

# LIBERTAS

## Voices from the South



Mexican Human Rights Activist  
Rafael Reygadas Robles Gil

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, governments around the world are spending increasing amounts of time and money on anti-terrorism measures that threaten to undermine human rights protection. Now more than ever we must be vigilant in ensuring that Canada and other countries keep human rights on the agenda and make a significant contribution to peacebuilding and the fostering of strong democracies. In the spirit of the Vienna Declaration, which states that the realization of human rights is the primary obligation of States, we need to ensure that the means by which we address terrorism do not compromise the fundamental principles of human rights. In the upcoming year, through *Libertas*, you will be able to read the perspectives of our partner organizations in different countries about the effects of the September 11 fallout in their part of the world and its impact on civil liberties, human rights and the work of human rights activists and defenders. We begin the series with a piece written by Rafael Reygadas Robles Gil of Convergencia de Organismos Civiles por la Democracia in Mexico.

**F**or Mexico, the economic, social, political, cultural and military implications of September 11 have resulted in an exacerbation of the political dominance of the US over Mexico. Mexico is a country that lost half of its territory to the US, shares a border of some 3,000 kilometres with the US, conducts most of its external trading ventures with the US, and has a difference in minimum wage at a ratio of one to eight with the US.

The pressures on national sovereignty and the increasingly harsh measures employed by the police and armed forces have augmented since September 11. Here are some examples:

Multiple commitments to supply oil, natural gas and electricity, in force between Mexico and the US, have effectively transformed Mexico into a

strategic enemy of the enemies of the US and, thereby, leave Mexico in a very vulnerable position.

On the northern border, economic activity has become more difficult. Every day there are delays for many thousands of Americans and Mexicans who move from one country to the other in order to work, buy and travel. This increases unemployment. Also, restrictions on the freedom of movement in the US have diminished American tourism in Mexico, which provides the second largest income after oil.

Immigrant workers going to the US, whether they are from Mexico, Latin America or other countries, have experienced increased human rights abuses. Along the northern border, the work carried out by the Fox government to facilitate the issuing of more work visas and legalize

the situation of 3.5 million Mexican immigrant workers has been frozen, while a pronounced policy to seal the borders has been noted. Consequently, the number of patrols has been increased along the whole border. The *polleros*, or illegal smuggler-guides who take money to bring undocumented immigrants across the border from south of the Suchiate River, have raised their fees to more than US \$1,000, and very often abandon their clients anywhere along the route.

Perhaps the worst effect of September 11 upon Mexican politics is the increased pressure for the integration of Mexico's energy and communications industries into a subordinate relation dependent on the interests of the US. Since that date the build-up of capital investment

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**Rights & Democracy**

International Centre for Human Rights  
and Democratic Development

Rights & Democracy (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development) is a Canadian institution with an international mandate. It is an independent organization, which promotes, advocates and defends the democratic and human rights set out in the *International Bill of Human Rights*. In cooperation with civil society and governments in Canada and abroad, Rights & Democracy initiates and supports programmes to strengthen laws and democratic institutions, principally in developing countries.

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in the oil and electricity industries has been disguised as investment mechanisms such as the Multiple Investment Contracts which, in contradiction to the Constitution of Mexico, are allowing foreign capital to invest in these industries that form the basis of national sovereignty.

In addition, certain individuals in Mexico have taken the law into their own hands with absolute impunity. Digna Ochoa y Plácido, the well-known defender of human rights, was assassinated on November 19, 2001. To date, no one has been charged or brought to justice for this crime.

Hundreds of indigenous, social justice and non-governmental organizations, women's groups and labour unions are working for the *National Coordination of Activities for Peace, Justice and Human Rights (Coordinación Nacional por la Paz, la Justicia y los Derechos Humanos)*, since it is clear that isolated groups cannot alone confront the serious consequences of September 11 for our country. They also have strengthened their resolve to take part in the Hemispheric Social Alliance in order to further continental efforts to combat the Free Trade Agreements in the Area of the Americas, that will increasingly impoverish the great majority of Latin Americans.

# Emergency funds for Afghan Women's Ministry



Photo: CP

Suhaila Siddiqi, Health Minister and Sima Samar, Women's Affairs Minister.

Two months into her six-month mandate, Dr. Sima Samar has yet to receive any funds for her Ministry of Women's Affairs in Afghanistan's interim government. Dr. Samar, laureate of the 2001 John Humphrey Freedom Award, was sworn into office on December 22, immediately following her cross-Canada tour. However, the promises of foreign aid to rebuild Afghanistan have yet to be fulfilled. Until recently, she worked out of her rented home in Kabul, without staff or resources. Rights & Democracy decided to provide

emergency funds to the Ministry to help Dr. Samar, who faces an uphill battle defending and promoting women's rights in the post-Taliban regime. In a letter written to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Rights & Democracy also urged Canada to provide immediate support for the office and operations of the Afghan Women's Affairs Ministry. Visit our Web site at [www.ichrdd.ca](http://www.ichrdd.ca) for an opportunity to take action by sending your own letter to our government urging support for Dr. Samar and the Afghan Ministry for Women's Affairs.

## Call for nominations

# 2002 John Humphrey Freedom Award

Rights & Democracy is now accepting nominations for its annual John Humphrey Freedom Award. The deadline for submissions is **May 1, 2002**. The Award, which includes a \$25,000 grant and a speaking tour of Canada, is presented each year to an outstanding human rights activist or organization from any country around the world, including Canada, who works on the frontline for the benefit of developing countries. For eligibility requirements or a copy of our leaflet, please contact Augie van Biljouw ([avbiljou@ichrdd.ca](mailto:avbiljou@ichrdd.ca)) or visit our Web site ([www.ichrdd.ca](http://www.ichrdd.ca)).

## Exploratory trip to the Middle East

The President of Rights & Democracy Warren Allmand travelled to the Middle East in January 2002 with consultant Rachad Antonius, a specialist on Middle East affairs, and met with a variety of human rights groups in Cairo, Jerusalem and Ramallah. The objective of the mission was to evaluate a possible role for Rights & Democracy in the promotion of human rights and democratic development in the Middle East.

# World Social Forum in Porto Alegre

Warren Allmand and Diana Bronson of the Globalization and Human Rights programme both attended the second edition of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. With over 50,000 participants including 15,000 people in the youth camp, the forum has become a dynamic international rendez-vous for activists from all over the world seeking greater economic justice, human rights and democracy.

With hundreds of activities happening simultaneously, delegates were faced with the

near impossible task of selecting activities that would be most useful to their work. Rights & Democracy focused mostly on the activities organized by its partners in the human rights and dignity Caucus (composed of the Brazilian Movement for Human Rights [MNDH], the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues [FIDH], the International NGO Committee on Human Rights in Trade and Investment [INCHRITI], the Inter-American Platform for Human Rights, Democracy and Development [PIDHDD] and

the Center for Dignity and Rights [CEDAR]).

The caucus heard many interesting presentations, including a testimonial by Virginia Dandan, chair of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; several interesting presentations of what people are doing at the national level to implement social and economic rights, as well as discussions regarding the actual and potential relationship between international trade and investment regimes and human rights. Visit [www.worldsocialforum.org](http://www.worldsocialforum.org) for further details.

# NGOs help build International Criminal Court

From January 16 to 18, Iris Almeida, Rights & Democracy's Director of Programmes, attended the meeting of the Steering Committee of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (ICC) in New York. Rights & Democracy and the other NGO members of the coalition have been working to obtain worldwide ratification of the Rome Statute creating the ICC; to assist States in implementation and domestic compliance, and to generate public support for the ICC through education. Following the 60th ratification of the Rome Statute (expected to take place between June and December 2002), the UN Secretary General will convene the first meeting of the Assembly of States Parties. NGOs and networks expect to be present in large numbers at this historical meeting.

Rights & Democracy is also part of the Canadian International Development Agency sponsored International Criminal Court Technical Assistance Programme (ICCTAP) with three other Canadian organizations: the Vancouver-based International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society of Vancouver, and the Canadian NGO Network for an International Criminal Court,

which is coordinated by the World Federalists of Canada in Ottawa.

ICCTAP organized its fifth successful regional training workshop in Abidjan, Ivory Coast at the end of January with an agreement to push for the adoption and ratification of the Rome Statute by West African States. More than 90 delegates representing governments, media and civil society organizations from 15 West African States attended the three-day meeting in Abidjan to focus on questions relating to the future implementation of the Statute and domestic legislation.

On January 22, the West African country of Benin became the 49th state to ratify the Rome Statute for an ICC. (Estonia followed on January 30, 2002, and became the 50th state to ratify.) Benin's recent move means that five West African States have now ratified (Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone) while only one of the nine remaining states (Togo) has not signed the treaty.

Adama Dieng, Registrar of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), reminded participants in Abidjan that ratification by African States was crucial in order to shape and influence the future court. The State parties

who have ratified will attend the Assembly of States Parties and will have a say on the nomination process of judges.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) will be a permanent judicial body to bring to justice individuals, including political and military leaders, accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The ICC is widely heralded as a cornerstone of an evolving system of international justice. Its jurisdiction will apply to crimes occurring in both international and internal conflicts. It will provide a mechanism to try the future Hitlers, Pinochets and Pol Pots of the world.



Jean-Baptiste Gnohoue, President, Amnesty International, Benin; Antonio José Almeida, Senior Programmes Assistant, Rights & Democracy; and San Evariste Barro, journalist, Burkina Faso, *L'Observateur Paalga*, at the ICCTAP Meeting in Abidjan from January 29 to 31, 2002.

# Guatemalans call for Canada's continued support for the peace process

A former member of the Guatemalan government's Peace Commission urged Canada to keep up its political and financial support for the Guatemalan peace process, five years after the Peace Accords put an end to the 36-year-old civil war.

Raquel Zelaya, Executive Director of the Association for Research and Social Studies, was in Ottawa to attend Rights & Democracy's Consultative Group on Guatemala, a project that brings together representatives of the Canadian government and non-governmental organizations to exchange information and improve policy dialogue on the Guatemalan peace process and wider issues of human rights.

As the government of Alfonso Portillo lobbies intensely for international financing

for a poverty-reduction plan, implementation of the Guatemalan Peace Accords continues, but not without delays. A worrying deterioration of the human rights situation also threatens to derail the process, as organizations working to bring to justice the perpetrators of more than 600 massacres find themselves increasingly under threat. The delays in implementation of key parts of the Peace Accords have led to revisions in the timetables for completion and an extension to the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA.)

The Consultative Group on Guatemala met prior to the meeting in Washington DC of the international donor community to discuss financing the continued implementation of the Peace Accords.



Raquel Zelaya



From January 14 to 17, Asia Regional Officer Micheline Lévesque travelled to **Paris** to attend the **Burma Donors Meeting** organized this year by the Jean-Jaurès Foundation. From January 14 to 18, Africa Regional Officer Akakpo-Vidah travelled to **Brussels**, to attend a meeting on the Inter-Congolese Peace Dialogue in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, organized by the **Belgium** government. From January 26 to 28, he attended a meeting in **Calgary, Alberta** with the Chairperson Kathleen Mahoney to discuss plans to hold an NGO parallel event during the G-8 Summit in **Kananaskis, Alberta** at the end of June 2002. Mr. Allmand attended the annual International Human Rights

Funders Group in **San Francisco, California** from January 21 to 24, 2002. Globalization and Human Rights Assistant Coordinator Carole Samdup travelled to **Hong Kong** from January 24 to February 1 to meet partners in Asia. Rights of Indigenous Peoples Programme Coordinator Marie Léger participated in the United Nations Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in **Geneva** from January 26 to February 8. Mr. Allmand joined Ms. Léger in **Geneva** from February 5 to 8 following his trip to **Porto Alegre, Brazil** for the World Social Forum (see page 2). On February 6, Ms. Almeida hosted a meeting in **Montreal** with the Vietnamese Canadian Federation and Canada's Ambassador to **Vietnam**, Cécile Latour. Mr. Allmand met with her in **Ottawa** on February 13 to discuss the

human rights situation in that country. On February 15, Mr. Allmand gave a speech on human rights post-September 11 to members of the Social Justice Committee of the Eastern Townships in **Knowlton, Quebec**. On February 21, he was guest speaker before the Parliamentary Human Rights Group in **Ottawa**. On February 25, Mr. Allmand testified before the Sub-committee on International Trade, Trade Disputes and Investment of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on the World Trade Organization and transparency. From January 25 to 28, several staff members joined Mr. Allmand at the annual Department of Foreign Affairs NGO Consultations before the 58th session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission to be held in March-April 2002 in **Geneva**.

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