



## Front Line Quarterly Update – October 13, 2009

*"As a Human Rights Defender in Burma, I pass my daily life like a hungry soul crying for freedom and justice."*

- Aung Kyaw Soe, Burma

**In recent years, the situation confronting human rights defenders has deteriorated.** Since the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 1998 there has been a significant global decline in the security conditions confronting many human rights defenders. Local conflicts, repressive government regimes and the international "war on terror" have all contributed to this corrosion of the space in which human rights defenders are able to successfully operate.

Despite this trend, Front Line believes that the role of Human Rights Defenders remains central and vital to the implementation of human rights law at local, regional and international levels. It sounds strange, but as we work with so many human rights defenders who carry out their lives living day by day on the front line we have discovered that repression is almost a measure of effectiveness. Perpetrators choose who they target on the basis of who is being effective in challenging their interests. The activities of Front Line that are described in this Quarterly Update are all intended to provide at-risk defenders of human rights with the protection and security resources they need to be effective in the immediate and long term. Your support is crucial to our efforts and we remain grateful for your commitment to our programme.

### Front Line Training

Throughout 2009 Front Line has continued to deliver locally tailored training workshops for at risk human rights defenders throughout the world. To this end we have conducted nine local, regional and international training workshops for human rights defenders in six countries. These events typically run from three to five days and have included the topics of Personal Security & Risk Assessment and Digital Security. Front Line workshops are delivered as both standard and training-of-trainer exercises.

1. **Istanbul Turkey**, January 19-23, 2009 - Digital Security Training of Trainers Workshop
2. **Nairobi, Kenya**, January 23–30, 2009 - Digital Security Training of Trainers workshop for Francophone central Africa HRD.
3. **Antigua, Guatemala**, February 23–March 3, 2009 - Digital Security Training of Trainers workshop for Latin American HRDs
4. **Cairo, Egypt** – March 9-10, 2009 - Digital Security Training of Trainers Workshop
5. **Belgium**, Brussels – March 30 to April 3, 2009 - Francophone Training of Trainers Workshop
6. **Kenya, Nairobi** - 13-15 May, 2009 - Training on Personal Security & Risk Assessment
7. **Guatemala** – 23 February – 3 March, 2009 - Digital Security Training of Trainers Workshop
8. **Turkey, Istanbul** – May 5-11, 2009 - Digital Security Training of Trainers Workshop
9. **Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo** – July 20-22 2009 - Personal Safety & Risk Assessment Workshop for Women Human Rights Defenders

### Front Line Small Grants

Since January, Front Line has disbursed over €276,000 in grant support to 117 human rights defenders and organisations in need of practical assistance. Typical grants were provided for items such as cell phones, office & IT security measures, and legal & medical fees.

Among the 117 small grants awarded to date in 2009, 64 have been issued as Emergency Grants that are used for evacuation and relocation of HRDs and their families, rapid medical assistance and legal support. This is an increase over previous years. We believe this expansion reflects a broad trend of increasing

activity carried out against HRDs as a result of the ongoing war on terror and the fear of change that so many HRDs represent to repressive regimes and cultural institutions and throughout the world.

### Examples of Front Line Small Grant Support to at risk human rights defenders

Country	Org. / Ind.	Purpose of Grant	Grant Amount	Date of Issue
Philippines	Organisation	Counseling workshop for rural women human rights defenders and IT equipment	€5,666	January 23, 2009
India	Organisation	Reinforcing the security of the NGOs building	€3,758	January 23, 2009
Russian Federation/Lithuania	Organisation	Legal fees for founders and directors (WHRD)	€5,545	January 26, 2009
Zimbabwe	Organisation	Install access controls on the premises of two law firms.	€6,000	March 3, 2009
Cameroon	Organisation	Legal fees for two organisation members	€1,715	March 3, 2009
Mexico	Organisation	IT equipment	€2,380	April 14, 2009
Indonesia	Organisation	Provision of unarmed body guards	€3,192	May 7, 2009

### Front Line Field-based coordination & follow up Training

With the October 2008 addition of field-based protection staff in Moscow & Bahrain, Front Line has increased its interaction with HRDs working throughout the Former Soviet Union, Central Asia, the Middle East and Northern Africa. With this expanded interaction we have been able to encourage the development of ongoing communication and informal networking of HRDs in these regions.

Front Line interaction with human rights defenders has also been expanded through the focused delivery of Front Line Training of Trainer and follow-up training workshops delivered by HRDs among their peers. Through dialogue promoted by the organization's field-based coordinators, HRDs have shared experiences and have articulated the common and unique challenges that they face. In some cases, HRDs have developed cooperative security strategies to assist one another in the event of an emergency.



**Kenya: Ann Njogu**

Violence against women in Kenya is a huge if unrecognised issue. Ann Njogu's organisation works to make people aware of their rights - highlighting traditional practices such as bride price and bride inheritance, which are common in some communities.

Kenyan human rights defenders and other members of civil society have been tear-gassed and baton charged by the police when they take part in peaceful demonstrations.

### 5th Dublin Platform for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders – February 2009

Front Line will host the 5th Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders on February 10-12 2010. This gathering will provide a unique opportunity for 100 at-risk defenders from roughly 70 countries to come together to exchange experiences, discuss relevant issues and engage with decision makers from governmental and intergovernmental bodies. We are presently working with participants to coordinate panel discussions, defender testimonies, presentations and working groups to address the most pressing issues of security and protection which impact the daily lives of HRDs.

### Front Line Advocacy/campaigning on Individual Cases of HRDs at Risk

Between January and October 2009 Front Line has taken up the cases of 135 human rights defenders who have been arrested or detained in 28 countries. This figure includes 13 human rights defenders from 8 countries who were killed as a result of their human rights activities.

## Front Line Advocacy for Human Rights Defenders

- **Africa:** Cameroon, DRC, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Mauritania, Republic of Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe
- **Asia:** Burma, China, India, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand
- **Europe/Central Asia:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Uzbekistan
- **Latin America:** Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru
- **MENA:** Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Western Sahara, Yemen

**Follow-up actions** such as emails and phone calls have also been undertaken on cases from Armenia, Bahrain, Cameroon, Colombia, DRC, Ecuador, Gabon, Gambia, India, Iran, Kenya, Kosovo, Mexico, Malaysia, Oman, Peru, the Philippines, Russian Federation, Serbia, Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Western Sahara.

### Front Line Advocacy Detail

**India:** At the outset of the trial of human rights defender Dr Lenin Raghuvanshi, Front Line submitted a request for impartial trial observation directly to EU Embassies, who monitored the case closely. This activity was a direct outcome of 2008 workshop on EU Guidelines, and privileged access to EU diplomats.

**Sudan:** On March 5, 2009, the Sudan Social Development Network (SUDO) was closed down and Sudanese security forces surrounded its headquarters outside of Darfur. On the same day, the organisation's Chairperson (and prominent human rights defender) Mudawi Ibrahim Adam was warned of his imminent arrest. Front Line immediately engaged contacts within the King Baudouin Foundation (BE) to ensure that the issue was relayed by the Belgian Ambassador to the UN in New York, with the Cabinet of EU Commissioner Louis Michel, and the EU Special Representative for Sudan.

**Democratic Republic of Congo:** Upon the March 16, 2009 detention of two human rights defenders at the Kin-Maizière prison in Kinshasa, Front Line contacted the prison's Commandant, exchanged SMS messages with EU Commissioner Louis Michel, and pushed the Czech Presidency to take action. At Front Line's behest, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs also issued a public statement urging the release of the detainees. The defenders were released on March 17.

### Protection

Front Line continues to provide 24-hour rapid and practical support to at-risk human rights defenders. The organisation's 24-hour support is provided through an emergency response phone line that is maintained in five languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic).

## Natalia Estemirova - A Testament to Courage



Natalya Estemirova was an award winning journalist and human rights defender who documented human rights violations in Chechnya. On the morning of 15 July 2009, she was abducted near her apartment building in Grozny and later killed.

In 2005 Natalya Estemirova stayed in Dublin for three months as part of Front Line's *Rest & Respite Programme*. In October 2003 she addressed the audience of Front Line's *Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders*, which included 100 human rights defenders from over 70 countries. In her testimony she described the incredible courage of those who struggled to document and challenge the human rights abuses being perpetrated in Chechnya.

Natalia Estemirova is the latest victim of a climate of impunity in which harassment and intimidation, kidnappings and killings go unpunished. She paid for her courage with her life - her words speak for themselves:

## Testimony by Natalia Estemirova to the 2003 Dublin Platform

"I would like to tell you about a woman of whose life and death, I believe, the people must know.

Her name was Zura Bitieva. She lived in a small Chechen village. During '95-'96, when the Russian army occupied Chechnya, she was actively involved in anti-war protests. She was not afraid of the fatal consequences. In 1999, the Russian army again invaded Chechnya, and in February 2000 she and her son Idris, were taken into the Chernokozov prison by a Russian soldier. Conditions of this prison were appalling in their brutality. Torture, killing, assault and human degradation were all part of this institution.

Zura was a small, aged and very sick woman. But her soul and the strength of her spirit, withstood the threats and beating of her captors. She defended other inmates in prison, with this strength. Zura went on hunger strike. She was released in a very ill condition. Her friends helped her go to Turkey.

But once her health was slightly better, she went back to Chechnya, and began collecting evidence of crimes committed by the Russian soldiers and militia against the peaceful citizens of Chechnya. This evidence she submitted to UN and organizations for human rights.

In the middle of a spring night 2003, her house was broken into by camouflaged and masked men. These men were part of the Russian forces. They killed her, her son Idris, her husband and her brother. Her one year-old grandson was gagged and left in a puddle of blood. Only her other son, escaped death by hiding in time.

Half a year passed, and the crime has still not been investigated. Exactly two years before this event, Islamic fundamentalists in conjunction with the Russian forces, mortally wounded human rights defender Viktor Popkov. Still, the killers have not been brought to justice, even though this is quite possible.

In spring this year, men in camouflage and masks kidnapped a defender Imran Ezhiev. The press raised a storm, and after a few days Imran was dropped and left on a dirt road. To this day, he does not know where he had been, as he was gagged and cuffed. But he does know that his kidnappers were part of the Russian forces. He was saved by the press outcry.

I suggest that whenever a human rights defender is suffering, we should hold massive press gatherings to free the defender and lead proper investigations into their arrests."

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