

Human Rights Watch Sweden Progress Report 2015

Insamlingsstiftelsen the Swedish Foundation in Support of Human Rights Watch
Org. no. 802478-1885

What does your organisation seek to achieve?

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people worldwide. We scrupulously investigate abuses, expose the facts widely, and pressure those with power to respect rights and secure justice. Human Rights Watch is an independent, international organization that works as part of a vibrant movement to uphold human dignity and advance the cause of human rights for all.

What is the organisational structure within which your organisation operates?

Human Rights Watch was founded in 1978 as “Helsinki Watch” to support and protect individual dissidents and independent citizens’ groups in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Our aim was to defend the rights of suppressed writers, scholars, and intellectuals, and to ensure that their governments complied with the 1975 Helsinki Accords, which, among other things, affirmed the right of citizens to monitor the human rights practices of their own governments.

With time, we began addressing human rights violations in other parts of the world. We became a global organization by the end of the 1980s and have since expanded our reach to populations that had been traditionally ignored by the human rights movement, including women, children, refugees, workers, gay people, people with disabilities, and people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Human Rights Watch is today an organization of more than 400 staff, including researchers, advocates, and legal experts, as well as communications, development, finance, and operations professionals. We are now nearing the end of our four years into a five-year strategic campaign to truly internationalize our global presence. Today, we have more than 400 staff members representing 76 nationalities and working from 61 different cities around the world. By opening new hubs outside of the West and placing more researchers and advocates in the field, we are strengthening our partnerships with local media, civil society, and policy-makers who have the power to effect change. We most recently opened an office in São Paulo, Brazil and added new positions on North Korea and Angola/Mozambique. We are evolving our management and infrastructure to better meet the myriad challenges of operating across time zones with an increasingly dispersed staff.

The Human Rights Watch Swedish entity was founded in September 2014. Human Rights Watch is excited to expand operations into Sweden, our first formal presence in Scandinavia. We are looking forward to consolidating our existing contacts with the human rights community and other stakeholders in Sweden, as well as to making new connections and being part of and contributing to what is already a flourishing human rights culture in the country.

What strategies do you employ to fulfil your aims?

We **investigate** abuses. Human Rights Watch conducts meticulous on-site investigations. We speak to victims, witnesses, local activists, government officials, and others. We examine documentary evidence including hospital registers, morgue lists, gravestones, military records, flight records, satellite images, and court records. We assemble a picture of a human rights situation that is as complete, accurate, and objective as possible.

We **expose** wrongdoing. Human Rights Watch releases its findings in reports, press releases, photo essays, and video documentaries that are distributed to key policy-makers and made available to the public. Our staff writes op-eds, gives interviews to news programs, uses social

media, and works with journalists behind the scenes to expose human rights abuses and the leaders who are responsible for them.

We **change** policy and practice. Human Rights Watch then uses its findings to generate pressure on governments to respect human rights. We analyze human rights problems, formulate recommendations for improvement, and press for real change through strategic, targeted advocacy. We generate public pressure through intensive traditional and social media coverage, build coalitions with local and international organizations, launch targeted advocacy campaigns, and conduct high-level, behind-the-scenes meetings to effect positive change. We enlist influential governments, the international business community, the United Nations, and other multilateral institutions to exert pressure on abusive regimes. These combined efforts routinely produce results because government actors who abuse human rights find that they have a strong incentive to improve their practices in order to avoid persistent bad press, economic sanctions, or other real consequences of our work.

What capacity and what expertise do you have to achieve your aims?

We have earned a reputation as a leading human rights defender because of our ability to respond quickly and effectively to a broad spectrum of human rights concerns. Very few international organisations have the reach and expertise that Human Rights Watch does in highlighting various forms of human rights abuse that would otherwise remain hidden. We have pioneered the protection of marginalised groups under a human rights framework, including the rights of women; children; lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual people; people with HIV/AIDS; people with disabilities; and victims of abuses related to the environment and major industry.

The primary beneficiaries of Human Rights Watch's work are victims of human rights abuse or individuals at risk of abuse. Local non-profit organisations and civil society actors also benefit from our research and advocacy as we seek to improve the human rights environment in which they work. Our credibility, high profile, and reputation as an internationally-respected human rights organisation helps amplify the voices of local and regional civil society actors with policy-makers to whom they may otherwise not have access.

As one of our key target audiences, policy-makers are well served by our timely reporting and advocacy. Our work elucidates complex situations from a human rights perspective, bringing to light little-known rights abuses and providing policy-makers with informed recommendations to address abuses. Finally, international and local media outlets frequently turn to us for our analysis and insight on human rights stories. Our increasing use of multimedia technologies helps media outlets by providing pre-packaged products—such as video and audio clips and photo essays—that can be easily incorporated into their programming. As more and more newspapers and major networks are forced to cut their budgets and close their foreign bureaus, such materials are critical to making information on international human rights issues available to the public.

How do you tell whether your organisation is advancing?

Human Rights Watch is committed to rigorous, transparent, and consistent self-evaluation. When looking at our own impact, we determine whether or not we have met our goals to bring about positive change for those facing human rights violations. We consider input on our progress from key interlocutors, local human rights partners, and critics. We gauge how effectively we have allocated our resources. To ensure that we reach the highest standards of accuracy and objectivity in our research and achieve the greatest impact from our advocacy, we engage in self-evaluation throughout the year.

If abuses we have investigated and reported on decrease, our work has been successful. Often, since it takes a great deal of time to bring entrenched human rights abuses to an end, we consider interim criteria for evaluation. These include:

- Whether we have succeeded in generating prominent press coverage about the government's abuses.

- Whether other governments and institutions have acted on these revelations by protesting the abuses or exerting diplomatic or economic pressure on the abusive government.
- Whether we have succeeded in building or protecting outspoken indigenous opposition to the abuses.
- Whether the abusive government has seen it necessary to engage with us—ideally by beginning a constructive dialogue but even, ironically, by denouncing us (since that shows that we have hit a raw nerve and are being taken into account).
- Whether the abusive government adopts and implements new policies aimed at ending abuses.
- Whether the abuses we have investigated and reported on decrease or come to an end.

What have you achieved so far?

In our more than 30 years in existence, Human Rights Watch has had significant impact. Some examples:

- We built political support for treaties banning the use of cluster munitions, child soldiers, and landmines.
- We took the lead in establishing the International Criminal Court, the first permanent tribunal for trying individuals for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
- We played a leading role in the conviction and effective life sentence of Liberian President Charles Taylor on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- We wrote the definitive history of the genocide in Rwanda and then testified as expert witnesses at the international tribunal where those responsible for atrocities are being tried.
- We won a Nobel Peace Prize with our partners in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines for our work to end the use of landmines.

In the past year, we have also made progress on several fronts:

- Amidst the ongoing political crisis in Ukraine, Human Rights Watch kept media attention on abuses by all sides and spurred Ukrainian officials to commit to investigating our findings on Ukrainian government use of cluster munitions.
- We helped extend the reach of international justice for serious crimes through the use of courts in Europe to try grave crimes committed abroad.
- Following our investigation on the abandonment and isolation of people with disabilities in the conflict in the Central African Republic, the UN Security Council—for the first time—increased protections for people with disabilities in its peacekeeping there.
- We persuaded the International Olympic Committee to include human rights protections in contracts with host cities.
- Following our research on abuses against migrant workers at a high-profile construction project in the United Arab Emirates, New York University committed to financially compensate up to 10,000 migrant workers.
- After we exposed how private probation companies trap low-level offenders in a cycle of debt, the US state of Georgia passed a new law to enhance oversight of probation companies, increasing the protection of poor people's rights in the United States.

Human Rights Watch in Sweden

The Human Rights Watch Swedish entity was founded in September 2014 to support the organization's work globally and to defend the rights of people worldwide. Our efforts in Sweden are led by director for development and advocacy Måns Molander. Måns is a Swedish lawyer and diplomat specializing in international relations and human rights. Before he started at Human Rights Watch, he was Head of the Human Rights Section at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the past year we have hosted several outreach events on a wide range of topics. We organized panels with our advocates and researchers to discuss our work in conflict zones across Syria and Ukraine. We have also pressed government officials to take on a stronger role in the fight against using explosive weapons in populated areas. A new of Human Rights

W and other parts of civil society seeks to ban this practice.

On the pressing issue of asylum-seekers and refugees in Europe, Human Rights Watch has conducted targeted advocacy with government offices and parliamentarians on several occasions to discuss the refugee situation and advocate for a rights-based approach. We have also published a new [report](#) on how climate change affects the human rights of people living in northern Kenya, around the Lake Turkana. The report was disseminated widely in Sweden. Following the release of the report, we met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry for Environment in preparation for the United Nations Climate Change summit in Paris.

In addition to Måns, several people are involved in the day to day activities of our Stockholm presence, such as Deputy Executive Director of Advocacy Bruno Stagno in Paris, Managing Director of Development Laura Boardman in London, and Development Associate Astrid Cederlöv, also in London. Continued outreach to Swedish media is assured by the media team in Vienna/Brussels. Moreover, there are Nordic colleagues such as Foundations Director Kristine Jensen in Copenhagen and Associate Director of Development Helena Lamb in Oslo.