



ARTICLE19

International Annual Report **2021**

A Critical Juncture



Defending Freedom of Expression and Information around the World

First published by ARTICLE 19, 2022

www.article19.org

Text and analysis © ARTICLE 19, April 2022 (Creative Commons License 3.0)

ARTICLE 19 works for a world where all people everywhere can freely express themselves and actively engage in public life without fear of discrimination. We do this by working on two interlocking freedoms, which set the foundation for all our work. The Freedom to Speak concerns everyone's right to express and disseminate opinions, ideas and information through any means, as well as to disagree from, and question power-holders. The Freedom to Know concerns the right to demand and receive information by power-holders for transparency good governance and sustainable development. When either of these freedoms comes under threat, by the failure of power-holders to adequately protect them, ARTICLE 19 speaks with one voice, through courts of law, through global and regional organisations, and through civil society wherever we are present.

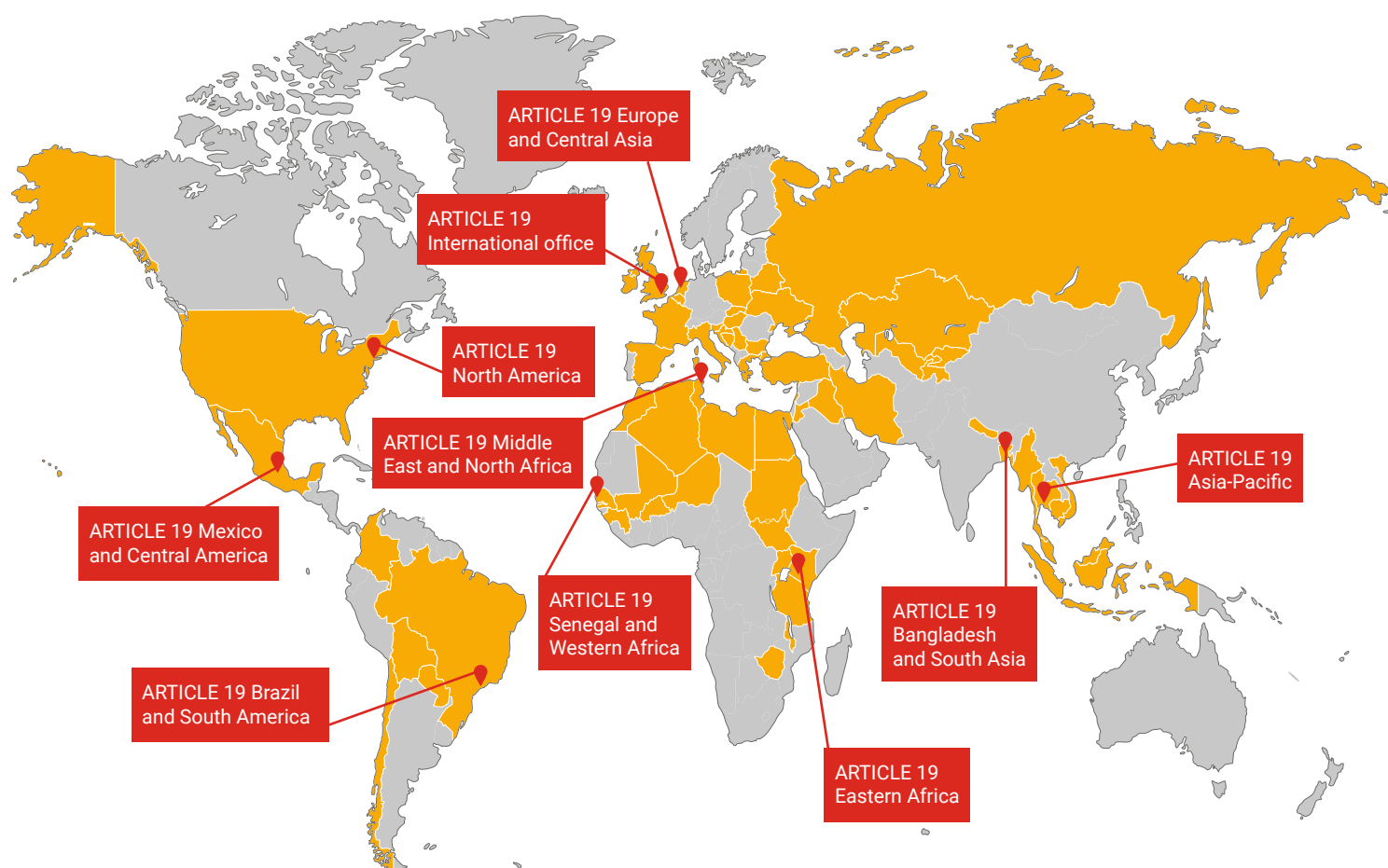
About Creative Commons License 3.0: This work is provided under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike 3.0 license. You are free to copy, distribute and display this work and to make derivative works, provided you:

- 1) give credit to ARTICLE 19
- 2) do not use this work for commercial purposes
- 3) distribute any works derived from this publication under a license identical to this one.

To access the full legal text of this license, please visit:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/legalcode>

Cover photo: Marvina Newton, campaigner for Black Lives Matter and XR Unify, at the Kill the Bill march against the UK Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. London, 15 January 2022. (Photo: Crispin Hughes/Panos Pictures)

Where we work



ARTICLE 19 regional offices



Countries we work on

ARTICLE 19 Asia-Pacific:

asia@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 Bangladesh and South Asia:

bangladesh@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 Brazil and South America:

brasil@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa:

kenya@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 Europe and Central Asia:

europa@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America:

comunicacion@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 Middle East and North Africa:

mena@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 North America:

info@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 Senegal and Western Africa:

westafrica@article19.org

ARTICLE 19 International Office:

info@article19.org

Contents

I. A CRITICAL JUNCTURE



3	Where we work
4	Contents
6	Abbreviations
7	From the Executive Director: Quinn McKew
9	From the Chair of the Board: Paddy Coulter

13	Six years of the Expression Agenda
14	Our partners reflect on the Expression Agenda
16	Snapshots of authoritarianism – and resistance
19	Snapshot of hope: The Gambia
20	The Power of Our Voices
21	Bridging human rights and technology to define a new digital era for freedom of expression
21	Protecting, empowering, and connecting silenced voices and dissent
22	Advancing law and policy to protect freedom of expression and demand accountability

Photo (middle): An indigenous woman takes part in a protest outside JP Morgan during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). Glasgow, Scotland, 10 November 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Dylan Martinez)

Photo (right): Facial recognition software is being deployed across the globe to gather and analyse personal data. Without proper regulation this risks profiling people based on age, gender, and skin colour, enabling discrimination. (Photo: Shutterstock)

II. CRITICAL THOUGHT



25	New research at the boundaries of expression
25	Destigmatise dissent: New research on the right to protest
28	When bodies become data
28	Biometric technologies and freedom of expression
30	New surveillance revelations from the Pegasus Project
32	Researching rights worldwide
33	Building bridges between academia and civil society
34	Advancing freedom of expression through law and policy
34	Tame Big Tech to protect freedom of expression
38	Regional legal wins
40	International and regional advocacy
40	Two new UN resolutions on human rights online
41	Putting human rights at the heart of Internet infrastructure
42	Embrace freedom of expression to tackle 'disinformation'
43	From global to local: Artist in Thailand released following ARTICLE 19's UN advocacy
44	Advocacy snapshots
44	Better regional protections for environmental human rights defenders

III. CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS



- 47 'From margin to center' : Amplifying the voices of at-risk groups**
- 47 Bangladesh: Supporting women journalists through Covid-19
- 47 Tunisia: Ministry of Education to integrate ARTICLE 19's 'hate speech' manual into schools
- 47 Brazil: ARTICLE 19 reveals government's regression in tackling inequalities
- 48 Kenya: Improving the safety of women human rights defenders
- 49 Speaking up for LGBTQI+ people in repressive regimes
- 49 Walking the walk: Putting equality, diversity, and inclusion at the heart of ARTICLE 19
- 51 Protecting journalists, fighting impunity**
- 51 Mexico: Progress towards justice for two journalists
- 52 Algeria: Journalist released following international pressure
- 53 Malta: Landmark Public Inquiry into the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia
- 53 Togo: Jailed journalist released – under strict conditions
- 54 Nothing but the truth**
- 54 Northern Ireland: The truth of The Troubles
- 55 Mexico: Archiving repression and resistance

- 56 ARTICLE 19 joins UNESCO working group on Holocaust denial
- 57 Beyond belief: Freedom of expression for all religions – and none**
- 57 Malaysia: #CubaDengarDulu youth campaign promotes empathy, diversity, and inclusiveness
- 58 Jordan: ARTICLE 19 stands in solidarity with poet sued for 'insulting the religious feelings of others'
- 59 Asia and Pacific: Voices for Inclusion fights religious discrimination – despite difficult context
- 59 Bangladesh: Promoting tolerance between rural religious groups
- 60 Caught in the crossfire: ARTICLE 19 on the frontlines worldwide**
- 60 Mexico: President accuses ARTICLE 19 of being paid to undermine his government
- 61 Belarus: Former ARTICLE 19 staff member and his partner jailed
- 62 Thailand: ARTICLE 19 consultant charged with *lèse-majesté* for quoting UN at a protest

Bridging the digital divide: In rural Bangladesh, women in pink and blue uniforms, known as info-ladies, bring Internet services to people who cannot access the web. Here, info-lady Shathi helps 50-year-old Kohinur Begum to Skype with a relative working overseas. (Photo: ARTICLE 19)

IV. CRITICAL MASS



- 65 Sparking solidarity: The power of partnerships**
- 65 Team CommUNITY: Nurturing the mental health of digital rights defenders
- 67 Progress in EU on vexatious lawsuits against journalists (SLAPPs)
- 68 Covid-19 in Africa: Together for Reliable Information
- 69 Making the invisible visible: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists
- 70 New Internet Freedom Initiative launched
- 71 Campaigns update**
- 71 Challenging hate in Kyrgyzstan
- 72 Mexico: New women's health campaign in five indigenous languages
- 73 Biometrics campaigns in the EU and India
- 74 Governance**
- 75 Our Trustees
- 76 Our partners/donors**

Protesters march from Khartoum North to Omdurman during a rally against military rule following a coup. Khartoum, Sudan, 13 December 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah)

Abbreviations

BDT	Bangladeshi taka
DSA	Digital Security Act
ERT	Emotion recognition technology
GxR	<i>Global Expression Report</i> evidence-based metric
INR	Indian rupee
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
SLAPP	Strategic lawsuit against public participation
SMC	Social Media Council
UN HRC	UN Human Rights Council
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



A world on the edge

Quinn McKew, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19

At the time of writing, the Russian army has invaded Ukraine, murdering civilians in a torched-earth policy of catastrophic barbarity. Even the world we looked into in 2021 had the feeling of a planet on the edge: the challenges – economic, environmental, and political – loomed larger than most of us could comprehend. Yet we still believed a world based on respect for the dignity of people and preservation of the planet was achievable.

I am reminded of the words of Kathryn Sikkink, author and human rights specialist who said: **"Anger is not sufficient to maintain motivation over time; you also need to have hope, and to believe that you can make a difference."** Her words are why most of us who work in human rights get up in the morning. While there is no doubt we are at a profound inflection point – where the stark consequences of impunity, authoritarianism, and populism are playing out in all our lives – it is now that we must dig-in and continue to strive even harder for a more just and progressive future.

Last year when the world felt a little safer than it does today – even as the pandemic raged through populations everywhere – ARTICLE 19 reflected on the successes and setbacks of our Expression Agenda strategy. We solicited expert views on the challenges for Freedom of Expression and our role in meeting them. We listened and combined their insights with our own, and this Annual Report for 2021 is filled with stories of work which makes these insights tangible and extremely relevant to the context we face today.

We know unequivocally that:

- **The rise of authoritarianism is driven by attacks on expression.** When powerholders look to tighten their grip, they first look at controlling the narrative in their countries, to limit what people can and can't know and to demonise 'enemies'. Efforts by Russia to crush civil society and independent media are a painful current example of this.
- **During the past six years we have witnessed growing impunity** for human rights violations, with few meaningful actions taken to combat the backsliding on human rights and the rule of law. Nothing personifies this more than chronic violence against Mexican journalists, whose deaths proceed in the face of government inaction combined with a toxic attack on the media by the Mexican President.
- **While the future of expression is online, the space is increasingly contested**, with the vision of an open, interoperable Internet under greater threat than ever before. Now is the time to embed human rights at a structural and governance level, as well as ensuring that regulation of online spaces preserves, not hinders expression.
- **The benefits and burdens of freedom of expression are not felt equally.** Individuals in vulnerable circumstances or who have been traditionally marginalised or stigmatised often face structural barriers to using expression and access to information in ways that improve their lives and help them to achieve their full rights as participants and contributors to society.

The culmination of our reflections and our collective ambition is a new four-year strategy (2022–25) called **The Power of Our Voices**. The strategy seeks to redefine freedom of expression in an increasingly digital era, with diversity, equity, and inclusion at the heart. It will focus our efforts specifically towards ensuring:

- digital spaces, governance, services, and technologies are rooted in human rights and enable the diversity of human experience;
- more inclusive, protected, and resilient communities and individuals feel free to express themselves in public and media; and
- accurate and reliable data and information are publicly accessible, and empower individuals to seize their rights.

ARTICLE 19 emerges stronger, better connected, more agile, more resilient, and sustainable in order to realise our mission.

We invite all our partners and supporters to join us as we continue to build the systems for those who dissent, challenge power, and seek change. With your support, we will continue to propel the growing movement for free expression, driving change locally and globally so people everywhere may realise the power of their voices.

As we transition away from the Expression Agenda and towards our new strategic ambition, I want to say to all our partners, **thank you** for travelling with us, and for helping to make the changes you read about here, firm ground for hope.



From the Chair of the Board

Paddy Coulter

As we reach the end of our six-year Expression Agenda and launch an exciting new strategy, The Power of Our Voices, the Chair of our International Board, Paddy Coulter, reflects on developments in freedom of expression – and within ARTICLE 19 – over the past six years.

You've been on ARTICLE 19's International Board since 2013, and the Chairman since 2014. What motivated you to advocate for freedom of expression?

The most obvious trigger was my career in international media, where I witnessed, close up, how crucial media freedom is to journalists, editors, and media organisations all over the world – and what happens when that freedom is violated.

But freedom of expression also struck a chord with me because I grew up in Northern Ireland, and human rights was really at the core of the conflict there. ARTICLE 19's very first Executive Director, Kevin Boyle, was also from Northern Ireland. He was an extraordinarily brave and thoughtful man, a human rights lawyer who insisted on putting civil rights at the centre of The Troubles. One of his favourite quotes – from an early UN resolution – appeals to me, too:

"Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and is the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated."

Freedom of expression really is at the heart of democratic values and liberty, and it's only through international collaboration that we'll advance it.

You must have seen a huge amount of change since ARTICLE 19 launched the Expression Agenda back in 2015. What's been the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge has been a global decline in democratic values – to put it mildly. Our [Global Expression Report 2019/20](#) found that over half of the world's population lived in countries characterised as being in a freedom of expression crisis. That, to me, was a really shocking statistic.

In 2013, when I joined the Board, we were opening new offices in Myanmar and Tunisia with high hopes. Yet in 2021, the military mounted yet another coup in Myanmar, and Tunisia – the first Arab Spring country – drifted back to authoritarianism. Now we're facing what I call 'the threat of a bad example', where major superpowers like Russia and China reject basic international human rights standards and get away with it, and smaller countries see this and think they can do the same. And if you'd told me in 2013 that in 2022 we'd be witnessing one European country invading another [Russia invaded Ukraine a few days before this interview], I wouldn't have believed you.

Our successes must be acclaimed; social movements can still effect positive change. But we need to wise up to where this war on expression is going – and be ready for it.

What about the most significant developments within ARTICLE 19 itself?

ARTICLE 19 has expanded massively as an organisation. Our budget was £4 million in 2013; it's now nearly quadruple that, and we have about 170 staff around the world. That wasn't a gradual evolution; it was a steep transformation, because the world around us was changing so fast.

There have been two other major transformations in the way we work.

The first is **digital**. It seems obvious now, but back in 2013, the Internet world and the human rights world were very much separate. One of the most far-seeing things ARTICLE 19 did was to pick out digital rights as absolutely fundamental to freedom of expression, and to drag international human rights into the world of the Internet. Now no one can deny that these two worlds are joined at the hip – and ARTICLE 19 has been at the forefront of that.

The second is our **regional offices**. Under the Expression Agenda, one of our main drivers was decentralising power to regional offices. A real highlight has been our regional offices hosting annual International Board meetings – in Tunis, São Paulo, and so on. That's been exceptional, because you get to meet regional board members and staff, and to see some of the work we're involved with on the ground. There's been a real building up of this local-to-global network.

But we also realised we had to do more to integrate the international and regional offices, so a couple of years back the International Board set up a cultural review process, which established the need for much greater cross-organisation integration. One of the biggest fruits of that was our first ever virtual ARTICLE 19 staff conference in 2021, 'Open19', with simultaneous translation – so that colleagues working on, for example, the protection of journalists in Mexico could share their expertise with offices in South Asia and West Africa.

What do you think will be the most significant challenges for freedom of expression over the next five years?

We're anticipating further deterioration in liberal, democratic values. This puts civil society organisations and social movements on the back foot. And in this difficult context, we have to increase the decentralisation of power within ARTICLE 19 while also having a shared vision of irreducible common standards. We need to release the bottom-up energies in different countries, and we need a networked approach. The name of ARTICLE 19's new strategy, **The Power of Our Voices**, signals the centrality of voices, people, and power as we move forwards.

While ARTICLE 19 was a much smaller organisation when I joined in 2013, it had some key ingredients that I felt the International Board should bottle to keep! And while we've changed, I do think we've retained those ingredients that make ARTICLE 19 such a special organisation. It's a place where, despite the disturbing problems we deal with, we remain human; a place where people genuinely want to work, and where we collaborate across disciplines and regions. I hope – and expect – that will continue over the next five years.

A close-up portrait of a Native American woman with dark hair. She has traditional face paint: a black band across her forehead with a geometric pattern, a thin black line above her right eye, and a black line on her chin. She is wearing a necklace with blue feathers and red beads. The background is a blurred blue.

I. A CRITICAL JUNCTURE

Across the world, democracy is under attack, authoritarianism is on the rise, and powerful actors – from governments to Big Tech – are battling to control the narrative. People who challenge power and those most at risk of discrimination are disproportionately the casualties in this battle.

This is a critical juncture.

Business as usual is not an option.

ARTICLE 19, as a leader of the global movement for freedom of expression, is meeting these new challenges head-on. As we launch an exciting new strategy, the **Power of Our Voices**, we will build on our experience to define a new digital era for expression, propel change and protect those who fight for it, hold states and corporations accountable, and ensure all people, everywhere, can realise the power of their voices.



“

For six years, as the UN’s principal monitor of global free speech issues, I turned first and always to ARTICLE 19: for intellectual leadership, legal research, policy guidance, connections to global activists, strategic thinking, and convenings. Simply put, there is no organisation worldwide that does more for freedom of expression, in a deep and focused way, than ARTICLE 19.

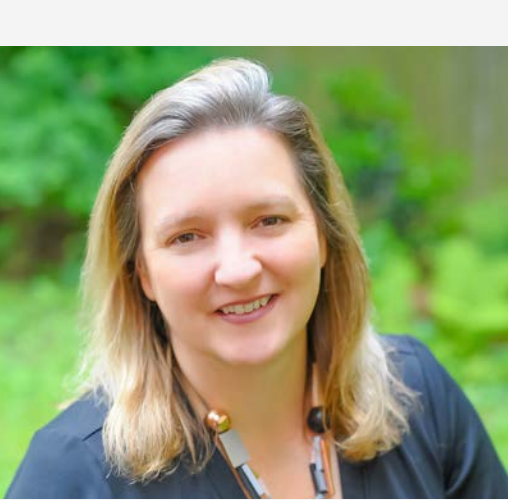
”

David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 2014–20

Photo on page 9: An indigenous woman takes part in a protest outside JP Morgan during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). Glasgow, Scotland, 10 November 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Dylan Martinez)

Six years of the Expression Agenda

Six years ago, ARTICLE 19 [launched](#) the **Expression Agenda**, which set out our vision of a world in which all people could freely express themselves and meaningfully engage in public life without fear or discrimination.



“ In every community, in every country – if we are to address the serious global challenges we face – expression must be at the heart of new power relationships. ”

Quinn McKew
Executive Director, ARTICLE 19
[The Global Expression Report 2021](#)

Every year since, our *Global Expression Report* has investigated the state of freedom of expression around the world and ranked countries according to how free each and every person is to write, post online, march, teach, access and share information, and hold the powerful to account.

The developments we have witnessed over the course of The Expression Agenda are truly chilling. Democratic institutions have been hollowed, media and civil society attacked, and checks and balances on executive powers eroded.

[The Global Expression Report 2021](#) found that:

- **Two-thirds of us, or 4.9 billion people, now live in countries that are Highly Restricted or In Crisis** – more than at any time in the last decade.
- The level of democracy the average citizen enjoyed in 2020 was down to **levels last found around 1990**.
- The global score for freedom of expression and the right to information is at its **lowest point since 2010**.

Since March 2020, states worldwide have used the Covid-19 pandemic as an excuse to crack down on freedom of expression at the time we most needed it. But the pandemic hit a world already fraught with populist strongmen hostile to journalism and science, the denigration of dissent, and an erosion of multilateral engagement and trust.

But despite these grim developments, hundreds are making tremendous strides in strengthening media literacy, improving corporate transparency, tackling hate speech, and regulating giant companies.

By working together, we can still make a difference.

Tackling the challenges we face will require:

- **more voices**, not fewer;
- **more information**, not less; and
- **more clarity and authenticity**, not lies and deceit.

Expression is the best way we can strengthen public health, address the climate crisis, and support economic recovery – for the next six years and beyond.

Our partners reflect on the Expression Agenda

ARTICLE 19 could not have made the strides we have made globally over the past six years without the faith and support of our partners. We are deeply grateful to each and every one of you.

We asked some of our partners how they would describe ARTICLE 19. Here is what they said:

“

ARTICLE 19 has demonstrated that it can set precedents, establish best practices and collaborate with partners in the field. In keeping with its track record of being able to respond dynamically to new threats as they emerge and its reputation of high-quality policy work, we expect ARTICLE 19 to continue to play a lead role in freedom of expression.

”

Godfrey Odongo, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

“

The role that ARTICLE 19 has played in strengthening new and existing normative and regulatory frameworks has been central in influencing and advancing national, regional, and international standards on freedom of expression.

”

Mariken Bruusgaard Harbitz, Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs

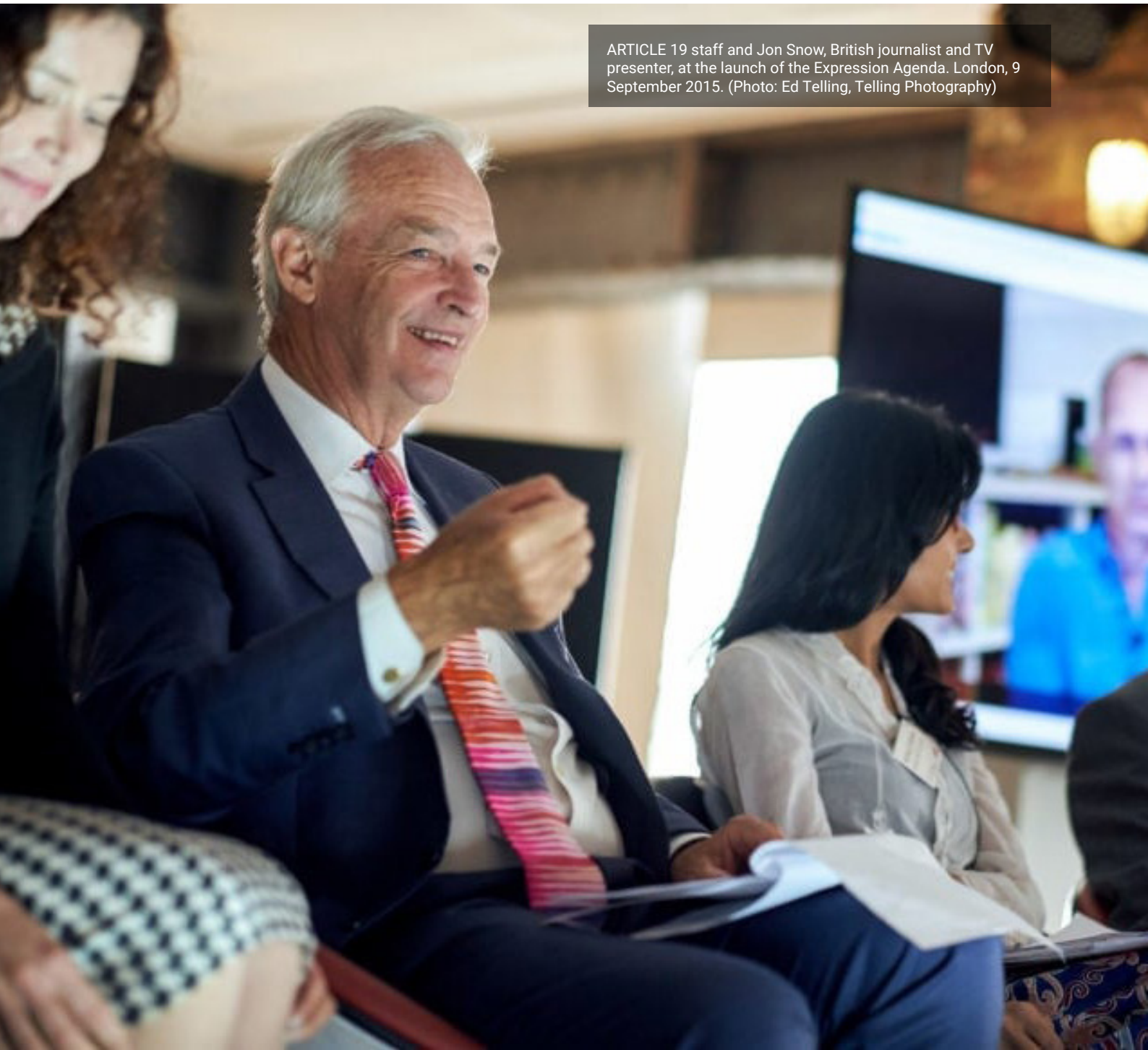
“

[ARTICLE 19's] focus on respect for diversity and inclusion recognizes that social cohesion is so critical to building resilience to threats by nefarious actors or authoritarian governments, whose efforts to stifle and oppress the voices of marginalized communities have been augmented by the rise of digital communications.

”

Rita Boisvenue, Canada Ministry of Foreign Affairs

ARTICLE 19 staff and Jon Snow, British journalist and TV presenter, at the launch of the Expression Agenda. London, 9 September 2015. (Photo: Ed Telling, Telling Photography)



Snapshots of authoritarianism – and resistance

Our *Global Expression Report 2021* found that over two-thirds (68%) of the world's population now live in autocracies – up from 48% in 2010.



Below, we present four snapshots of authoritarianism and one snapshot of hope. These are based on our unique evidence-based metric, the GxR, which we use in *The Global Expression Report* to create a freedom of expression score (from 1 to 100) for each country and to assign each country to one of five categories: **In Crisis**, **Highly Restricted**, **Restricted**, **Less Restricted**, or **Open**.

While each country has its own unique context, three clear lessons can be learnt from their experiences:

- Even when a country appears to be striding towards democracy, **devastating backslides** remain possible.
- Even in the most repressive regimes, **protest movements** – often led by youth, women, and other at-risk groups – strive to make their voices heard, and are often the catalyst for change.
- We need to **remain vigilant, keep up the pressure, and support** journalists, activists, and protesters speaking truth to power.

Tunisia: Coup snatches hopes of democracy

Tunisia experienced a meteoric rise in its GxR score following the Arab Spring, leaping from **Restricted** to **Less Restricted** in just one year (2010–11). In the following decade, the country looked to be consolidating its democratic gains, and experienced the biggest increase in score of all 161 countries we monitored – an enormous 1,213%. The revolution seemed to be shifting from the streets to the corridors of power.

That is, until 25 July 2021.

Following a series of protests corresponding with Republic Day, the President of the Republic, Kais Saied, **announced** a state of emergency, dissolved parliament, and concentrated the executive, legislative, and parts of the judiciary in one single person. This coup was accompanied by attacks on journalists, the arrest and prosecution of bloggers and activists, restrictions on press freedom, and MPs being trialled in military courts.



“

We are very disappointed that the only democratic experience in the region faces great dangers and could fail completely due to the continuation of the state of emergency announced by President Saied in July 2021. We have a huge amount of work ahead of us.

”

Saloua Ghazouani, Regional Director, ARTICLE 19 Middle East and North Africa



Brazil: Bolsonaro is a perfect storm – but protest remains vibrant

In the last six years, Brazil has fallen from being one of the world's highest-scoring countries to being **In Crisis**, a drop of 48.4% – the third-biggest decrease of all the countries we monitor.

President Jair Bolsonaro has ushered in the perfect storm of contemporary expression issues: autocratic populism, disinformation, acute inequality, and technological control. Stigmatising discourse, weakening social participation, and a level of public aggression not seen since the military dictatorship have been defining features of Bolsonaro's regime. Brazil remains one of the most lethal countries in the world for journalists, and 'hate speech' creates a toxic online environment for women and other at-risk groups.

But even in the face of brutal repression, protest movements remain active, vibrant, and strong, with thousands taking to the streets to call for racial justice, an end to violence against women, environmental protections, and the impeachment of the President for his approach to Covid-19.

“

It's not just that Bolsonaro doesn't like to be criticised; it's that he hates journalists. Even during the military dictatorship, we didn't have presidents openly attacking journalists like he does.

”

Guilherme Amado, Deputy Director of Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (on ARTICLE 19's [Freedom of Expression in a Pandemic](#) podcast)

Southeast Asia: Digital dictatorship seeks to crush dissent online

In our *Global Expression Report 2021*, Asia and the Pacific's regional score was at its lowest since 2010 – a drop of 39% – and 85% of its population lives in countries **In Crisis** or **Highly Restricted**.

The rise of authoritarianism is particularly pronounced in mainland Southeast Asia, where digital dictatorship is a key theme. Authorities across the region seek to control the flow of information, repress protest movements, and quash dissenting voices on social media where 'hate speech' against minorities runs rampant.



Police stand and watch as people clash with pro-military supporters who attacked individuals in their neighbourhood with swords and sticks and injured at least four, according to eyewitnesses and victims. Yangon (Rangoon), Myanmar, February 2021. (Photo: Panos Pictures)

Myanmar saw significant advances in its GxR score from 2010 to 2020, but transition from military to civilian government brought serious human rights abuses – including genocide – before the 2021 coup, when the army killed hundreds of protesters and restricted the Internet.

Malaysia's hard-line conservative government continued to crack down on critical speech; a specific government unit now patrols the Internet for speech it sees as blasphemy.

Thailand's youth-led, pro-democracy protest movement has increasingly moved online; the response has been a serious crackdown on anyone who criticises the government – and, especially, the monarchy – online, including via criminal law.

Meanwhile, **China** continues to spread its damaging ideology of 'Internet sovereignty' to its neighbours; its nefarious influence could clearly be seen in 2021 when – to take just one example – **Cambodia** enacted a law setting the state for its own equivalent of the Great Firewall. China's influence could also be seen internationally, including through the spread of disinformation, increased censorship of foreign websites, and its efforts to shape global Internet governance standards.



“

There were so many hate messages ... Ninety hate messages in an hour, 90 rape threats per minute. When I was younger, I was a war correspondent. That was easier than this.

”

Maria Ressa, Nobel Laureate and Filipino journalist *The Guardian*, 8 October 2021

Belarus: Women lead opposition to Lukashenko's brutal repression



Belarus left the **In Crisis** category in 2014 but fell dramatically back into it in 2020 with one of the biggest global declines of the year (72.9%) amid a generalised and violent crackdown on protest and media. A moment of hopeful pro-democratic revolution collapsed into heightened repression and tighter control, both online and off, centred around the election.

Opposition in Belarus is notable for its women protagonists, who spearheaded the campaign against President Alyaksandr Lukashenko in the lead-up to the election after male opposition leaders were arrested or barred from running. Nonviolent, women-led protests began to take place every Sunday, but many protesters were arbitrarily detained and tortured in detention – from beatings to electric shocks and rape.

Lukashenko claimed an 80% majority at the elections, which were condemned as fraudulent by much of the international community. Protests subsequently intensified – but so did the crackdown.

“

ARTICLE 19 is working in a very difficult security environment to continue to support Belarusian partners so they can monitor violations, provide digital security, and enable the resistance to continue on the ground.

”

Sarah Clarke, Head of Europe and Central Asia, ARTICLE 19

Snapshot of hope: The Gambia

The Gambia is the only country that not only made significant gains in its GxR score over the past decade – an increase of 422% – but also sustained these gains.

Progress is slow and faltering – the country's GxR score declined slightly in 2019, and some concerning crackdowns on protest and a problematic 'false news' law were reported in January 2020 – but 2021 saw the adoption of laws on access to information and the rights of people with disabilities, indicating an ongoing trend towards democratisation.

ARTICLE 19 West Africa has been instrumental in this trend, working closely with the Gambian Government and civil society to ensure new laws protect freedom of expression and information in this new democracy.

We look forward to consolidating these advances over the next six years – and beyond.

“

The signing of the Access to Information Law is a victory for democracy in The Gambia. It is a move towards a more transparent governance and citizens' participation in public life. Now those running public affairs in the public and private sector have to do better and make information available for all.

”

Bulakali Alfred Nkuru, Former Deputy Regional Director, ARTICLE 19 West Africa



Women shout slogans at an expressway, which farmers blocked to mark the 100th day of the protest against the farm laws, near the Kundli border. Haryana, India, 6 March 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Anushree Fadnavis)

The Power of Our Voices

We are at a critical global inflection point for freedom of expression. We have seen consistent declines in democracy and the protection of human rights, exposing societal failures, exacerbating inequalities, and fuelling authoritarianism. Meanwhile, Big Tech has fundamentally and rapidly expanded the frontlines of expression, making the battle for narrative and information control a defining struggle of our times.

The challenges are enormous and urgent.
But when the right to freedom of expression is
threatened, ARTICLE 19 is there to resist.

Our new strategy, **The Power of Our Voices**, sets out how we will rise to meet this critical juncture over the next four years. We will bring together the knowledge, passion, and tenacity of the freedom of expression movement to tip the balance towards a world where all people, everywhere, can freely express themselves.

We will harness ARTICLE 19's experience and expertise – from our international teams to our nine regional offices around the world – to achieve the following impacts:

1. Bridging human rights and technology to define a new digital era for freedom of expression

The digital sphere holds huge potential to strengthen the exercise of all human rights, including freedom of expression, and youth-led movements have shown it can be used to change the status quo. But there is mounting evidence of the threats digital technologies can pose: from spreading 'disinformation' to normalising surveillance and exploiting our personal data.

ARTICLE 19 pioneered the consideration of human rights within the fundamental infrastructure and governance of the Internet. Our work on technology standards is rooted in collaborating with people who are typically missing from technology discussions, such as women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people; and activists from the Global South. That is why we are well placed to help define a new Internet era – one that respects freedom of expression and reflects the diversity of human experience.

We will work with partners to build a resilient and fair digital public sphere where individuals can realise their right to freedom of expression and information without being censored, controlled, or exploited by Big Tech, governments, or other powers.

2. Protecting, empowering, and connecting silenced voices and dissent

ARTICLE 19 sees freedom of expression through the lens of diversity, equality, and inclusion. Our collective focus will therefore be on underserved people who have been systematically discriminated against or oppressed, and who are often living in the most vulnerable situations.

We will work with:

- **Communities at risk:** Human rights defenders, activists, and political dissidents, as well as people in situations of greater vulnerability, such as women, indigenous and racialised people, migrants, religious and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQI+ communities.
- **Infomediaries:** Journalists, social communicators, whistleblowers, media workers, and independent and community media outlets – particularly those reporting on corruption, human rights, and the environment.
- **Civil society, community networks, and social movements:** Particularly those in situations of vulnerability, including youth, women, and minority groups, and those fighting corruption and defending the environment, particularly in rural and remote areas.

3. Advancing law and policy to protect freedom of expression and demand accountability

ARTICLE 19 is a thought leader in developing cutting-edge policies and standards for the protection of freedom of expression around the world. By working on complex legal and policy issues and proposing tailored solutions, we provide a unique approach in the freedom of expression movement.

We are committed to improving international standards via international, regional, and national advocacy – not only at the UN and regional intergovernmental bodies but also at technical standard-setting bodies and other spaces where decisions affecting our lives are made.

Over the next four years, ARTICLE 19 will develop policies on new areas impacting freedom of expression, including content regulation, digital infrastructure, pluralism, and diversity online. We will also ramp up our empirical research, building the evidence base to shape international standards and tailor national solutions.

ARTICLE 19 is rising to the challenge as a leader in the movement for free expression, propelling change locally and globally so that all people, everywhere, can realise the power of their voices.

Join us in this movement to defend the right to freedom of expression.

“

ARTICLE 19 has over the last six years had a comprehensive approach in responding to the threats to freedom of expression posed by digitalization. This includes strengthening the understanding and use of Internet and digital platforms to enable freedom of expression and in promoting digital platforms as rights-enabling arenas. ... In the years to come, ARTICLE 19 will have an important role to play in ensuring that measures are based on human rights and transparency.

”

Mariken Bruusgaard Harbitz, Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs

“

Congratulations! This strategic framework is a document that has been clearly informed by ARTICLE 19's vast experience in the promotion of human rights, and will go a long way in supporting the freedom of expression movement.

”

Rita Boisvenue, Senior Programme Officer, Office of Human Rights, Freedom and Inclusion Canada Ministry of Foreign Affairs



II. CRITICAL THOUGHT

ARTICLE 19 is a thought leader on the forefront of freedom of expression, developing innovative ideas and context-specific solutions where they matter the most.



“

I am a great admirer of ARTICLE 19. They are leaders among champions of freedom of expression. They manage to not only relentlessly mobilise against the age-old threats of censorship and the repression of dissent, but also draw our attention to new challenges in the digital age.

”

[Irene Khan](#), UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression

New research at the boundaries of expression

Destigmatise dissent: New research on the right to protest



“

Freedom of expression is at the core of protest. Yet the space for protest is shrinking, and protesters are being stigmatised – to discredit them, to intimidate them, and to turn public opinion against the vital causes they support.

”

Patricia Meléndez
Head of Civic Space, ARTICLE 19

We are living in an age of protest.

Protests play a vital part in the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural life of all societies, and people are taking to the streets in unprecedented numbers worldwide. The right to protest involves exercising numerous human rights, and is essential for securing all human rights.

Yet we are also living in an age of violent crackdowns against protest.

Governments – not only authoritarian regimes but also, increasingly, liberal democracies – are quashing dissent via restrictive legislation and a heavy-handed response from law enforcement towards people who are coming together to demand social justice. Governments are also pushing narratives portraying protesters as a nuisance at best and dangerous at worst – narratives that the media repeats.

Our three-year **#FreeToProtest** campaign aimed to change these negative perceptions in two pilot countries: Brazil and Kenya.

“

[#FreeToProtest] showed promising approaches to building broader support bases and empowering social movements and ally activists for increased and sustained visibility/support for the right to protest ... at a time when restrictions on protest are increasing.

”

Godfrey Odongo, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

As we took stock of the campaign's learnings in 2021 – and as protests continued to erupt worldwide – we realised we would need more robust evidence, from more countries, to convince the authorities to protect this fundamental right.

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 conducted rigorous human rights research – including over 200 interviews – in five countries where the right to protest is under threat: Brazil, Kenya, Poland, Thailand, and Tunisia.

We investigated both the overall state of the right to protest and how violations of this right affect the most at-risk groups – from indigenous communities in Brazil to women in Kenya, monarchy-reform activists in Thailand, and LGBTQI+ people in Poland and Tunisia.

ARTICLE 19 is using this evidence to inform a **new global campaign on the right to protest**, launching in 2022.

Protest Dialogues: Learning from activists worldwide

To inform our research, in early 2021 we organised a series of online Protest Dialogues, in which we invited a variety of activists from around the world to speak to ARTICLE 19 about the difficulties they face when protesting. Our new campaign will amplify the voices of these and other grassroots protesters – especially those who have historically been silenced.

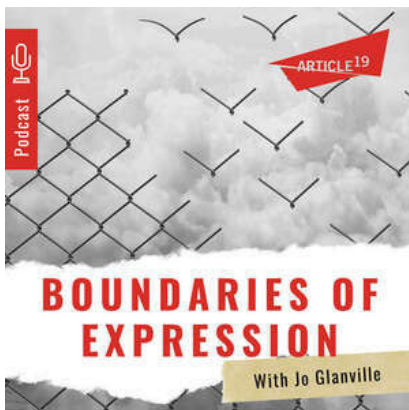


“ I was choking on gas. Our family members were being shot. But before doing anything else during the Free Land Camp march, we protected each other. ”

Telma Taurepang, Union of Indigenous Women of the Brazilian Amazon (at ARTICLE 19's first Protest Dialogue). (Photo: c/o Telma Taurepang)

“ The synergies we saw in the struggles of different activists fighting for their right to protest, from Kenya to the Brazilian Amazon, were incredible. ”

Barbara Dockalova, Senior Campaigner, ARTICLE 19



Boundaries of Expression: New podcast and essay series

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 launched a new series of essays and podcasts, **Boundaries of Expression**, with journalist and editor Jo Glanville.

- [Read](#) Jo's essay, 'Why the right to protest matters'
- [Listen](#) to our podcast episode on protest
- [Subscribe](#) to the podcast



Pro-democracy protesters hold up the three-finger salute during an anti-government rally in Bangkok on 25 October 2020. (Photo: Lillian Suwanrumpha / AFP)

Spotlight on... Thailand

Since the start of 2020, a vigorous pro-democracy protest movement has swept across Thailand, led by a new generation of activists seeking a new constitution, a new government, and an end to the harassment of government critics.

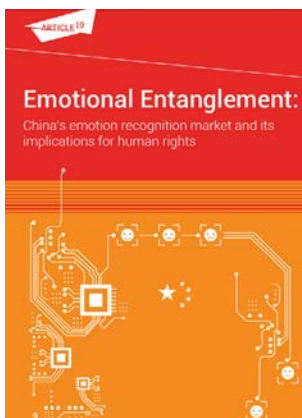
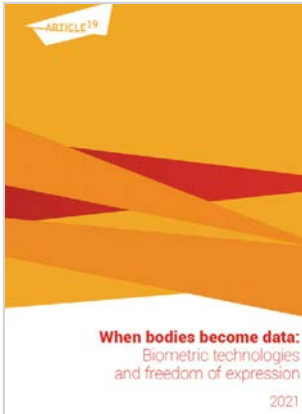
Protesters also began to question the role of the monarchy, which empowered others in the country to do the same. This is an unprecedented departure from historical norms – and one for which protesters are paying the price; ARTICLE 19's new research found that protesters who criticise the monarchy face harsher repression than those who do not.

Throughout 2021, the military-backed government continued to violently repress protests, including:

- **Using criminal defamation law** against people who raised concerns about human rights abuses, labour rights violations, and corruption, as highlighted in our report, *Truth Be Told*, which calls for defamation to be decriminalised.
- **Reviving one of the strictest *lèse-majesté* provisions in the world** – which we have repeatedly [called](#) to be repealed – against critics of the monarchy, as detailed in our briefing, *Breaking the Silence*.
- **Passing laws that severely restrict Internet freedom and freedom of expression online**, on which ARTICLE 19 will publish a new briefing in 2022.

When bodies become data

Biometric technologies and freedom of expression



ARTICLE 19 has pioneered work on the dangers biometric technologies pose to freedom of expression. We have made the case for why states, private companies, and civil society should care about this issue; co-produced over 40 case studies in the Global South; and undertaken research in notoriously hard-to-study settings, including China and Myanmar.

In 2021, we added a new policy, *When bodies become data*, and a new report, *Emotional entanglement*, to this body of work.

Biometric technologies gather and analyse personal data that can enable the unique identification of a person. They can surveil what we are doing, with whom, and how we are likely to behave in the future – and profile people based on age, gender, and skin colour, enabling discrimination.

Emotion recognition technology goes one step further by claiming it can infer a person's inner emotional state from their outer appearance. This is not only discredited pseudoscience but also ineffective, biased, and carries enormous potential for harm.

Yet despite the dangers, states and private companies worldwide are increasingly using these technologies in a dizzying array of settings – from banks to border patrol, schools to the streets, and passport checks to protests.

ARTICLE 19 is therefore calling for:

- A **moratorium** on the development and deployment of all biometric technologies until vital human rights safeguards are in place.
- A **total ban** on the design, development, sale, and use of emotion recognition technologies with immediate effect.





Vidushi Marda, who leads our research on the use of biometrics technologies, tells us about ARTICLE 19's new report, *Emotional entanglement*.

Why focus on emotion recognition technology (ERT), and why now?

We knew ERT was a worrying new development in biometrics – but no one in human rights spaces was talking about it. We didn't want to end up in the situation we saw with facial recognition technology, where people only started questioning its value 10–15 years after it was deployed worldwide. Once a technology is out there, it's so much harder to roll back. We needed to get ahead of the curve.

The new report focuses on Chinese companies. Why should other countries – countries with better human rights records – be concerned?

China is a compelling case study, but make no mistake – this is a global issue. China will export this technology, and it will determine what it looks like in the rest of the world.

Indeed, we've already seen this happen. In the EU, the [iBorderCtrl project](#) trialled ERT to detect signs of deception at borders in Latvia, Hungary, and Greece. In South Korea, companies use ERT during the hiring process; in India, some law-enforcement agencies are using the technology to detect if women are 'distressed' on the road.

ARTICLE 19 is calling for a total ban on ERT. Why not just limitations or improvements?

Because there's so much at stake. For a start, it's based on junk science. Your facial responses and your inner emotional state don't have a 1:1 correspondence, so a multibillion-dollar industry is being built around a technology that can't do what it claims to do.

But even if it could – it shouldn't. It's not that we want this technology to improve over time; it's that it's fundamentally at odds with human dignity.

It's also very difficult to secure purpose limitation for these technologies. You might say states can use them for acts of terror, but we can't be certain they won't also use them for mass surveillance.

How do these technologies disproportionately affect at-risk groups?

The institutions using these technologies – from law enforcement and banking to education and hiring – have their own legacies of marginalisation, atop of which comes the use of an inherently discriminatory, faulty, and dangerous technology. The margin for discrimination is enormous. They can be used in particularly horrific ways, too – research published after our report indicates that ERT is currently being tested on Uighur Muslims in China.

More broadly, the way that people show and understand emotions is determined in significant ways by their cultural context. Applying a template of ‘universal’ facial expressions and attributing to them discrete emotions is both unscientific and inefficient.

Some companies have responded to this by saying: “Okay, so we’ll gather more data on how emotions are expressed in different cultures.” But that’s just peddling junk science in the name of diversity. We don’t need to make these technologies as good at identifying, say, black women as they are at identifying white men. We need them not to exist at all because they violate our fundamental rights.

How has ARTICLE 19’s report been received so far?

We’ve had overwhelmingly positive feedback from academia and civil society organisations trying to make these arguments in India, the EU, and elsewhere.

The report garnered good international press coverage, including [Reuters](#), [The Guardian](#), and [The Globe and Mail](#), and also negative coverage in China, which we’re happy about – it’s ruffled a few feathers!

“

We don’t need to make these technologies as good at identifying, say, black women as they are at identifying white men. We need them not to exist at all.

”

New surveillance revelations from the Pegasus Project

Last year saw further shocking revelations from the Pegasus Project, an international investigation led by Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International into government espionage using Pegasus spyware.

NSO Group, the Israeli company that developed Pegasus, claims it is only used to ‘[investigate terrorism and crime](#)’ and ‘[leaves no traces whatsoever](#)’. But analysis of 50,000 leaked phone numbers revealed it was used to spy on journalists, human rights defenders, opposition politicians, and other political dissidents.

In July 2021, organisations including ARTICLE 19 began publishing reports on this use of Pegasus to suppress critical voices, and called for further investigation into this chilling violation of human rights.

One step forward in Mexico

Of the 50,000 phone numbers revealed to be targeted by Pegasus, [15,000 were in Mexico](#) – including dozens of human rights defenders and journalists.

The 2021 revelations confirm findings from earlier investigations, including by ARTICLE 19, that Mexican state agencies carried out systematic surveillance against numerous journalists and their families – including Cecilio Pineda Brito, who was killed in March 2017, just a few weeks after being targeted by Pegasus. ARTICLE 19, along with organisations representing the victims, has led an open investigation into this espionage for more than four years.

Finally, in November 2021, the Mexican Attorney General's Office announced the [first key development in the case](#): it had obtained an arrest warrant against a man, Juan Carlos 'G', for his 'probable responsibility' for using Pegasus to undertake 'aggravated communications to the detriment of a journalist'.

This is the first prosecution the Attorney General's Office has pursued – but it must not be the last. ARTICLE 19 hopes it is the beginning of a process that will expose other cases, which could total thousands.



“

It is unacceptable that in a country plagued by criminal and state violence that people who take steps to improve the situation are targeted for surveillance – and the perpetrators of the worst atrocities are free from scrutiny and continue to operate with impunity.

”

Leopoldo Maldonado, Director, ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America

One step back in the Middle East and North Africa

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the new revelations [identified](#) at least 35 journalists who the Moroccan Government targeted with Pegasus, and who were later prosecuted under questionable circumstances or subjected to state-sanctioned intimidation.

The revelations further showed that friends and family members of the slain and dismembered Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, were [targeted](#) with

Pegasus spyware before and after his murder, and that even journalists who had fled the country were not safe – one of whom, Emirati activist [Alaa Al-Siddiq](#), was [killed](#) in a traffic accident in the UK in June 2021.

In July 2021, the **MENA Surveillance Coalition** – of which ARTICLE 19 is a member – [called](#) for an immediate halt to the use, sale, and transfer of surveillance technology to oppressive governments across the region.

Researching rights worldwide

Mexico: Reports show how inequality proliferates online

ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America published two digital reports in 2021: one on how content removal from social media platforms perpetuates discrimination against already at-risk groups, and another on the digital divide that prevents some communities from getting online at all. These reports show that not all people are equally able to freely express themselves online – a form of inequality that ARTICLE 19 continues to challenge.



Iran: Online harassment and abuse against women journalists

In collaboration with the Committee to Protect Journalists, ARTICLE 19 published a [briefing](#) that looked into the toxic – and often violent – space women journalists reporting on Iran inhabit. It makes recommendations for how governments, companies, and media outlets can guarantee women journalists' right to report without violence and fear of retaliation.

“ I try to ignore the threats or else I would lose my mind. My most recent threat was a post telling me I'll find myself in a pool of acid. ”

Iranian woman journalist
(as told to [ARTICLE 19](#))

Europe: ARTICLE 19 presents media freedom report to 47 Member States

ARTICLE 19 is an active member of the Council of Europe's Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists. In 2021, Sarah Clarke (Head of Europe and Central Asia) was an editor of the Platform's [annual report](#), which found that more than 200 serious violations of media freedom were recorded in Europe in the previous year. Sarah also addressed the 47 Member States at the Committee of Ministers on the report's recommendations for strengthening media freedom in Europe.

Eastern Africa: Freedom of expression and the digital environment

ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa published a [report](#) examining the digital environment in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. The report focuses on three key areas: freedom of expression online, Internet accessibility and affordability, and privacy and data protection. Since its publication, we have used the report's recommendations in regional and international advocacy, including the Universal Periodic Reviews of Tanzania and Uganda.

Building bridges between academia and civil society

As part of ARTICLE 19's commitment to collaborate with academia to increase understanding of freedom of expression challenges and undertake evidence-based advocacy, in 2021 we started a new project, [#JournoSafFlashTalks](#), in collaboration with the Centre for Freedom of the Media at the University of Sheffield, to connect academic researchers and civil society organisations working on the safety of journalists.

The project consists of sessions resembling speed dating: each civil society organisation worker takes two minutes to tell a researcher what they are working on and how the researcher could help to strengthen it (and vice versa) before moving on. This proved a fun and fruitful way to sow the seeds for collaboration, and we plan to hold more sessions in 2022.



“

I regularly participate in academic conferences, so I say to them: ‘You lead the research, we lead the practice; we have the questions, you can help us to find the answers – let’s collaborate.’

”

Silvia Chocarro, Head of Protection, ARTICLE 19

Advancing freedom of expression through law and policy

Tame Big Tech to protect freedom of expression



“

Practices of dominant social media platforms are one of the biggest threats to freedom of expression worldwide. All this infrastructure is in private hands – and whoever controls the infrastructure controls everything.

”

Barbora Bukovská
Senior Director for Law and Policy,
ARTICLE 19



Executive Vice President of the European Commission for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age, Margrethe Vestager, gives a news conference on 2030 Digital Compass following a weekly meeting of the EU Commission. Brussels, Belgium, 9 March 2021. (Photo: Olivier Hoslet/Pool via REUTERS)

The biggest social media platforms have repeatedly failed to address the concerns of their users and governments – from Facebook’s failure to remove incitement to genocide against Rohingyas in Myanmar to YouTube’s struggle to shut down the video of the Christchurch terrorist attack in New Zealand.

In response, governments around the world have come up with various proposals on how to address these problems. But while these proposals claim to be about regulating **platforms**, in reality, they are more about regulating **users’ content**.

Basically, some governments are asking social media companies to police our communication and decide what kinds of speech are ‘illegal’ – or even ‘legal but harmful’. Rather than tackling the root problems, this would put even more power into the hands of very few private companies.

ARTICLE 19’s new policy, *Watching the watchmen: Content moderation, governance, and freedom of expression*, outlines how to regulate content moderation in a way that protects the right to freedom of expression.

ARTICLE 19's new policy, *Taming Big Tech*, offers a pro-competition solution: independent regulators must order large social media platforms to 'unbundle' their hosting services from their content-curation services, and to open the market to other providers of these services.

Currently, social media platforms both host content and curate it using automated systems. These two services are offered together as one 'bundle', preventing competition and locking in users. To unbundle these two services and open the market for curation to other players would mean users would finally have viable alternatives to choose between – and would incentivise providers to provide better content curation.



ARTICLE 19's **Maria Luisa Stasi** (Head of Law and Policy: Digital Markets) explains further, using Facebook as an example.

"Facebook manages what we see on our news feed according to an automated system set on their own criteria, which is to maximise profit – meaning maximising engagement, collecting as much user data as possible, and profiling us. If we want to be on Facebook, we have no other choice but to be subject to its automated system – and all that entails.

But it doesn't need to be like this.

If Facebook were obliged to 'unbundle' hosting from content curation, they would have to ask each of us: 'Do you want us to organise your newsfeed, or someone else?' We could then choose the provider we prefer and trust – which we could change at any time – and we wouldn't need to leave the platform.

So if you're concerned about privacy, you could choose a provider with excellent data protection. If you don't want to see certain kinds of content, you could choose a provider that

filters it out. Minority groups or activists could cooperate with a provider to set up a non-discriminatory algorithm that best fits their needs.

Unbundling would support a variety of players to access the market, and competition for users would stimulate innovation and encourage content curation that prioritises users' rights and preferences – not Facebook's profits.

But for this to happen, Big Tech giants need to make their platforms interoperable with other providers. There's no incentive for them to do that; the status quo works perfectly for them. That's why this solution needs to be imposed, and it won't happen voluntarily.

Large social media companies have closed the online environment into silos. With this new instrument, we're going to force them to open it up to diversity."

Spotlight on... Europe

EU: Digital Markets and Digital Services Acts

Throughout 2021, ARTICLE 19 played an active role in debates and advocacy to shape the EU's [Digital Services Act](#) and [Digital Markets Act](#), using our new policies to argue for [user choice](#), [interoperability](#), [not sacrificing users' freedom of expression at the altar of content regulation](#), and [redistributing power in the social media markets](#).

Throughout 2021, we also:

- **Engaged** with civil society organisations, journalists, digital rights activists, and the public – because the excessive power of social media affects us all;
- **Published** a [number](#) of [op-eds](#) to raise awareness of our innovative solutions;
- **Were** invited to forums not usually interested in civil society; and
- **Cooperated** with a [variety of actors](#) to create debate and share knowledge to support interoperability solutions on digital markets.

Our Law and Policy team is now working on legal guides, case studies, and capacity-building to raise awareness of how our proposals can protect freedom of expression online.

“

We have seeded the idea. Now we need to take care of the soil – and let's see what blossoms.

”

Maria Luisa Stasi
Head of Law and Policy: Digital Markets,
ARTICLE 19

“

If we want to fix the problem, we need to fix the business model. That is not addressed at all in the Bill. It focuses only on content moderation at the expense of solutions that can curb the excessive market power of the dominant companies.

”

Barbora Bukovská
Senior Director for Law and Policy,
ARTICLE 19. [Oral evidence](#) to Draft
Online Safety Bill Joint Committee

UK: Online Safety Bill is a threat to freedom of expression online

In May 2021, when the UK Government published its long-awaited proposals on its Draft Online Safety Bill, ARTICLE 19 urged them to go back to the drawing board. The proposals were unduly broad, overly complex, gave the government too much control, imposed disproportionate sanctions, and contained insufficient safeguards for freedom of expression. We raised the alarm that they would embolden digital authoritarians worldwide.

On 21 October, Barbora Bukovská, ARTICLE 19's Senior Director for Law and Policy, raised these concerns in her oral evidence to the UK Parliament.

Poland: Challenging state control of legacy media

It is not just on social media where lack of adequate market regulation poses a serious threat to media diversity and freedom of speech.

In Poland, it was announced in December 2020 that PKN Orlen – a state-controlled oil company – would buy Polska Press Group, an independent media group that owns the majority of local newspapers and whose readers total 17 million.

In March 2021, the Polish Human Rights Ombudsman appealed against this acquisition, and the Regional Court in Warsaw suspended the merger until it had reviewed his appeal.

ARTICLE 19 submitted an amicus brief to the Court in support of the Ombudsman's appeal, arguing that the acquisition would violate EU and Polish merger rules and undermine media pluralism.

Policy in practice: Social Media Councils

ARTICLE 19 has proposed the creation of [Social Media Councils](#) (SMCs) as a model for the oversight of content-moderation issues on social media. The SMCs would bring additional transparency and accountability to content moderation, and would ensure the effective participation of local civil society organisations representing the diversity of society.

New report sets out learnings from pilot SMC in Ireland

In 2021, we published [Social Media Councils: One piece in the puzzle of content moderation](#) to share our learnings from working towards creating a pilot SMC in Ireland. The report recommends the creation of a working group to carry the project forward.

As a result of ARTICLE 19's leadership, the SMC concept has been integrated into policy debates on platform regulation and recommended by stakeholders including:

- [The Transatlantic High-Level Working Group on Content Moderation Online and Freedom of Expression](#);
- [The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, Irene Khan](#) (having first been endorsed by the previous Special Rapporteur, David Kaye); and
- [Members of the European Parliament](#), who proposed the inclusion of an advisory 'European Social Media Council' in the EU Digital Services Act.

Tunisian Press Council now working voluntarily

Independent press councils have provided one source of inspiration for the SMCs: in our last annual report, ARTICLE 19 celebrated the creation of the Tunisian Press Council – the first in the Middle East and North Africa region. Since the 2021 coup, the Council has received no public funding.

But despite this, Press Council members continue to work voluntarily – and **ARTICLE 19 continues to support them.**

Next steps for SMCs: Social Media for Peace

In 2021, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) invited ARTICLE 19 to take part in a three-year project, funded by the EU, called Social Media for Peace. This project will seek to harness the power of social media in the service of peace-building and conflict resolution in Kenya, Indonesia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.



“

The ARTICLE 19 team spared no effort and demonstrated great professionalism in their follow-up, availability, and technical support, which the Council warmly welcomes.

”

Atidel Mejbri, President, Tunisian Press Council

The Tunisian Press Council in 2020. Atidel Mejbri is the third person from the right in the front row. (Photo: ARTICLE 19 MENA)



Pierre François Docquir, Head of Media Freedom at ARTICLE 19, tells us more:

“With Social Media for Peace, ARTICLE 19’s role will be facilitating a coalition on freedom of expression and content moderation in each country.

The idea is to look at how such a coalition could enable civil society to have a voice in conversations about content moderation that impact their society. A coalition informed by freedom of

expression would act as a one-stop shop where platforms could hear what’s going wrong with content moderation. That would be a strong incentive for platforms to actually listen to and engage with local voices, who can speak about freedom of expression and the national context, which is what we’ve been calling for all along with SMCs.”

Regional legal wins

Mexico: Two Supreme Court wins

Secret ballot to reject marriage equality ruled unconstitutional

On 18 August 2021, the Supreme Court **determined that the Congress of Yucatán had acted illegally and unconstitutionally** by rejecting, via secret ballot, reform initiatives to modify the State Constitution to recognise marriage equality.

ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America had collaborated with three other local organisations to file two *amparos* (constitutional protection lawsuits) highlighting the illegality of the secret voting method, which, we argued, violated the rights to active transparency and political participation – and was thus unconstitutional.

Social Communication Law 2018 ruled unconstitutional

Mexico’s regressive Social Communication Law 2018 enables the government to spend billions on public advertising with neither regulation nor accountability – with **disastrous consequences** for media pluralism and freedom of expression in Mexico.

We were therefore delighted when, on 8 September 2021 – and following deliberation of another ARTICLE 19 *amparo* – the Supreme Court declared the Social Communication Law 2018 unconstitutional.

The Court found that the law violated the right to freedom of expression and information, and ordered Congress to legislate to guarantee this right. However, Congress did not comply with the ruling within the three months given by the Court. This lack of political will and disposition once again inhibits freedom of expression and the right to information in Mexico, which has consequences for both the free exercise of rights and media plurality. ARTICLE 19 continues to advocate for a new law to ensure this remains on the public agenda.

Bangladesh: Government admits Digital Security Act has been misused and abused

Since its enactment in 2018, ARTICLE 19 has [repeatedly called](#) on the government to review the Digital Security Act (DSA), which has been [widely used](#) to muzzle dissent and press freedom.

In December 2021, ARTICLE 19 [released](#) more data highlighting [widespread abuse](#) of the DSA. From January to November 2021:

- **225** cases were filed under the DSA, accusing **417** individuals;
- **68** journalists were charged, of whom **15** were jailed;
- **83%** of cases were filed against people for expressing their opinions online; and
- **40%** of cases were filed against people for criticising members of the ruling party.

Two days after ARTICLE 19 released this chilling data, Bangladesh's Law Minister, Anisul Guq, [admitted](#) the Act had been misused.

Also in December, ARTICLE 19 Bangladesh and South Asia held two consultations with senior members of parliament and law-enforcement officials in which we discussed amending the DSA, emphasising the need for a zero-tolerance approach to attacks against journalists.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is now considering forming a special cell for the protection of journalists.

The Gambia: Access to Information Act passed

On 25 August 2021, [The Gambia's President signed the Access to Information Act](#) into law. This Act is a vital first step towards enabling individuals to obtain information from public institutions and will increase the transparency and accountability of power holders.

ARTICLE 19 West Africa played a leading role in advocating for and shaping this Act, working closely with the security sector, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, and government to ensure the Act aligned with international standards.



“

The freedom of the media depends on a safe, non-discriminatory and free Internet system. But the DSA threatens the freedom of both the media and the Internet in Bangladesh.

”

Faruq Faisal
Regional Director, ARTICLE 19
Bangladesh and South Asia



“

This is something ARTICLE 19 has been pushing for for about 20 years. Our West Africa office was deeply involved in the negotiations. We've been working in The Gambia long before anyone else cared what was going on there.

”

Dave Banisar
Head of Transparency, ARTICLE 19



The Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room (formerly Room XX) in the Palace of Nations, where the UN HRC frequently meets. (Photo: UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré)

International and regional advocacy

Two new UN resolutions on human rights online

The UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC) passed two new resolutions on protecting human rights online at its [47th session](#) in summer 2021.

1. The promotion, protection, and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet

ARTICLE 19 was at the forefront of advocacy around this [resolution \(47/16\)](#). In the run-up to the resolution, we also co-organised a consultation event at the Stockholm Internet Forum with our Eastern Africa office and partners to capture key challenges in the region ahead of our negotiations.

The final resolution included many issues ARTICLE 19 advocated for, including Internet access, Internet shutdowns, and – for the first time – a call for States to ensure Internet neutrality.

Read our analysis of the resolution [here](#).

2. New and emerging digital technologies and human rights

ARTICLE 19 was the only civil society organisation to make an intervention at a high-level event to discuss this [resolution \(47/23\)](#) ahead of the UN HRC session. In our statement, we made it clear that the resolution, and the UN more broadly, should focus on the problems related to new and emerging digital technologies – not least facial and emotion recognition technologies – rather than their allegedly positive outcomes.

As a result of ARTICLE 19's advocacy, the resolution was significantly improved, with greater focus on the human rights impacts of emerging technologies.



“

There is a need to shift the narrative, with the default position always focusing on the human rights impacts of these technologies rather than their reported positive outcomes.

”

Callum Birch, UN Advocacy Officer, ARTICLE 19
Talking to States ahead of Resolution 47/23

Putting human rights at the heart of Internet infrastructure

ARTICLE 19 is often the sole civil society voice in the room at tech standards bodies, where we fight for freedom of expression to be at the heart of Internet infrastructure.

In 2021, we achieved two big wins at the G7 and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).



Mehwish Ansari, Head of Digital at ARTICLE 19, tells us more:

“

Our advocacy led to the final communique recognising the importance of freedom of expression and other human rights in emerging tech standards. That was a huge achievement.

”

What do human rights have to do with tech standards?

Take WiFi as an example – a standardised technology we all use every day. If your WiFi isn't secure, someone can track you online, whether at home, at work, in a cafe, or on the underground. But engineers are unlikely to even consider the freedom of expression or privacy impacts of not having a secure connection – unless an organisation like ARTICLE 19 is at the table saying: “This is a problem, it's affecting people every day, you need to prioritise it in the infrastructure of the Internet.”

Tell us more about ARTICLE 19's work at the G7 in 2021.

ARTICLE 19 was invited to closed-door meetings prior to the G7, where we explained to States why human rights must be considered in the development of all tech standards, but especially when considering standardisation of emerging technologies, some of which – like emotion recognition technology – we shouldn't legitimise through standardisation at all.

Our advocacy led to the final communique recognising the importance of freedom of expression and other human rights in emerging tech standards. That was a huge achievement.

Since the G7, the EU has also expressed interest in allocating more funding to support stronger civil society participation in standards bodies, which would have a very positive impact for at-risk groups. Standards-setting meetings happen multiple times a year in various countries, so it can be prohibitively expensive for under-resourced civil society organisations, especially those from the Global South.

ARTICLE 19's advocacy in 2021 also resulted in the ITU recognising the importance of community connectivity for the first time. Tell us more about that.

In response to the digital divide that's left poor, remote, and rural communities unconnected to the Internet, we've seen the emergence of community operators all over the world – from South America to Eastern Africa – who are trying to connect local communities. But they need an enabling regulatory environment to access government-controlled resources like spectrum, and to set interconnection agreements with other infrastructure providers to connect to the global Internet. And efforts to create that environment are hampered by legacy multinational telecommunications companies, who want to remain the dominant providers of 'last-mile' infrastructure, or the most local part of a communications network that delivers service to end users.

The ITU is the premier global telecommunications decision-making body. But even though its mandate is to 'connect the unconnected', its membership has historically been hostile towards community operators, which are labelled as 'rogue operators' or 'pirate networks'. This rhetoric, which is driven by legacy telecom companies, then gets reinforced by national regulators, who then don't enable community connectivity.

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 worked with the Brazil delegation to push the ITU's development sector, which focuses on the Global South, to advocate for formal recognition of the importance of community networks to provide last-mile infrastructure to rural and remote communities. We worked with other civil society organisations, submitted a case study on community connectivity in Brazil, and influenced the official positions of the Brazil delegation – which was no mean feat; the ITU is a very closed body, especially to civil society.

And it worked: the ITU formally recognised the importance of these networks in one of its major outcome reports.

Embrace freedom of expression to tackle 'disinformation'

“

Diverse and reliable information is an obvious antidote to disinformation and misinformation.

”

Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion

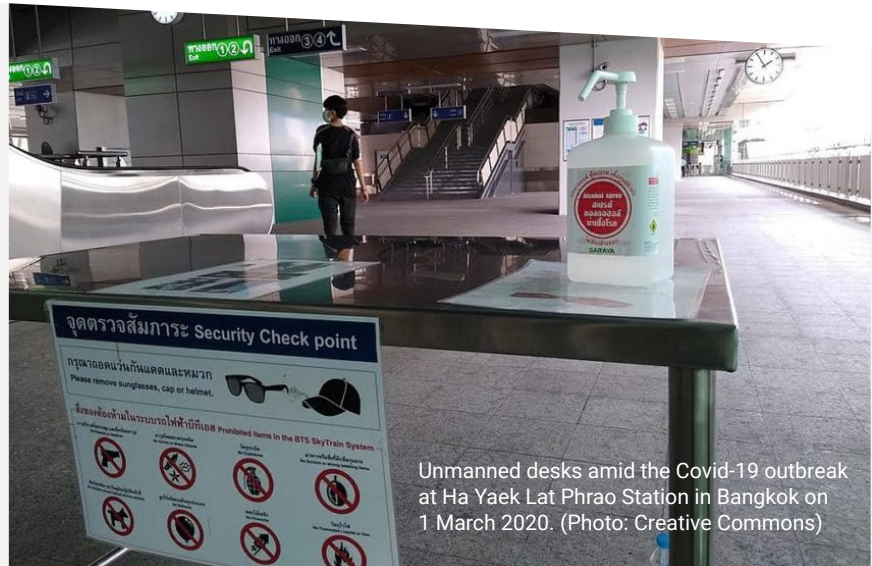
In February 2021, ARTICLE 19 [responded](#) to a consultation launched by Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion, Irene Khan, for her report to the UN HRC on 'disinformation'.

We argued that, while the spread of 'disinformation' online poses challenges, many proposals to tackle it risk giving social media platforms and governments absolute control over what is deemed true or false – and that an over-reliance on restrictive legislation, instead of positive policy measures, would lead to a decline in freedom of expression online.

The Special Rapporteur's [final report](#) closely aligned with our policy positions on 'disinformation'. It reframed previous debates, in which freedom of expression was often pitted against efforts to tackle 'disinformation', by arguing that freedom of expression is the solution to the problem – not the problem itself.

At the UN HRC session in June, ARTICLE 19 also led a [statement on 'disinformation'](#) – supported by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Access Now, and others – in which we welcomed the Special Rapporteur's report. We also co-organised a side event on the topic at the session, which was sponsored by the permanent missions of Canada, Fiji, Finland, Namibia, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the USA.

From global to local: Artist in Thailand released following ARTICLE 19's UN advocacy



Unmanned desks amid the Covid-19 outbreak at Ha Yaek Lat Phrao Station in Bangkok on 1 March 2020. (Photo: Creative Commons)

On 23 March 2021, Thai artist Danai Usama was arrested for posting on Facebook about the lack of Covid-19 screening measures at a Bangkok airport.

Airports of Thailand PCL, a public company with majority-government ownership, filed a complaint against Danai under the Computer Crime Act, alleging that his post was false, created public panic, and caused reputational damage to the company – activities punishable with up to five years' imprisonment. ARTICLE 19 has raised concerns about this Act previously, which is often used to silence government critics and human rights defenders.

On 12 May 2021, Danai appeared in Bangkok Criminal Court, where prosecutors requested the maximum possible sentence. On 21 May, ARTICLE 19 and Thai Lawyers for Human Rights submitted a communication about the case to the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression. ARTICLE 19 also highlighted the case in an oral statement to the UN HRC on 2 July.

Following our advocacy with the UN, the Court threw out the case against Danai.

However, the public prosecutor decided to appeal his case in February 2022, so Danai is not yet out of the woods. ARTICLE 19 will continue to monitor his case in 2022.

We will also be launching new resources, funded by UNESCO, on how civil society can use the UN Special Procedures to highlight specific cases.

Advocacy snapshots

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 also:

- Made a [joint statement](#) on the importance of upholding human rights in the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy;
- Organised a side event at the UN General Assembly Special Session on corruption, emphasising the need to protect journalists and the right to access information; and
- Held a side event at the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which attracted over 220 attendees, where we launched our [two reports on online harassment and abuse against women journalists](#).

Better regional protections for environmental human rights defenders

“ This [Aarhus] is one of the most innovative mechanisms for protection that we’ve seen at an international level. It sets a very good precedent for other regions. ”

Dave Banisar
Head of Transparency, ARTICLE 19

In April 2021, the [Escazù Agreement](#) came into force in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Agreement is binding and includes an enforcement mechanism, making it a strong tool to protect environmental human rights defenders. ARTICLE 19’s regional offices in Mexico and Brazil worked closely on its creation, development, and now enforcement.

In October 2021, the UN Economic Commission for Europe’s Aarhus Convention Meeting of Parties approved the creation of a new [Rapid Response Mechanism](#) to tackle attacks against environmental human rights defenders in Europe. This will include not only an enforcement mechanism but also the creation of a new Special Rapporteur dedicated to protecting environmental human rights defenders. ARTICLE 19 held the first ever side event at an Aarhus meeting in 2014, which focused on the need to protect environmental human rights defenders, so we warmly welcome this development.



Guarani indigenous people pray during a protest for the vote on the ‘PL do Cinturao Verde’ (‘Green Belt Bill’), which supports the preservation of green areas. Sao Paulo, Brazil. 16 December 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Amanda Perobelli)



III. CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS

ARTICLE 19's nine regional offices worldwide are on the frontlines of new battles for freedom of expression. They deliver vital programmes to protect, empower, and connect journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and protesters – especially those from at-risk groups – on the ground.

ARTICLE 19 takes a *glocal* approach, elevating local experience and expertise to the global level to hold states accountable and change lives – from Cuba to Cambodia, Malawi to Morocco, Brazil to Belarus, Sri Lanka to Senegal, and Kyrgyzstan to Kenya.

This international–regional–national connection uniquely positions ARTICLE 19 in the world of freedom of expression.

“

ARTICLE 19 is definitely a leader in the world of freedom of expression, and one of its unique strengths is its ability to bridge work at the international, regional, and national levels. Its international advocacy is informed by on-the-ground expertise and its international expertise is applied in local settings.

”

Godfrey Odongo
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

Photo on page 45: Bridging the digital divide: In rural Bangladesh, women in pink and blue uniforms, known as info-ladies, bring Internet services to people who cannot access the web. Here, info-lady Shathi helps 50-year-old Kohinur Begum to Skype with a relative working overseas. (Photo: ARTICLE 19)

“From margin to center”*

Amplifying the voices of at-risk groups

Bangladesh: Supporting women journalists through Covid-19

Last year, we reported on an innovative project, run by ARTICLE 19’s South Asia office, that provided much-needed bridging employment to women journalists in Bangladesh in the context of an alarming crackdown on reporting on Covid-19. The project continued into 2021, with the support of the Asia Foundation.

ARTICLE 19 provided bridging employment for 32 women journalists, at a total value of BDT 1.5 million (USD 17,650). Eight of the women received job offers from media houses while working with ARTICLE 19.

ARTICLE 19 also distributed personal protection equipment to 300 frontline women journalists in 2021, most of whom lived and worked in rural areas, enabling them to continue working while staying safe.

Tunisia: Ministry of Education to integrate ARTICLE 19’s ‘hate speech’ manual into schools

In 2021, Tunisia’s Ministry of Education adopted our manual, *The Promotion of Freedom of Expression to Fight Hate Speech in the School Environment*, and will be integrating it into school teaching programmes.

This was the result of a long campaign targeting schools in Tunisia, which ARTICLE 19 Middle East and North Africa has spearheaded since 2017.

The manual was designed using an innovative participatory methodology, bringing together not only pedagogy experts, inspectors, and teachers but also school pupils. Its objective is to promote human rights, particularly freedom of expression, to prevent and counter ‘hate speech’ in schools in a practical, engaging, and interactive way.

Brazil: ARTICLE 19 reveals government’s regression in tackling inequalities

On 13 July 2021, a coalition of 57 civil society organisations from across Brazil – including ARTICLE 19 Brazil and South America – published a [report](#) highlighting Brazil’s failure to fulfil the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The report, which included contributions from 106 experts, found that Brazil has failed to reach 80% of the goals it committed to, and has regressed in many areas – including poverty, food security, health, education, gender, equality, economics and the environment – and is reneging on its promise ‘not to leave anyone behind’.

As the report shows, the people most at risk of being left behind include women, *quilombas* (residents of *quilombo* settlements, first established by escaped enslaved black people in Brazil and now inhabited by their descendants), and people from LGBTQI+ and indigenous communities. The report offers 127 recommendations to level these stark inequalities.

[*From *margin to center* is a book written by bell hooks, a groundbreaking author and activist who published more than 30 books on race, feminism, capitalism, and intersectionality, who sadly died in 2021]



Activists shout slogans, hold banners, and wave flags during a protest against Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, an international accord designed to protect women. Istanbul, Turkey, 19 June 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Umit Bektas)

Kenya: Improving the safety of women human rights defenders

As part of our PROTECT project, ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa played a leading role in creating networks of women human rights defenders and journalists in Mombasa and Kisumu, Kenya. One of the aims of these networks was for women in civil society to be able to advocate with the UN and regional mechanisms on freedom of association, assembly, and expression.

We also delivered numerous training sessions for women human rights defenders and journalists, media organisations, police officers, government officials, and the Kenya National Commission for Human Rights on the safety – physical, digital, and psychosocial – of women journalists, protocols for investigating attacks against them, and gender-sensitive reporting.

Speaking up for LGBTQI+ people in repressive regimes

Despite the risks that come with speaking up for LGBTQI+ people in deeply homophobic and transphobic regimes, ARTICLE 19's regional teams did just that throughout 2021.

In **West Africa**, where being LGBTQI+ is a crime in almost all countries and attacks against LGBTQI+ people are a daily occurrence, ARTICLE 19 West Africa raised its voice to oppose repressive laws – while also taking steps to protect our staff in the region. In **Ghana**, for example, we urged the government to reject the proposed 'sexual rights and family values' bill, which would criminalise not only LGBTQI+ people but also anyone who supports their rights.

In **Malaysia**, too, ARTICLE 19 Asia Pacific repeatedly called for the decriminalisation of LGBTQI+ people, including when the Religious Affairs Minister announced the government's intention to increase sentences under the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965, a law that already subjected LGBTQI+ people to up to three years' imprisonment, six lashes, and a fine.

In **Iran**, ARTICLE 19 Middle East and North Africa paid tribute to Alireza Fazeli-Monfared, a 20-year old gay man who was murdered on 4 May 2021 in Ahvaz. Alireza's murder shook the Iranian LGBTQI+ community, shining a light on its plight at the hands

of State structures and homophobic, transphobic, conservative, and patriarchal social norms. We called for a prompt, thorough, and independent investigation, and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

In **Hungary**, ARTICLE 19 Europe and Central Asia condemned attacks on the rights of the LGBTQI+ people following the passing of legislation that outlawed showing any content that encourages discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity to anyone under the age of 18. We called on the Hungarian Government to repeal the law and support the European Commission's investigation into the legislation.



Walking the walk: Putting equality, diversity, and inclusion at the heart of ARTICLE 19

ARTICLE 19 not only talks the talk; we also walk the walk, mainstreaming equality, diversity, and inclusion in our internal processes in our international and regional offices.

In 2021, our Head of Gender & Sexuality, Judy Taing, started a series of Open Lounges: online workshops for ARTICLE 19 staff to discuss what a feminist organisation looks like – and any barriers impeding us from becoming one – including power dynamics, intersectionality, and decolonisation.

There was a strong appetite for this work among senior management and staff in our international and regional offices. In parallel to this process, ARTICLE 19 also led an internal cultural review, with the objective of assessing the values held within the organisation and improving them where needed. This process touched upon values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As we go forward, we intend to continue to learn from each other, to assert our organisational values via human resource processes, and to have these difficult but fruitful conversations.

New working group on gender, sexuality, and intersectionality

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 formed a series of working groups to contribute to our new strategy, one of which focused on gender, sexuality, and intersectionality, led by Judy Taing and including members of staff from most of our regional offices. This working group put forward the need for the organisation to centre its work around values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, including all at-risk groups. These three key values are now central to ARTICLE 19's new strategic plan.

As part of our commitment, the group will continue to ensure best practices are mainstreamed throughout our work. One of its key objectives for the coming months will be reviewing our methods and implementation plans to ensure our commitment remains a reality for all teams in the international and regional offices.

Committing to gender parity in our leadership positions

On International Women's Day 2021, ARTICLE 19 signed up to the [FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders](#) pledge to achieve a fair share of women in our leadership – including our Board – by 2030. This commitment includes ARTICLE 19's global offices and our presence in the UK, USA, EU, Mexico, Brazil, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Senegal, Kenya, and Southeast Asia. Our teams, including our human resources department, have taken this on board, and are now developing new and existing processes to ensure we meet our target by 2030.

ARTICLE 19 was also featured as a case study of best practice in FAIR SHARE's report, [Leading for change: Case studies from organisations committed to gender equality](#).



“The Gender and Sexuality programme has greatly expanded in the past five years in a very positive way. As a result, feminist approaches are increasingly mainstreamed in the various thematic projects of ARTICLE 19.”

Simon Petitjean,
Senior Project Officer:
Gender & Sexuality, ARTICLE 19

Protecting journalists, fighting impunity

Mexico: Progress towards justice for two journalists

Lydia Cacho was detained and tortured in 2005 in retaliation for her book, *The Demons of Eden: The Power that Protects Child Pornography*, which investigated powerful networks that committed or enabled child abuse.

ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America has led Cacho's defence for over a decade. Thanks to this, in 2018, the UN HRC found that the Mexican State was responsible for the human rights violations against her, and investigations into those implicated were reopened.

On 3 February 2021, the former Governor of Puebla, Mario Marín – who is accused of being one of the masterminds behind Cacho's torture – was arrested in Acapulco.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of this development for justice in Mexico in general and justice for journalists in particular. There is no precedent of a high-level official in Mexico being apprehended for an attack against a journalist – let alone a former governor being detained on charges of torture.

In December, the US Congress also sanctioned Marín and his family.

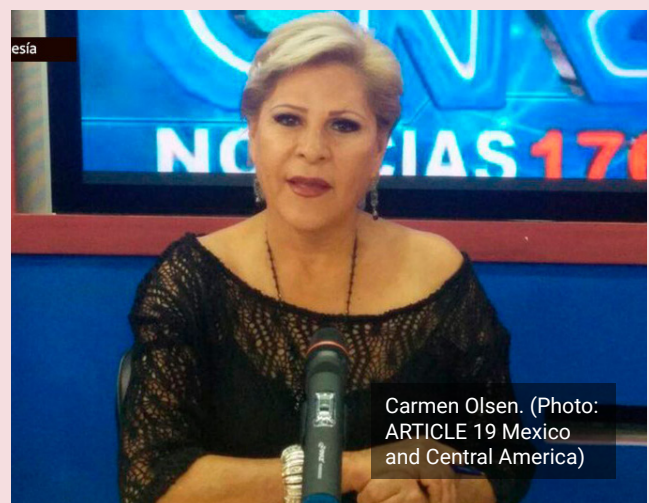


Lydia Cacho. (Photo: Eneas De Troya, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license)

After eight years on trial, journalist **Carmen Olsen** was finally acquitted in January 2021 of the crime of 'outrage against authority'.

The case dates back to January 2013, when two police officers arrested and assaulted Olsen when she was working, denounced her for the crime of 'outrages against authority', and later alleged she 'offended them' during her arbitrary detention. Since then, ARTICLE 19 has represented and accompanied Olsen through the multiple aggressions she has experienced.

Although we welcomed Olsen's acquittal, we were disappointed that the Court did not rule on the unconstitutionality of the offence – despite the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation declaring it unconstitutional in 2016. ARTICLE 19 reiterated our demand that the Congress of Baja California repeal the crime, and continues to work for justice for Olsen.



Carmen Olsen. (Photo: ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America)



Photojournalists light candles during a vigil in São Paulo, Brazil, marking the death of a video journalist killed whilst covering a protest in Rio de Janeiro. (Photo: Nelson Antoine/Shutterstock)

Algeria: Journalist released following international pressure

In March 2020, Algerian journalist Khaled Drareni was sentenced to two years in prison on a charge of ‘inciting an unarmed gathering and endangering national unity’. Drareni regularly reported on protests, corruption, and the repression of press freedom. Prior to his arrest, he experienced multiple intimidation and bribery attempts at the hands of the authorities.

ARTICLE 19, with other international and Algerian non-governmental organisations, repeatedly called for Drareni’s release and the withdrawal of all charges against him – and all other imprisoned journalists in Algeria.

On 25 March 2021, we welcomed the decision of the Supreme Court in Algeria to reverse the conviction against Drareni, following a presidential pardon of 60 imprisoned detainees.

However, he now faces retrial in the Algiers courts with a new judicial composition. ARTICLE 19 remains concerned at the deteriorating situation for journalistic freedom in Algeria, and calls on the judiciary to protect Drareni’s freedom – and that of all journalists.



Algerian journalist Khaled Drareni

“ The support I received from ARTICLE 19 during my imprisonment is precious and invaluable. Especially coming from such an important organisation that is so committed to the defence of journalists and their work. ... ARTICLE 19’s support and rallying to all initiatives of solidarity with my cause came to me while I was behind bars. It was an honour to know this. And my gratitude to you will remain Eternal. ”

Khaled Drareni, Algerian journalist

Malta: Landmark Public Inquiry into the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia



On the eve of the fourth anniversary of the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, representatives of ARTICLE 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, the European Federation of Journalists, and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) undertook a joint press freedom mission to Malta to remember Caruana Galizia's life, work, and courage, and to press for the need for full criminal justice for her assassination. Valletta, Malta, October 2021. (Photo: ARTICLE 19)

On 16 October 2017, Malta's leading investigative journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia, was brutally murdered in a car bomb attack that shook the world.

In July 2021, the Public Inquiry into Caruana Galizia's death published its [report](#), which found:

'the State has to shoulder responsibility for the assassination because it created an atmosphere of impunity, generated from the highest levels in the heart of the administration of the Office of the Prime Minister and like an octopus spread to other entities like regulatory institutions and the police, leading to the collapse of the rule of law.'

The findings of the Public Inquiry represent a milestone in the fight for truth, accountability, and justice for Caruana Galizia's assassination.

It ultimately came about only through threat of legal proceedings and a landmark [resolution](#) from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, secured through extensive advocacy by Caruana Galizia's family and international civil society – including ARTICLE 19.

We observed proceedings and filed a [comprehensive submission](#) on ongoing threats to journalists and press freedom in Malta. On 16 October 2021 – the four-year anniversary of Caruana Galizia's brutal murder – ARTICLE 19 undertook a joint press freedom mission to Malta, where we [met with representatives](#) including Prime Minister Robert Abela, who reaffirmed his commitment to ensuring the safety of journalists and to remain in dialogue with civil society and journalists on ongoing reforms.

ARTICLE 19 will [continue](#) to press for justice for Caruana Galizia, for implementation of the recommendations of the Public Inquiry, and for the safety of all journalists in Malta.

Togo: Jailed journalist released – under strict conditions

On 10 December 2021, journalist Ferdinand Ayité was [arrested and detained](#) for 'defamation' and 'outraging authority' for remarks he made on YouTube. ARTICLE 19 [raised concerns](#) about the absence of a legal basis for these offences, which are used to silence critical journalists in Togo. Ayité has experienced [intimidation attempts](#) before, including being [targeted](#) with Pegasus spyware and the newspaper he edits, *L'Alternative*, being [suspended](#) for four months.

On 31 December 2021 – having been jailed for three weeks, and following national and international pressure – Ayité was released.

But he remained subject to [strict and unjustified conditions](#), including surrendering his passport, not leaving Togo, visiting the judge weekly, and not commenting on the case. ARTICLE 19 urges Togo to retract these conditions and to respect its commitment to freedom of expression.

“

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that ARTICLE 19 has done to secure our release. ... We will continue to fight with the same determination and ensure that freedom of the press is a reality in Togo. Thank you for everything. May God bless you abundantly.

”

Ferdinand Ayité, Togolese journalist

Nothing but the truth

While the need to establish the truth is important for all of us in an age of ‘misinformation’, ‘disinformation’, and historical revisionism, it is critical for victims and survivors of serious human rights violations and their families, who have a right to know the truth about what happened and who was responsible. Establishing the facts of such violations is vital to protect freedom of expression, bring those accountable to justice, and tackle impunity.

Northern Ireland: The truth of The Troubles

In July 2021, the UK Government [announced](#) it would end criminal prosecutions relating to The Troubles in Northern Ireland, and instead set up a body modelled on truth commissions.

While truth commissions can be useful (ARTICLE 19 West Africa continues to play an active role in The Gambia’s Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission), the UK Government’s announcement led to outcry across communities in Northern Ireland.

On 28 September 2021, ARTICLE 19, with partners from the Media Freedom Rapid Response, [commemorated](#) the 20th anniversary of the death of Martin O’Hagan, a journalist shot dead in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, during The Troubles.

O’Hagan, who specialised in stories about drug gangs and paramilitary organisations, was shot multiple times from a passing car. It has long been suspected that his killing was ordered by paid police informants linked to the Loyalist Volunteer Force. To this day, no one has been held responsible for his murder.

“

“It’s caused great distress, because families feel that their loved ones do not matter, they feel their loved ones’ lives are being devalued. ... People are saying it’s like they’ve been wounded again, and it’s as if their loved one is dying all over again.”

”

Sandra Peake, Chief Executive of WAVE Trauma Centre, Northern Ireland (on ARTICLE 19’s [podcast](#))

Over a century ago, Spanish philosopher George Santayana wrote: ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’ Establishing the truth about history is a vital precursor to learning from it – and society as a whole benefits from reckoning with its history.



Family members of 10 people who were shot dead in Ballymurphy, Belfast, in 1971. The victims were initially labelled terrorists, but in May 2021 an inquest finally found that they were innocent civilians killed by the British Army. (Photo: Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyn)

Mexico: Archiving repression – and resistance



“

Disappearances still happen with total impunity. ... When these crimes are not punished and we do not know what happened, they can be committed again and again.

”

María De Vecchi Gerli, ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America (on ARTICLE 19's [podcast](#))



Ricardo Velasco, former member of the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, who donated materials to Archives of the Resistance. The text in the photograph reads: 'With much love for my friends from your friend'. Guadalajara, Jalisco State, Mexico, December 2021. (Photo: Ilse Huesca/ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America)

Archives of the Resistance

In December 2021, ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America launched [Archivos de la Resistencia \(Archives of the Resistance\)](#), a sister project of Archives of the Repression (featured in our last annual report). [Watch the video from the launch here.](#)

The archives – which contain 5,530 historical documents – collect the voices, testimonies, and stories of survivors and relatives of victims of human rights violations at the hands of the State between 1960 and 1992.

Clandestine Graves Citizen Platform

The [Clandestine Graves Citizen Platform](#), also launched in 2021, documents the locations of clandestine graves across Mexico, with the aim of filling gaps in knowledge and revealing the true magnitude of the phenomenon.

Between 2006 and 2019, the following were discovered:

- At least **2,357** clandestine graves;
- The bodies of at least **2,603** victims; and
- More than **1,000** unidentified bone fragments.

The Platform, which is interactive and open access to encourage further research, also contains a prediction model for the discovery of further clandestine graves.



German chancellor Willy Brandt kneeling before the Warsaw ghetto memorial, Poland, 1970. (Photo: Alamy)

ARTICLE 19 joins UNESCO working group on Holocaust denial

ARTICLE 19's Head of Civic Space, Patricia Meléndez, joined the UNESCO Roundtable on Holocaust denial and distortion in 2021, where she will work on behalf of the organisation to bring in international standards on 'hate speech'.

The UN [recognises](#) that education is vital to prevent genocide, and it provides a forum to address past violence while also promoting the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to prevent contemporary violence against at-risk groups.

This is part of our long-term UN advocacy on 'hate speech'. ARTICLE 19's nuanced approach to this issue was also extensively cited in a UNESCO report, [Education as a tool for prevention: addressing and countering hate speech](#), in 2021.



Satko Mujagić in the hangar of the former Omarska concentration camp, where he was imprisoned. (Photo: Claudia Heinermann)

“ My grandmother is missing. My best friend is missing. His parents are still looking for his body. ... People don't disappear into the air. Someone either killed them or made them disappear. ”

“ What are we leaving to new generations if we simply leave it as it is – if we don't do our best to find the truth? ... We need the truth for history books, for new generations to understand and learn from that ”

Satko Mujagić, Survivor of Omarska concentration camp (on ARTICLE 19's [podcast](#))

Find out more in our [essay](#) and [podcast](#) from 2021 on the right to truth – and why it matters – in which ARTICLE 19 talks to staff, survivors, and survivors' organisations.

Beyond belief: Freedom of expression for all religions – and none

The right to freedom of religion or belief is protected under international human rights law and intersects with the right to freedom of expression. Yet across the world, we have seen an increase in violence and intolerance against members of religious communities.

ARTICLE 19's regional offices work in difficult contexts to protect the right to freedom of expression of people from all religions – and none.

Malaysia:
#CubaDengarDulu
youth campaign
promotes empathy,
diversity, and
inclusiveness



On the eve of Merdeka (Malaysia's Independence Day) 2021, ARTICLE 19 and Projek Dialog [launched](#) a youth-led campaign to promote diversity, inclusiveness, and meaningful dialogue on freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

The campaign, [#CubaDengarDulu](#) ('Listen First'), was inspired by our concern that these fundamental freedoms have become taboo topics in Malaysia. It aims to foster empathy between young people of different religions and beliefs by initiating dialogue and countering messages of hate with messages of acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion.

Campaign activities to date include:

- Asking youth to take the **#CubaDengarDulu** pledge to practice empathy towards all people, regardless of their background, ethnicity, and opinions;
- Encouraging a diverse spectrum of youth to **tell their stories**, and sharing these to foster understanding; and
- Sharing **artwork that promotes empathy** towards people of all religions and beliefs.



“ We are working with lots of youths from diverse backgrounds on this campaign and putting together lots of initiatives – but it's not just about the outputs; it's also about developing relationships with and between young people to foster diversity and acceptance. ”

Caroline Stover, Asia Programme Manager, ARTICLE 19

Jordan: ARTICLE 19 stands in solidarity with poet sued for 'insulting the religious feelings of others'

“

Many thanks for forwarding this excellent statement of support and solidarity by ARTICLE 19. Indeed, you have all done a great job to support freedom of thought and expression in Jordan. I have forwarded the statement to Zulaikha, and she was very heartened by this expression of solidarity and support.

”

Salwa Ismaili
Professor of Politics with
reference to the Middle East
School of Oriental and African
Studies, University of London

In 2021, Jordanian poet and writer Dr Zulaikha Abu Risha was brought before the Amman Criminal Court for posting on Facebook that the voices of people who recite the Qur'an or perform the call for prayer should sound harmonious. She was charged with the crime of insulting others' religious feelings – a popular accusation used to sue intellectuals, human rights defenders, and religious minorities in Jordan.

Various individuals on social media called for Zulaikha to be punished, and a cleric asked the Minister of Awqaf (Religious Affairs) to sue her for violating Islamic sanctities, thus declaring her an apostate and endangering her life.

In November 2021, ARTICLE 19 [condemned](#) this incitement campaign and declared our solidarity with Zulaikha. We [call](#) on the Jordanian authorities to guarantee the right to freedom of expression – including in religious matters; to drop the lawsuits against Zulaikha and guarantee her physical protection; and to pursue all those who called for her to be attacked.



Dr Zulaikha Abu Risha,
Jordanian poet and writer

Asia and Pacific: Voices for Inclusion fights religious discrimination – despite difficult context

Despite significant challenges posed by Covid-19 and a military coup in Myanmar, ARTICLE 19 Asia and the Pacific made substantial progress in 2021 on our **Voices for Inclusion** project, which fights intolerance, stigmatisation, discrimination, and incitement to violence based on religion or belief.

Highlights from 2021 included:

Myanmar

- **Publishing robust research** into the root causes of ‘hate speech’, validated by key civil society bodies and external stakeholders, including Facebook’s Oversight Board;
- **Providing media grants to journalists** so they can amplify the voices of ethnic and religious minorities – including in coverage of the coup; and
- **Advocating for protection of human rights defenders**, including Myanmar refugees in Thailand and Malaysia, with the UN HRC and independent UN experts.

Malaysia

- **Leading on advocacy for religious tolerance and inclusion** in response to both individual [attacks](#) (such as against political satire artist [Fahmi Reza](#)) and harmful laws;
- **Building robust relationships with journalists** and developing in-house guidelines on tolerance and inclusion with media houses; and
- **Conducting 12 training sessions with 473 youth** on ‘hate speech’, tolerance, and inclusion, and reaching nearly 2,000 people by broadcasting our training on Facebook and YouTube.

“

Thank you so much for the insightful session. ... I received great feedback from my friends where they said it’s a fantastic and awesome programme plus they love to hear your talk. Thank you for helping us out.

”

Participant in youth training programme, Malaysia

Bangladesh: Promoting tolerance between rural religious groups

Rural Bangladesh is home to a diversity of indigenous and religious communities, and violent clashes have erupted between some of these groups. ARTICLE 19 Bangladesh and South Asia therefore focused on promoting the right to freedom of religion and belief in rural and remote areas in 2021.

Activities included producing **radio shows** on the right to freedom of religion and belief, which were broadcast on community radio in rural areas, and **empowering rural women’s organisations**, including delivering training on how to identify ‘false news’ and ‘misinformation’, as part of our commitment to media information literacy – a vital tool in promoting religious tolerance.

Caught in the crossfire: ARTICLE 19 on the frontlines worldwide

For three decades, ARTICLE 19 has worked to bring freedom of expression and information to authoritarian regimes. Because they are on the frontlines of this battle, our regional offices and courageous staff worldwide sometimes come under fire from powerful political forces, who choose impunity for human rights violations, and who choose to silence voices of dissent, rather than deal with the crimes in front of them.

Whenever and wherever freedom of expression is threatened, ARTICLE 19 will be there to defend it and to defend each other.

Mexico: President accuses ARTICLE 19 of being paid to undermine his government

“

ARTICLE 19 will not stop its vital work supporting the protection of journalists in one of the most dangerous environments in the world for media workers. We urge the President to stop attacking democratic values and start the process of making his country a safer place for ideas and knowledge to flourish.

”

Quinn McKew
Executive Director, ARTICLE 19

On 31 March 2021, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador accused our Mexico office of being funded by the USA to wage a ‘conservative campaign’ against him. He launched a second similar attack against us at a press conference just over a month later.

As ARTICLE 19’s International Board members said at the time, the President’s deeply problematic language reflects his growing intolerance of those who seek accountability for human rights abuses. Following his attacks, we received statements of support from over 160 organisations and individuals.

We are proud that ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America has been the key player in some of the most emblematic cases of freedom of expression in recent years. The office’s funding – which it has always disclosed, and which comes from a wide variety of sources – is directed towards supporting journalists, filling the void left by the Mexican State.



Belarus: Former ARTICLE 19 staff member and his partner jailed

“

“By bringing the attention of the public to Andrei and Irina’s plight, we want to encourage people to show their support. Collectively we will demand justice on their behalf and on behalf of the many Belarusians facing ongoing and blatant travesties of justice.”

”

ARTICLE 19 and Index on Censorship

On 12 January 2021, much-loved former ARTICLE 19 staff member Andrei Aliaksandrau and his partner Irina Zlobina were arrested and detained in Minsk, Belarus, as part of a widespread crackdown on independent media, protest, and criticism following the highly disputed 2020 presidential election. They have been behind bars in pre-trial detention ever since – and ARTICLE 19 has been calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

Those of us who have had the privilege to meet and work with Andrei know of his dedication to defending human rights, his friendliness, and his great sense of humour. He is facing charges of ‘treason to the State’, which stem from allegations that he paid the fines of journalists and protesters detained during pro-democracy protests triggered by the 2020 election. If convicted, Andrei will face up to 15 years in prison.

Irina was detained ‘on suspicion of financing protest activities’ and has since been charged with ‘organisation and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order’. She is facing up to three years in prison.

ARTICLE 19, in partnership with Index on Censorship, launched a solidarity campaign for Andrei and Irina on the one-year anniversary of their detention, reiterating our calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

[Find out how you can support the campaign.](#)



Thailand: ARTICLE 19 consultant charged with *lèse-majesté* for quoting UN at a protest



“

The Thai authorities are clearly trying to stifle a vibrant discussion about the role of the monarchy in Thai politics by silencing those brave enough to voice a critique. This absurd case is an affront to both the individuals facing the prospect of years in jail as well as the international human rights system that Thailand claims to respect.

”

David Diaz-Jogeix
Senior Director of Programmes,
ARTICLE 19

On 4 March 2021, ARTICLE 19 consultant Pimsiri Petchnamrob was one of five people charged with sedition and insulting the monarchy – known as *lèse-majesté* – for speaking at a protest on 29 November 2020.

In her speech, Pimsiri – a veteran human rights defender as well as a valued colleague – neither explicitly commented on the monarchy nor called for its reform. She merely spoke about the incompatibility of Thailand’s *lèse-majesté* provision with international law, quoting a statement by then-UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, which asserted that *lèse-majesté* laws have no place in democratic countries.

ARTICLE 19 has repeatedly called for Section 112 of Thailand’s Penal Code (which contains the *lèse-majesté* provision) to be repealed in its entirety. Our briefing, *Breaking the Silence: Thailand’s renewed use of lèse-majesté charges*, details the authorities’ renewed use of Section 112 – which carries a penalty of up to 15 years’ imprisonment – to suppress the pro-democracy movement.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Thai authorities to end all legal proceedings against individuals based on their exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and to release all those detained on such grounds.



Somyot Pruksakasemsuk, Inthira Charoenpura, Natthida Meewangpla, and ARTICLE 19 consultant Pimsiri Petchnamrob (left to right), who were charged on 25 November 2021 in relation to their participation in the ‘Disarm Thai Feudalism’ protest in 2020. Here, they are pictured reporting to the public prosecutor. (Photo: ARTICLE 19)



IV. CRITICAL MASS

ARTICLE 19 works in powerful partnerships to propel change for those who need it most. We spark solidarity and collaboration, joining and leading movements that protect the right to freedom of expression, locally and globally. And we join forces on projects and campaigns – because together we have a bigger impact than any one of us could have alone.

“

In responding to the increasing threats to freedom of expression globally, ARTICLE 19 has positioned itself to be an important player in protecting and defending freedom of expression, not least in ensuring the right to information for civic space and marginalized groups.

”

Mariken Bruusgaard Harbitz
Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Photo on page 61: Protesters march from Khartoum North to Omdurman during a rally against military rule following a coup. Khartoum, Sudan, 13 December 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah)

Sparking solidarity: The power of partnerships



Participants of Team COMMUNITY's annual global gathering share a moment of solidarity and laughter together as they develop strategies for coping with surveillance and censorship, March 2019, Valencia, Spain. (Photo: Team COMMUNITY, ARTICLE 19)

Team COMMUNITY: Nurturing the mental health of digital rights defenders

“

People don't get it. For many of us it's actually a matter of life or death.

”

Activist interviewed
by Team COMMUNITY

ARTICLE 19 project [Team COMMUNITY](#) – one of the most important nodes in the digital rights and Internet freedom community – was set up to address a lack of diversity, inclusion, and equity in the digital rights space.

In July 2021, the project published a pioneering new report, [Building Stronger Communities. Community Health Report 2020: The case for mental health support for digital rights defenders](#), which offers a snapshot of the mental health of digital rights defenders from over 130 countries.



Of the **238** activists surveyed,
66% said their mental health had
regressed in the past year.

While all activism is tough, digital activists are subject to the additional threats of online surveillance, censorship, and digital attacks. Activists reported symptoms including anxiety, overwhelm, and stressors created or [exacerbated by](#) the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sandy Ordóñez, Head of Team CommUNITY, explains why the mental health of digital rights activists should matter to all of us:

“These are the people who are globally fighting for privacy and security rights for citizens worldwide. They’re on the frontline in your country ensuring your privacy and security are safe. Working in digital rights requires specialist skills; if these activists burn out, it’s going to be incredibly hard to rebuild this talent. It’s essential that these folks remain healthy mentally – especially when dealing with adversaries that have such powerful tools to surveil and censor all citizens worldwide.”



In response to the report’s findings, Team CommUNITY held its first **Community Health Village** in November 2021 to encourage healthier work environments, including sessions on [mental health planning](#), [how community leaders can support activists](#), and a [Mayan healing ceremony](#).

But more funding – and more diverse sources of funding – is crucial to ensure the sustainability of this vital community.

The psychosocial stress caused by economic threats featured strongly in Team CommUNITY’s research findings. Yet funding in the digital space often focuses on tech development, overlooking the needs of the people who fight for our freedoms online.

Team CommUNITY is [fundraising](#) to deliver more projects that meet the digital rights community’s urgent need for psychosocial care – particularly for those most at risk. [Find out more on their website.](#)



“

Mental health is a human right – including for human rights activists. If we genuinely care about the work we do, and want to play our part of resisting, we need our mental health, and we need our communities.

”

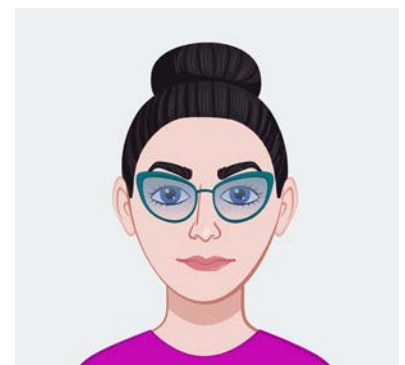
Selma Zaki
Team CommUNITY Health Researcher

“

The digital rights community is one of the most unique, beautiful, resilient communities I’ve ever come across – and one of the most intersectional. And they skew young. They are really the future of human rights, so it’s vital we strengthen the foundation underneath them.

”

Sandy Ordóñez
Head of Team CommUNITY



Progress in EU on vexatious lawsuits against journalists (SLAPPs)

“

Professor Sadurski has been a target of numerous SLAPP lawsuits brought by [public broadcaster Telewizja Polska] TVP and the ruling party which were clearly designed not to be won but to intimidate and silence him.

”

Sarah Clarke
Head of Europe and Central Asia,
ARTICLE 19

“

There have been a number of cases where the police show up at your house at 6 am and drag you out as if you were a dangerous criminal. Then you might be kept overnight at the station. The prosecution interrogates you for hours. Then you end up facing charges, and you are forced to spend months or even years with all this stress ... and you need money to pay for the lawyers.

”

Joanna Szymanska
Senior Programme Officer, ARTICLE 19
Europe and Central Asia
Speaking to [BalkanInsight](#) about
SLAPPs in Poland

Vexatious lawsuits against journalists, communicators, and activists – known as strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) – continued to rise across Europe in 2021.

SLAPPs are a form of legal harassment. Pursued by law firms on behalf of powerful individuals and organisations, their aim is to drain the target's financial and psychological resources and chill critical voices.

On 16 September 2021, the European Commission [committed](#) to passing EU-wide measures against SLAPPs.

This is a huge step forward – and one that ARTICLE 19 has advocated for over a number of years, including in our joint 2021 [submission](#) with the [Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe](#), whose steering group ARTICLE 19 sits on.

On a country level, ARTICLE 19 and our coalition partners spoke out against SLAPPs in the [UK](#), [Serbia](#), and [Greece](#), and published a report on their use in [Spain](#). We also conducted in-person monitoring, as part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response coalition, of many [cases](#) in [Poland](#).

In March 2021, ARTICLE 19 welcomed the acquittal of Professor Wojciech Sadurski, whom we have supported through multiple SLAPPs cases for three years.

Professor Sadurski was sued for tweets criticising Poland's ruling party and public broadcaster. We monitored the court hearings in person and acted as his community representative.

The rise in SLAPPs across Europe shows the urgent need for an EU Anti-SLAPP Directive. ARTICLE 19 is working on this Directive as part of the [EU Expert Group against SLAPPs](#).



Covid-19 in Africa: Together for Reliable Information

“

They asked where I was going and the moment I showed them my journalism ID card, I was asked to lie down and was beaten, being accused of exposing them.

”

Terence Sipuma
Journalist assaulted by members of the police and army in Harare, Zimbabwe

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 joined forces with Deutsche Welle Akademie, Fondation Hirondelle, Free Press Unlimited, International Media Support, and Reporters Without Borders – in collaboration with UNESCO and funded by the EU – to document the risks faced by journalists in 17 African countries during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As part of this project, called **Together for Reliable Information**, ARTICLE 19:

- Published human-impact briefings on attacks against journalists in eight countries;
- Analysed trends across the region in two regional reports;
- Produced legal analyses for use in advocacy work;
- Engaged in advocacy at the national, regional, multilateral, and global levels; and
- Provided essential, timely support, capacity-building training, and resources to fact-checkers to help them provide quality and reliable information about the pandemic.

Visit our Covid-19 Response in Africa portal for more information.



Police beating up ferry commuters for allegedly violating curfew rules. Some journalists who reported on the incidents were beaten and their equipment confiscated. Mombasa, Kenya, 21 March 2020. (Photo: Nation Media Group)



An Afghan female journalist attends a Taliban news conference, where they announced they would start issuing passports to citizens again, following months of delays that hampered people's attempts to flee the country after the Taliban seized control. Kabul, Afghanistan, 5 October 2021. (Photo: REUTERS/Jorge Silva)

Making the invisible visible: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 launched an innovative global project to explore how feminist approaches can support the safety of journalists.

The project has four components:

- **Original global research**, including case studies in six countries in South America and South Asia, to explore existing initiatives that put diversity, equality, and inclusion at the centre of journalists' safety;
- **Three practical guidelines** on how civil society organisations can take an intersectional gender approach to documenting attacks against journalists, delivering protection training, and advocating on emblematic cases;
- **Three thematic advocacy sheets** for civil society organisations working on the protection of journalists; and
- **A digital resource hub** to facilitate easy access to international standards on the safety of journalists.

ARTICLE 19 looks forward to publishing the project's outputs in 2022.

“

Women should not be negotiating for their space within their place of work. The time for responses designed by men, for men, is over; it is time women took the lead in initiating action involving institutional systems with sound redressal mechanisms.

”

Dilrukshi Handunetti, Journalist and administrator of [South Asian Women in Media](#), Sri Lanka

New Internet Freedom Initiative launched



“

The first year of the Internet Freedom Initiative has already contributed to developing new civil society networks, strengthening old networks, and building up this movement in a very tricky civic space.

”

Michael Caster
Asia Digital Programme Manager,
ARTICLE 19

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 and four partners launched a new three-year project, the **Internet Freedom Initiative**, in Asia Pacific and South Asia. Funded by the US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the project brings together digital activists, policymakers, legislators, journalists, civil society organisations, and young people from across the region to increase awareness of digital freedom; influence policy and legislation; and create and strengthen civil society networks.

As part of the project, in 2021, ARTICLE 19 set up working groups in three countries in the region, which have developed and started to implement their own national action plans.

The working groups have already sparked encouraging connections among civil society organisations on the ground. Some of their calls for action have influenced changes in government policy, while the Bangladesh working group has hosted several major workshops and received [considerable media attention](#) in both the English- and Bangla-language press.

ARTICLE 19 and partners produced **50 written outputs** in the first year of the project – more than we had planned for the entire three years. These included not only [joint statements](#) and press releases but also op-eds in publications such as [Vice](#), [Reuters](#), and [local media outlets](#), raising awareness of digital freedoms to a much broader audience than just 'the usual suspects'. In 2021, we also produced three [legal analyses](#) under the project.

And we have already seen some fruits of this labour.

In August, ARTICLE 19 and partners published a [statement](#) calling on the Thai Government to repeal Regulation 29, which would have empowered the authorities to censor online expression, and to investigate and prosecute those whose communications may 'instigate fear'.

The Civil Court subsequently [ruled](#) that the government did not have the power to impose the regulation, and the Prime Minister [revoked](#) it.

Campaigns update



Challenging hate in Kyrgyzstan

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 launched a new campaign, **#ChallengeHate**, to educate and empower people in Kyrgyzstan to challenge 'hate speech' and defend the right to freedom of expression.

Kyrgyzstan was chosen for the campaign following [reports](#) of an increase in 'hate speech' in the country, particularly in the run-up to its last elections.

#ChallengeHate explores five important questions:

- [What is 'hate speech'?](#)
- [How do we think critically about 'hate speech'?](#)
- [What if your government treats criticism as 'hate speech'?](#)
- [When can the right to freedom of expression be restricted?](#)
- [How can we challenge hate?](#)

The campaign encourages audiences to explore these questions using a variety of materials – including [cartoons, illustrations, videos, and quizzes](#) – translated into Kyrgyz and Russian. It aims to encourage people to not only understand and challenge 'hate speech' in their own lives but also to advocate for improvements in law and policy.

'Hate speech' is harmful and wrong – so we have to challenge it with more speech.

#ChallengeHate is part of the [Media Dialogue](#) project in Kyrgyzstan, which is funded by the EU, led by the [European Partnership for Democracy](#), and implemented by a consortium of five organisations, including ARTICLE 19.



Uniting Kyrgyz and Irish youth to challenge hate

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 hosted a three-day online Hate Speech Conference bringing together youth from Kyrgyzstan and Ireland to discuss their experiences of ‘hate speech’ and ‘disinformation’ – and how to challenge it. Attendees included young people from each country who have engaged in our #ChallengeHate and #KeepItReal campaigns.

Despite vast differences between the two countries, the young activists shared strikingly similar challenges. ARTICLE 19 hopes to bring more activists from different countries together in the future – including, hopefully, offline.

“

It’s so important to understand what’s happening in different countries and connect the dots. Bringing activists together like this helps to support and strengthen movements.

”

Barbara Dockalova, Senior Campaigner, ARTICLE 19

Mexico: New women’s health campaign in five indigenous languages

ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America [launched](#) a new campaign in July 2021, ***Nosotras con la Información (We Are Informed)***, in five indigenous languages: Zapoteco, Maya, Tzeltal, Ch’ol, and Chinanteco. The campaign emphasises the importance of the right to information for the health of indigenous women. It also explores women’s sexual and reproductive rights, the importance of traditional midwifery, and violence against women.

The campaign team interviewed women from indigenous communities in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatán about their right to information and sexual and reproductive health, and used this data to create community radio adverts and 14 animation-based [videos](#).

The campaign achieved the following successes in 2021:

- The videos and audio attracted **13,374 views and listens** across social media;
- **UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan cited the campaign** as a benchmark in her [first report on gender](#);
- The State Institute of Transparency, Access to Public Information and Protection of Personal Data of Yucatán is **disseminating the campaign in hospitals, health centres, and government agencies** across the state.

Governance

The extent of this annual look-back at the work of the International Board is testament to what has been an extraordinary year: unprecedented, demanding, and inspiring in equal measure.

Any governance function relies on strong and effective working relationships between trustees supported – periodically – by face-to-face meetings during the year. Regrettably, the difficulties of bringing an international Board together during the Covid-19 pandemic meant all of our business had to be carried out virtually. Yet despite those challenges (not least the challenge of international time zones), we were able to meet virtually to contribute to the exciting new strategy.

Our Regional Boards (also affected by the crisis) continued with their own priorities to ensure that both staff and operations were kept safe, and that ARTICLE 19 was able to maintain its commitments to donors wherever possible. This annual report attests to the fact that programmatic work across all offices continued largely uninterrupted despite the scale of local challenges: from Kenya to Brazil, from Tunis to Dhaka, ARTICLE 19 continued to drive change wherever we could.

The International Board added two special sessions (in addition to the regular scheduled Board meetings) specifically to review, debate, and approve the direction set out in ARTICLE 19's new strategy, the **Power of Our Voices**. ARTICLE 19's International Board and General Assembly has a deep pool of international experts from a variety of nationalities and backgrounds, able to interrogate our work from multiple perspectives. Facilitated by the consultants from Spring Strategies, the Board began by evaluating major transformations across the global landscape for freedom of expression, and asked what is ARTICLE 19's unique role in meeting the challenges they represent. As a Board we believe the central vision of the new strategy places freedom of expression as the solution to meeting the dangerous moment the world is in. Ours is a truly IMAX vision. In the new strategy we recognise our role as a 'Think-Do-Propel' organisation capable of contributing significantly on four global objectives through to 2025 (see Quinn's message at the start of this report on [page 7](#)). And we want to thank everyone who contributed to that ambition throughout the year.

On our other work during 2021:

The **Finance and General Purposes Committee** (FGPC) chaired by Treasurer **Mark Salway**, continued to meet regularly to push forward on their work plan primarily focused on improved finance reporting across ARTICLE 19. The Committee also focussed on the process of finalising and agreeing ARTICLE 19's statutory audit, as well as numerous project audits within a challenging schedule. The FGPC also oversaw the restructure of the Finance Team, led by the Director of Finance **Nicola Dodero** to ensure more robust financial management and compliance moving ahead.

The **Governance Committee** worked to identify and then nominate an outstanding new Board member, **Charles Onyango-Obbo**, who was appointed during the June 2021 General Assembly. As noted in the last annual report, ARTICLE 19 was seeking a Trustee with expertise in African freedom of expression. As one of East Africa's leading journalists, Charles brings a wealth of experience as co-founder and editor of Uganda's most successful newspaper, *The Monitor*, then in senior editorial positions with the Nairobi-based Nation Media Group and later *the Mail & Guardian* (South Africa).

Charles joined us as we bid a grateful farewell to **Frank Ledwidge**, who resigned in June 2021. Frank's expertise in digital and physical security, which he contributed as a member of our Security Management Group, helped ARTICLE 19 better prepare for an increasingly complex security environment globally.

At the time of writing in March 2022, the Board is looking ahead to re-evaluating our approach in Europe and Central Asia in light of the major geopolitical shifts arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. With its focus on countering the rise of authoritarianism through a focus on freedom of expression, the **Power of our Voices** speaks vitally to this moment.

Our Trustees

Abir Ghattas

Aparna Ravi

Arturo Franco

Bob Latham

Charles Onyango-Obbo

David Kaye

David Viney

Gayathry Venkiteswaran (Vice Chair)

Lesley Swarbrick

Mark Salway (Treasurer)

Nadezda Azhgikhina

Paddy Coulter (Chair)

Our partners and donors

Governmental

- Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)
- Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
- UK High Commission in Bangladesh
- Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Canada Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Canada Local Initiative Funds
- Global Affairs Canada – Pro Democracy Fund
- Embassy of Czech Republic to Mexico
- Embassy of Finland to Bangladesh
- Finland Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Finland Fund for Local Cooperation
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) – German Development Agency
- German Federal Foreign Office (FFO)
- Embassy of Germany to Mexico
- Embassy of The Netherlands to Bangladesh
- Embassy of The Netherlands to Senegal
- Embassy of Switzerland to the Gambia
- Embassy of United Kingdom to Mexico
- US Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL)
- US Department of State – Bureau of Near East Affairs
- US Agency for International Development (USAID)
- National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

Multi-governmental institutions

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Multi-Donor Trust Fund – Open Government Partnership (OGP)
- European Commission – European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

Private

- American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS)
- American Jewish World Service
- Angelica Foundation
- Avina
- Centro Latam
- Centre for Digital Resilience
- Chemonics
- Danish ChurchAid (DCA)
- Digital Defenders Partnership
- DW Akademie
- Facebook
- Ford Foundation
- Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
- Google
- FRIDA
- IFEX
- Journalist and Media International Centre – OsloMet (JMIC)
- Luminate
- National Democratic Institute (NDI)
- MacArthur Foundation
- Netgain
- Open Society Foundations
- Open Technology Fund (OTF)
- Pan America Development foundation
- SAGE Foundation
- Twitter
- Yelp Foundation



[article19.org](https://www.article19.org)