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The Network of Concerned Historians Reports on History and Human Rights

By Allen Mikaelian

The Annual Report of the [Network of Concerned Historians](#), released over the summer, continues a series of disturbing reports that document cases of oppression, abuse, censorship, and state secrecy directly involving historians or, are of particular interest to historians throughout the world. Drawing from news sources and reports from human rights organizations, the 2012 NCH report details issues in 98 countries. Some of the countries covered include:

- Afghanistan, where official history textbooks, funded by the US, do not include post 1973 history: "In order to promote a single national identity, the depoliticization and deethnification textbooks were deemed necessary."
- Tunisia, where Mohamed Talbi, a politically active historian and chairman of the Academic Council of the Academy of Sciences, Humanities and Arts, received death threats from extremists who charged him with apostasy.
- Mauritius, where the Ministry of Tertiary Education made moves to drop "courses in anthropology, history, international affairs, and political science at the University of Mauritius, because they did not offer students job opportunities."
- Cambodia, where "Flawed proceedings and allegations of government interference with the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), the United Nations-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal, cast a shadow over its credibility."
- The United States, where historian Lisa Karbatkin's lawsuit against the New York Department of Records and Information Services, over documents relating to the use of confidential informants who assisted the New York City Board of Education's anti-communist investigations, failed to gain her complete access, but granted her access to material that would not identify the informants.

Antoon De Baets, associate professor of contemporary history at University of Groningen, the Netherlands, founded the NCH in 1995, as a result of his research into historical censorship. As he explained in his 2009 book, *Responsible History*, "Gradually, it dawned upon me that some of the cases of censorship and persecution I studied were ongoing still and clearly called for more than research: they also called for action." The primary activity of the NCH is the creation and dissemination of an annual report, which, De Baets notes, "contains news about the domain where history and human rights intersect... as reported by various human rights organizations and other sources."

Since 1995, the NCH has grown from a small mailing list of 100 to about 1,300 today. It has published 18 annual reports, and has participated in 51 campaigns. NCH campaigns target a particular case and encourage historians to participate in letter-writing, in their official capacities as historians. Currently, the NCH is asking for letters in support of BÜsra Ersanli, a professor and political scientist who is, according to PEN international, facing trial in Turkey for "leadership of an illegal organization."

The online home of the NCH is www.concernedhistorians.org, where the Annual Reports dating back to 1995, information on over 250 legal decisions relating to historical work, and regular updates on active cases and campaigns can be found.

—Allen Mikaelian is the associate editor of Perspectives on History and media relations coordinator for the AHA.

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