

○ THE NETWORK OF CONCERNED HISTORIANS

A DECADE OF CAMPAIGNING

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A decade ago, the *Network of Concerned Historians* (NCH) was established. Its purpose was and still is to provide a bridge between international human-rights organisations campaigning for censored or persecuted historians and others concerned with the past on the one hand and the global community of historians on the other. The essay gives an overview of these campaigns and of the *Annual Reports* that NCH has produced. NCH's work amply demonstrates that the persecution of historians is no thing of the remote past or distant countries only. Solidarity with our persecuted colleagues is needed as urgently as ever. As Orwell said: "Imagination will not breed in captivity".

On 13 October 1995, the *Network of Concerned Historians* (NCH) was established at the History Department of the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Its purpose was and still is to provide a bridge between international human-rights organisations campaigning for censored or persecuted historians and others concerned with the past on the one hand and the global community of historians on the other. During the last decade, NCH participated in 30 such campaigns for cases in 18 countries on all continents. NCH also produced 11 *Annual Reports* about the domain where history and human rights intersect. The 2005 *Annual Report* contained entries on 61 countries. NCH will continue its efforts during the next decade. It eagerly hopes that many colleagues from all over the world (600 are currently on the NCH list) will join it. Solidarity with our persecuted colleagues is needed as urgently as ever.

ORIGINS

The NCH project resulted from three factors. The earliest was my research in the 1980s and 1990s on the postwar censorship of history. Some of the cases I studied were still ongoing and clearly called for more than research: they called for action also. The second cause was the escalating use of electronic mail in academic milieus since the mid-1990s. This facilitated communication with colleagues enormously. The final factor was the fact that for the first time the International Congress of Historical Sciences organised a roundtable in 1995 on the crucial subject of "Power, Liberty, and the Work of the Historian." Immediately after that congress in Montreal, I drafted a short mandate for a *Network of Concerned Historians* and encouraged colleagues to join the initiative. On Friday 13 October 1995, historian George Welling, a colleague at Groningen, created a website: www.let.rug.nl/nch (and later a mirror: www.dit.is/nch). He has continually updated and adapted it since. Historian Ingrid Sennema volunteered to revise the language of the longer *Annual Reports*, a task she has performed unflinchingly. NCH sprang from

this informal cooperation with no central office, no personnel, no budget, no board, and virtually no meetings. Its only assets were and are a clear mandate, spare time, e-mail, the Internet, and daily perseverance. Early in 2000, NCH became involved in a UNESCO initiative to establish a network of networks for academic freedom. Consequently, in June 2001 it became one of the founding members of the *Network of Education and Academic Rights* (NEAR), a global watchdog for academic freedom based in London (www.nearinternational.org). In addition to NCH, historical associations in Belgium, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland are now affiliated with NEAR. Since 2003 NCH has also had fraternal ties with *Academia Solidaria*, the academic-freedom initiative of the Spanish network *Historia a Debate* (www.h-debate.com), established in 2000.

OPERATION

Perhaps NCH's main characteristic is continuity. The mandate has remained basically the same since NCH's inception and the rhythm of activities has been relatively steady. The operation rests on four principles: universality, impartiality, independence, and distance. While the first three are rather obvious, the last one holds that NCH does not necessarily share the views of historians (and others) mentioned in its circulars. Three tasks are performed on a daily basis: reading and selecting history-related urgent appeals from international human-rights organisations; reading sources for the compilation of the *Annual Reports*; and, finally, the usual network logistics. When campaigns are launched (in all 57 original and follow-up campaign circulars were distributed for 30 cases), NCH members are always urged to write appeals in their professional capacity.

PERSECUTION

Is there any correspondence, one might ask, between the campaigns in which NCH participated and the *real* level of persecution of historians and others concerned with the past? NCH's information comes from two sources: human-rights organisations and historical associations. Until recently, NCH reported only from the former sources but this was not unproblematic. At times, international human-rights organisations did not report about cases of censorship or persecution, either because those fell outside their mandate or because they were simply not noticed. Today, I still come across such cases. At other times, the information from these human-rights organisations was too general to judge its importance for NCH in time for joining the campaign. Sometimes too, the information was clear enough, but I underestimated its importance. These shortcomings could be repaired partly by reporting about such overlooked cases in a next *Annual Report*. It is my hypothesis, then, that the *accumulated* campaigns and *Annual Reports* of NCH give a fair impression of the real situation of the persecution of the historical profession in the world *as far as the cruder and more visible forms are concerned*. As for the less visible types (from harassment to hidden forms of discrimination), NCH's ignorance is huge. Notably, it is under-informed about cases of dismissal – perhaps the most common sanction against historians around the globe.

TOPICS

Topics regularly figuring in NCH *Annual Reports* and campaigns can be divided into five groups. The first is, of course, the group of topics directly related to history, i.e., to historians, historical research, archives, archeology, history teaching and textbooks, and to popular history channels such as films, television, theater, novels, the Internet... The second group is memory-related, particularly the disturbance of commemorations. The third grasps freedom of information and expression issues: freedom of information and archive laws, archival access and secrecy, censorship, and defamation. The fourth group refers to questions of impunity: where impunity reigns, past crimes continue into the present and delicate questions of forensic anthropology, truth commissions, reparations for victims, and historical injustices arise. The final category contains cases of political and media activism of historians.

VICTIMS

Among the victims featuring in the campaigns, historians were obviously best represented. Related categories were (in order of importance) forensic anthropologists (who excavate mass graves with evidence of past atrocities), writers (including authors of historical novels), history students, archeologists, archeology students, history teachers, archivists, and truth-commission members. Four victims enjoyed a reputation beyond their country (Guatemalan bishop and truth-commission president Juan Gerardi; Chinese history student Wang Dan, the foremost student leader at Tiananmen Square in 1989; Iranian historian Hashem Aghajari, a close ally of former President Khatami; and Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk), but the others were known locally only.

IMPACT

NCH is light and flexible, but also small, vulnerable, and without power or authority. Only when members start writing appeals in their professional capacity, is some influence exerted. It is, however, impossible to determine the extent to which members participate in campaigns. Although there are encouraging signs of participation from historians worldwide and although some colleagues participate in every campaign, NCH's impact is difficult to measure. It is probably small and NCH is a long way from constituting an effective weapon. Naturally, NCH is not alone: it joins and intensifies existing initiatives. Perhaps its prime importance is that it spreads awareness among historians of the difficulties which those concerned with the past must confront. NCH's work amply demonstrates that the persecution of historians is no thing of the remote past or distant countries only.

SOLIDARITY

Why should we fight for historians' rights? For three good reasons. The first is solidarity: we should use our freedom on behalf of those to whom it is denied. Our professional rights are meant for *bona fide* historians everywhere, regardless of where they live, in democratic or non-democratic countries, and regardless of who they are, mainstream historians or their opponents. The second reason is self-interest. When our colleagues' right to free expression is in danger, then our own right to information is too, because we are deprived of the rich works which they could have produced. In the longer term, our own right to free expression will be harmed as well,

for we become obliged to write history on the basis of an impoverished array of information sources. The final reason is that fighting for historians' rights supports the integrity of historiography and opposes organised forms of oblivion. What George Orwell said six decades ago, remains true: "At present we know only that... imagination... will not breed in captivity" (Orwell 1962: 299).

NOTE: A table listing and categorising all the campaigns undertaken by the Network of Concerned Historians from 1995 to 2006 can be found in the Appendix beginning on the next page.

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Cite this article as: De Baets, Antoon. 2006. 'The Network of Concerned Historians: A decade of campaigning'. *History Australia* 3 (1). pp. 16.1–16.4. DOI: 10.2104/ha060016.

APPENDIX

The Network of Concerned Historians in Action: A Tableau of Campaigns (1995–2006) <i>— as of 24 January 2006 —</i>		
Year	Country	Name (gender) (date of birth) profession (number of appeals) [sources] * reason for persecution [persecuted previously: y = yes] + charges ~ history of persecution; probable current status
1996	Albania	Elvira Shapplo (f) historian; Vladimir Qiriaqi (m) archeologist, et alii (1) [AI] * published photograph of former Communist ruler Enver Hoxha in guide book. + distributing anti-constitutional writings. ~ detained; case dismissed; probably released.
	China	Wang Dan (m) (?1969–) history student (1) [AAAS] * leader of 1989 Tiananmen protests; signatory of pro-democracy petitions [y]. + conspiring to subvert government. ~ detained; incommunicado 17 months; 11 years' prison; 2 years' suspension political rights; expelled after 18 months; living in USA.
1998	Rwanda	Philomène Mukabarali (f) (?1943–) college director (1) [AI] * possessed leaflets expressing support for (pre–1959) monarchy. + endangering state security. ~ detained; tried; shortly imprisoned; released.
	Burma/ Myanmar	Ko Aung Tun (m) (1967–), U Myo Htun (m) (?1949–), historians (2) [AI/PEN] * wrote 7-volume history of Burmese student movement [y]. + collaborating with terrorist groups. ~ solitary confinement; tortured; 17 (later 13) and 7 years' prison respectively; U Myo Htun possibly released in 2004.
	Palestinian Authority	Wael Ali Farraj (m) (?1975–) history student (1) [AI] * allegedly supported Islamist group. + no. ~ detained; ill-treated; not tried; release ordered in 1999; possibly still in prison.
	Mexico	Andrés Aubry (m) (French) historian, anthropologist; Angélica Inda (f) archivist (1) [AAAS] * compiled archives about Maya Indians; assisted in peace talks between government and Zapatistas [y]. + no. ~ intimidated; harassed; archives confiscated; current status unknown.

Table 1 (a)

The Network of Concerned Historians in Action: A Tableau of Campaigns (1995–2006) — as of 24 January 2006 —		
Year	Country	Name (gender) (date of birth) profession (number of appeals) [sources] * reason for persecution [persecuted previously: y = yes] + charges ~ history of persecution; probable current status
1999	Ethiopia	Gamachu Malka Fufa (m) (?1957–), Garuma Bekele (m) (?1960–), Tesfaye Deressa (m) (?1959–), writers (all interested in Oromo past) (1) [PEN] * journalism, human-rights activities on behalf of Oromo minority. + armed conspiracy and involvement with Oromo Liberation Front. ~ imprisoned without trial; solitary confinement; all released and exiled.
	Guatemala	Juan Gerardi Conedera (m) (1922–98) auxiliary archbishop (1) [AI] * coordinated Catholic truth commission (REMHI) report <i>Guatemala: Nunca más</i> (detailing abuses in 1960–96 civil war) [y]. + no. ~ assassinated; witnesses, lawyers, prosecutors, judges involved in trial threatened; sentences of 4 perpetrators reduced; 1 perpetrator killed in prison.
	Palestinian Authority	Abdulsittar Qassem (m) (?1949–), historian, political scientist, et alii (4) [AAAS] * signed petition accusing government of corruption [y]. + no. ~ arrested; released; rearrested; released.
2000	China	Song Yongyi (m) (1949–), (Chinese-born American) historian, librarian (3) [AAUP] * collected published documents on Cultural Revolution [y]. + purchase and illegal provision of intelligence to foreign people. ~ detained; 6 months' prison; released; expelled.
	Burma/ Myanmar	Ma Khin Khin Leh (f) (?1966–), history teacher, et alii (1) [AAAS] * (with others) planned pro-democracy march on Martyr's Day. + unknown. ~ detained instead of spouse; life imprisonment; place of detention unknown.
	India	Anonymous (m), historian (1) [SAR] * coordinating editor of series on independence struggle (1938–47). + no. ~ dismissed; current status unknown.
	Ethiopia	Badada Bayene (m) history student, et alii (2) [AI] * fight between Oromo and other students after Tigrayan student presented paper, in which historical book with derogatory term for "Oromo" quoted. + unknown. ~ arrested; fear of torture; released.

Table 1 (b)

The Network of Concerned Historians in Action: A Tableau of Campaigns (1995–2006)

— as of 24 January 2006 —

Year	Country	Name (gender) (date of birth) profession (number of appeals) [sources] * reason for persecution [persecuted previously: y = yes] + charges ~ history of persecution; probable current status
2001	Turkey	Emrullah Karagoz (m) (?1978–), archeology student (4) [AI] * membership in legal pro-Kurdish political party HADEP [y]. + aiding illegal organization. ~ detained; tortured; released; rearrested; current status unknown.
	China	Tohti Tunyaz (m) (1959–) historian (3) [PEN] * research into Uighur history; received copy of 50-years-old list of documents on 1944 East Turkestan Independence Movement. + illegally acquiring state secrets for foreign persons, inciting separatism. ~ detained; tried; sentenced; appeal; 11 years' prison; 2 years' suspension political rights.
	Guatemala	Matilde Leonor González Izas (f) historian (1) [AI] * research into mechanisms used by military to control local communities [y]. + no. ~ threats after hiding; current status unknown.
2002	China	Xu Zerong (m) (1954–) historian (1) [PEN] * sent photocopied classified documents from Korean War abroad; active as publisher in Hong Kong. + leaking state secrets; economic crimes. ~ detained; held incommunicado; 13 years' prison; appeal pending.
	Guatemala	Members of forensic anthropology foundations (2) [AI] * exhumation of civil-war victims to serve as evidence in genocide trials [y]. + no. ~ threats and intimidation; threats continue.
	Iran	Hashem Aghajari (m) (1957–) historian (6) [AI/PEN/AAAS] * speech called for religious renewal: Muslims should not “blindly follow religious leaders.” + apostasy, blasphemy. ~ 74 lashes; 8 years' internal exile; 10-year ban on teaching; death penalty repealed, commuted to 4 years' prison; death penalty imposed again, revoked again; 3 years' prison; released; ban lifted.
	Argentina	Fernanda Sanssone (f) archeology student, et alii (1) [AI] * exhumation of graves of disappeared. + no. ~ threats; current status unknown.

Table 1 (c)

The Network of Concerned Historians in Action: A Tableau of Campaigns (1995–2006) — as of 24 January 2006 —		
Year	Country	Name (gender) (date of birth) profession (number of appeals) [sources] * reason for persecution [persecuted previously: y = yes] + charges ~ history of persecution; probable current status
2003	Kazakhstan	Anonymous (f) (1956–) (Armenian-born) art historian, archeologist (1) [SAR] * research unrelated to Kazakhstan and Kazakh nationalism not approved. + no. ~ dismissed; unemployed.
	Guatemala	Fredy Peccerelli (m) forensic anthropologist, et alii (3) [AI/AAAS] * exhumation of civil war victims to serve as evidence in genocide trials [y]. + no. ~ threats and intimidation; threats continue.
	Kuwait	Yasser al-Habib (m) (?1973–) writer (5) [AI/PEN] * lectured on Islamic (also Wahhabi) historical issues to private audience. + defaming companions of Prophet; attempting to overthrow regime. ~ abducted; detained; ill-treated; amnestied; in hiding; sentenced in absentia to 10 years' prison; home raided.
2004	Turkmenistan	Rakhim Esenov (m) (?1926–) (Russian) author of historical novel, et alii (3) [AI/PEN] * imported copies of historical novel banned and its “historical errors” criticized by president [y]. + inciting social, national, and religious hatred. ~ detained; released after 16 days; forbidden to leave country.
	Bangladesh	Humayun Azad (m) (?1947–) author of historical novel (1) [PEN] * novel on religious groups who collaborated with Pakistani army in 1971 independence war. + no. ~ death threats; stabbed; coma; attacks and injuries; new death threats; deceased.
	Turkey	Hakan Albayrak (m) journalist (1) [PEN] * wrote article saying that Atatürk was buried without funeral prayer. + insulting memory of Atatürk. ~ sentenced to 15 months' prison (of which 5 to serve); released.
2005	Armenia	Yektan Turkyilmaz (m) (?1972–) (Turkish) cultural anthropologist (2) [PEN/AAAS] * unaware that he was required to declare any books over 50 years old at customs. + export of “contraband” goods. ~ arrested and imprisoned; tried; released.

Table 1 (d)

The Network of Concerned Historians in Action: A Tableau of Campaigns (1995–2006) <i>— as of 24 January 2006 —</i>		
Year	Country	Name (gender) (date of birth) profession (number of appeals) [sources] * reason for persecution [persecuted previously: y = yes] + charges ~ history of persecution; probable current status
2005 cont	Turkey	Orhan Pamuk (m) (1952–) writer (3) [PEN] * statements abroad on Armenian genocide of 1915 and Kurdish insurrection of 1984–2000 [y]. + publicly denigrating Turkish identity. ~ proceedings ended.
	Peru	Luis Alberto Rueda Curimania (m) archeologist, Carlos Alberto Suarez Canlla (m) odontologist, Máximo Ángel Banda Roca (m) anthropologist (1) [AAAS] * exhumations at a military base, Ayacucho, and analyzing the human remains recovered from it. + no. ~ death threats.
	Iran	Yasub al-Din Rastgari (m) ([1927]–) Shi'a scholar (1) [PEN] * historical work critical of policies of historic characters, including Wahhabi sect personalities. + insulting Islam and causing schism. ~ charged, sentenced to 4 years' prison.
Abbreviations:		AAAS – American Association for the Advancement of Science. AAUP – American Association of University Professors. AI – Amnesty International. PEN – International PEN Writers in Prison Committee. SAR – Scholars at Risk

Table 1 (e)