly burning pages of the Quran.

On 2 September, the case received global news attention after the arrest of a Muslim cleric. He had first brought the burnt papers to the police as evidence against her, but was later charged with desecrating the Quran and tampering with evidence after witnesses accused him of planting pages of the Muslim holy book among the charred papers Ramshi had been carrying with her.

GHRD's local partners monitored the court proceedings and investigated the case. The gathered information was used to draw attention to the case through local partner organisations, the media and Dutch and international authorities, including the Special Rapporteur for Religious Freedom.

International pressure and government influence resulted in Rimsha being granted bail on 7 September. The case is the first example of an individual in Pakistan accused of blasphemy being released, and the accuser arrested. The case continues.

Naveed Walter speaking with Police Investigation Officer Mr. Munir Jaffri and Rimsha's aunt Ms. Gulzari (right)



Bangladesh

“ The political highlight of the year was a conference in the House of Lords in London, attended by senior Bangladeshi leaders of both the ruling and opposition parties. Local human rights defenders and British MPs joined in the roundtable discussion on concerns for minorities in Bangladesh during election time. ”

In 2012 Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) established itself as a leading international human rights organisation for raising awareness of the situation of minorities in Bangladesh. Priority areas included pre-election monitoring, and attacks against religious and ethnic minorities. Based on local fact finding missions, international events and campaigns were organised to gain national media exposure, and political attention locally and internationally.

The political highlight of the year was a conference in the House of Lords in London, attended by senior Bangladeshi leaders of both the ruling and opposition parties. Local human rights defenders and British MPs joined in the roundtable discussion on concerns for minorities in Bangladesh during election time. The adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh personally received GHRD's Human Rights Report 2012. Key activists were subsequently invited to The Netherlands to address Dutch policymakers and academia at a high level event in the Hague.

GHRD submitted a shadow report to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This will be followed up with a side event in Geneva in 2013.

GHRD researched and co-produced the documentary *Bangladesh: Culture of Impunity* broadcast on Dutch national television. As of today, over 80,000 viewers have watched the documentary online helping raise worldwide awareness of minority and religious extremism in Bangladesh.

With grant funding from the Dutch Foreign Office, GHRD was able to implement further human rights programmes for minorities. One such target group involves the LGBT communities in Bangladesh. GHRD believes that recognition and education of civil human rights of LGBT persons is key to achieving longstanding and effective change for these communities and will continue to support them.

The Ramu Tragedy

“We have no aspiration for revenge. We need to reconstruct the temples and houses despite all obstacles. We want peace, Buddhists cannot aspire for unhappiness of people.”
Buddhist monk reacting to the devastation in Ramu.

In September, a crowd of 5000 attacked and burnt down mainly Buddhist, but also Hindu, temples and houses in Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong District. As the violence escalated, Buddhists and Hindus fled in fear of their lives. Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) investigated the incident and raised serious concerns to the government regarding the passivity of the law enforcement agencies to prevent the attacks, and the government's lack of commitment to prosecute the perpetrators and prevent similar violence in the future.



In 2012, Hindu and Buddhist communities were regularly victims of attacks by organised, large mobs burning down temples and homes, attacking men, women and children.



India & Nepal

“ In 2012 GHRD supported projects to rehabilitate survivors of human trafficking. These projects concentrate on preventing violence and oppression by promoting education and community activities as well as economic rehabilitation. ”

Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) has been active in India since 2003 and in Nepal since 2009. In both countries GHRD focuses on the issue of trafficking in persons, predominantly from Nepal into India. On top of this, India also faces caste and social discrimination issues.

In 2012, GHRD continued with film screenings of the documentary *Sold - A Child Trafficked* to students and youth projects. The purpose of the film is to raise awareness of women and child trafficking in Nepal and mobilise international public opinion by putting pressure on the government of Nepal to commit to major efforts and financial resources to fight human trafficking.

In 2012 GHRD supported the following projects:

Rehabilitation for children affected by trafficking, and socially oppressed children - in the rural village of Udgir, District of Latur, state of Maharashtra, India.

The project concentrates on preventing violence and oppression by promoting education and community activities for the children's rehabilitation. In 2012 GHRD was able to support 75 children with the project.

Economic Rehabilitation of Survivors - in the state of West Bengal, India.

The project develops economic empowerment programmes for survivors of trafficking helping them to confidently re-enter society and learn a skill that provides them with a sustainable and independent livelihood. GHRD was able to support 50 survivors of human trafficking with this project.

International Day Events

Through human rights activism Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) promotes the protection of human rights through peaceful action by supporting activities in South Asia. These could be street dramas focusing on human rights issues, rallies, sport activities, dissemination of information, cultural performances, etc.

With a modest budget GHRD uses cost effective campaign strategies to support mass public actions, reaching over ten thousand people, creating an impact on society.

Achievements of International Women's Day and International Human Rights Day 2012

40 grassroots organisations in four countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan) organised 30 different activities. Each event saw thousands of people participating with an outreach of well over ten thousand, including those targeted through social media.

Participants from all levels of society participated in the awareness raising events. Among them: politicians, local leaders, religious leaders, students, human rights activists, lawyers, businessmen and women.



In connection with International Women's Day in 2012, GHRD's local partner organisations organised a variety of activities, such as rallies to inspire and lead young women, and to promote the rights of women from marginalised groups.



Education

Education, interaction and dialogue are tools used by Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) to inspire and promote a more tolerant society.

In 2012, Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) hosted students from several universities during study visits in The Hague. The purpose was to learn more about human rights in South Asia, but also the role of NGO's and international institutions. Students attended various seminars and workshops.



Europe

Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) hosted the EU Youth in Action Programme (YiAP) with the aim to inspire a sense of active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans and involving them in shaping the Union's future.

Team-building games, discussion sessions, presentations, role-playing games, workshops and a social programme were used to touch upon inequalities arising from differences in sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender and age.

GHRD also hosted a Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme on the subject of EU minorities and European values. Grundtvig offers adults the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills boosting employment prospects. The programme is intended for individuals eager to learn, as well as institutions and organisations offering or sponsoring suitable courses of study.

The Grundtvig workshop entitled *United in Diversity: discovering European values* brought participants with diverse backgrounds together from all over Europe for a week of study visits, trainings with experts, dramatic action and group projects. Participants were provided with new life skills, the competence and knowledge to improve the situation of minorities within their communities, and to promote values for an inclusive society.



Raising voices for minority rights - Kathmandu

GHRD organised a weeklong capacity building conference in November attended by South Asian human rights activists in Kathmandu. Workshops on religious minorities, human rights fact finding and investigation training were provided, as well as, workshops on intercultural communication and safety for human rights defenders.

Fact Finding Training - Faisalabad

In April, minority rights observers, volunteers, community leaders and activists from various regions in Pakistan completed a two day training on human rights fact finding and documentation organised by Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD).

Awareness Raising

Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) raises awareness through interaction, education, and dialogue.

GHRD organised an event at the Humanity House in The Hague on human trafficking in Nepal and the Netherlands. After the screening of the documentary *SOLD – A Child Trafficked*, a debate took place between Corinne Dettmeijer (National Rapporteur) and investigative journalists, Martijn Roessingh and Perdiep Ramesar, on the approach and practice of human trafficking in the Netherlands.

Humanity House Debate

Media Outreach

Film & Audio-visual Content

Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) conducted research and co-produced the documentary *Culture of Impunity: Bangladesh*. The documentary has been screened in the Netherlands, Bangladesh and London. Additionally, it was aired on Dutch national television in December and its online distribution via YouTube has received nearly 80,000 views.¹



GHRD also produced and distributed two video clips covering events in London and The Hague: GHRD's lobby tour, and a protest in front of the British Parliament against the violence in Bangladesh. During the lobby tour a ground-breaking meeting took place between high officials of the Bangladeshi government and opposition party who sat down with members of civil society to discuss upcoming elections and minority rights. Overall, these events received wide news coverage in both South Asia and Europe.



¹ Number of views by March 2013

Online Media: Global Online Campaigns

'Protect the Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh' was the name given to a global online petition campaign calling for constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples and the implementation of the CHT peace accord. It was initiated together with various organisations including Jumma Peoples Network - London, Kapaeng Foundation-Dhaka and CHT Indigenous Jumma Association Australia (CHTIJAA). The petition gathered 1043 signatures from 51 countries. To honour World Indigenous Day, it was handed to authorities in Bangladesh, the United Kingdom, Australia and the Netherlands. Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, personally responded to the petition and voiced her support.

In Pakistan, a similar petition campaign was organised to protect Pakistan's leading human rights activist, Asma Jahangir, from a state agency plotting to assassinate her. The petition gathered more than 1100 signatures worldwide.



Local news coverage

GHRD actively supports local activists to raise their issues in local news media through press outreach, conferences and training. In Pakistan, newspapers such as the *Daily Times* and the *Tribune* covered the peaceful demonstrations against Government celebrations of National Minorities Day. GHRD's local partners and other members of minority communities marked the day as a 'black day' arguing that there is no reason for celebration when considering the actual situation of minorities in Pakistan. This sparked a debate among the local media, voicing citizens' concerns about growing discrimination, hatred and violence.

International day events received coverage from over 75 media outlets (radio, television, newspaper and electronic media). On the various days, including International Women's Day and International Human rights Day, numerous events were organised in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Thousands of people participated, with an outreach of well over ten thousand, including those targeted through social media.

Social Media

GHRD stepped up its efforts to engage a wider public, in particular young people, through social media. The number of followers on GHRD's Facebook page doubled from 600 to more than 1200, whilst the estimated outreach has increased to approximately 3000 people.

Additionally, the GHRD Blog initiated in 2012, received more than 5000 views by the end of December 2012.

Lobbying



During the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic review of Pakistan held in Geneva, Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) conducted events, awareness raising and advocacy on the rights of Pakistani minorities in collaboration with other international and Pakistani civil society partners. The key themes of activities were the rights of religious minorities and ending bonded labour in Pakistan.

Advocacy meetings with European Permanent Missions in Geneva resulted in a number of recommendations on religious minorities being made during the UPR session, particularly on the blasphemy laws and violence against religious minorities. Furthermore, GHRD's joint NGO submission on minorities in Pakistan was covered in the OHCHR's stakeholders submission report.

Looking Ahead

With the support and recognition of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) is more determined than ever to continue addressing and supporting the cause against severe human rights violations in South Asia.

Minorities in South Asia continue being regular targets of human rights abuse. Human rights defenders, working for change in their countries, are in constant danger of death threats and physical assaults during the course of their work. The situation is increasingly getting worse. With elections due in Pakistan and Bangladesh this year, there is an urgent need to continue to facilitate interaction between small local human rights organisations and international institutions to help minority groups raise their issues at an international level, who might otherwise not be heard.

GHRD's strong ties and regular contact with local partners, in combination with consistent lobbying in Europe, provides the perfect bridge between small, locally based human rights organisations and international institutions promoting minority rights. Securing access to UN mechanisms, and a broader international lobbying platform will further GHRD's capacity to influence more international bodies and authorities.

As part of our programme 'Raising Voices for Minority Rights', we will also continue supporting LGBT communities to gain recognition and empower them through education. An impartial investigation of LGBT human rights violations, by trained human rights professionals, needs to take place before these issues can be raised on national and international agendas.

Furthermore, to improve fact finding, GHRD will provide local human rights defenders with the correct tools and certification to train others in their own country. This will enable a potentially exponential growth in trained human rights defenders in South Asia strengthening an entire human rights community by creating capacity at the local level.

This report was compiled by Global Human Rights Defence in 2012
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Photos by:
- Miles Roston
- Ashvin Ghisyawan – Totaalfotografie.nl
Editing by: Reina van Nieuwkerk-Rác - rites.eu

Laan van Meerdervoort 70
2517 AN The Hague
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)70 34 50 692
Fax: +31 (0)70 392 65 75
URL: www.ghrd.org
Email: info@ghrd.org

Support GHRD:
Chamber of Commerce: 2726163
ABN AMRO Bank: 417 943 024
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