



GENEVA SUMMIT for  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
and **DEMOCRACY**

17 May 2023

**MEDIA KIT**

# INVITATION FOR INTERVIEWS

The 15th Annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy will take place in Geneva on May 17, 2023, with the aim of placing urgent cases and causes on the international agenda. Please find below information on the speakers.

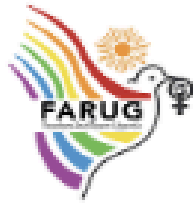
**To schedule virtual or in-person interviews, please contact Pat by email: [media@genevasummit.org](mailto:media@genevasummit.org)**

The Geneva Summit is a major annual event that shines a spotlight on urgent human rights situations that require global attention. It provides human rights heroes, activists, former political prisoners and the family members of current political prisoners with a unique platform to testify about their personal struggles for democracy and freedom, while building an international community to challenge dictatorships.

The event is attended by hundreds of dissidents, victims, diplomats, journalists, student leaders and other concerned citizens. Thousands more watch online.

The Geneva Summit is sponsored by a coalition of 25 human rights NGOs from around the world. It has been featured in media around the globe, including CNN, AFP, AP, DW, the Wall Street Journal and The Australian.

# PARTNERS



# PROGRAM

## Morning Session

### 10:00 WELCOME

**Hillel Neuer**, Executive Director of United Nations Watch, on behalf of the 25 NGO co-sponsors of the Geneva Summit

### 10:10 OPENING ADDRESS

**Evgenia Kara-Murza**, Human rights activist, wife of jailed Russian prisoner of conscience and opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza

### 10:20 TYRANNY, OPPRESSION AND ATROCITIES IN CHINA

*Moderator: Yang Jianli*, president of Initiatives for China, former political prisoner

- **Peter Yang**, Son of Guo Feixiong, imprisoned Chinese “barefoot lawyer” and civil rights activist
- **Dr. Gyal Lo**, Academic expert on China’s mass use of boarding schools to eradicate Tibetan identity and culture
- **Frances Hui**, First Hong Kong activist granted political asylum in the US, Director of We the Hong Kongers organization
- **Kalbinur Sidik**, Uyghur activist, witness to Chinese reeducation camp atrocities, survivor of forced sterilization

### 11:10 THE TRAGEDY OF ZIMBABWE

**Fadzayi Mahere**, Constitutional lawyer and opposition spokesperson arrested repeatedly in Zimbabwe

### 11:20 ESCAPING THE TALIBAN

**Nila Ibrahimi**, 15-year-old Hazara activist who narrowly escaped the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan

### 11:30 PRESENTATION OF 2023 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S RIGHTS AWARD

**Shima Babaei**, Activist imprisoned for removing hijab, daughter of forcibly disappeared dissident Ebrahim Babaei

### 11:45 THE IRANIAN STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM: A CALL FOR GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

*Special Session on Iran: Supporting the Iranian People in Parliaments Worldwide*

*Moderator: Hillel Neuer*, Executive Director of United Nations Watch

- **Hadrien Ghomi**, French MP outspoken for victims of repression in Iran
- **Alireza Akhondi**, Swedish MP campaigning to designate IRGC as terrorist entity
- **Ali Ehsassi**, Chair of Foreign Affairs Committee, Canadian Parliament

## **Afternoon Session**

### **14:30 THE UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS**

**Dolkun Isa**, President of the World Uyghur Congress

### **14:40 NORTH KOREA: ESCAPE FROM STARVATION AND OPPRESSION**

**Songmi Han**, North Korean escapee and survivor of extreme poverty, oppression, and abandonment

### **14:50 DIARY OF AN INVASION: EYEWITNESS TO RUSSIA'S WAR ON UKRAINE**

**Andrey Kurkov**, Renowned Ukrainian novelist, author of "Diary of an Invasion" on Russia's war

### **15:00 THE TERRIBLE COST OF RESISTING PUTIN**

**Anastasia Shevchenko**, First dissident convicted under Russia's "undesirable organizations" law, profiled in Oscar-shortlisted film "Anastasia"

### **15:10 FIGHTING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

**Marie-Claire Kakpotia**, Survivor and activist fighting to end Female Genital Mutilation

### **15:20 ERDOĞAN, JOURNALISM & THE ELECTIONS IN TURKEY**

**Nevşin Mengü**, Turkish journalist dropped from CNN Türk after she criticized President Erdogan

*Interviewer: Melissa Mahtani*, journalist, former CNN producer

### **15:40 THE HIDDEN ISLAND: THE LIFE OF CUBANS UNDER DICTATORSHIP**

**Abraham Jiménez Enoa**, Prominent Cuban journalist forced into exile, grandson of the bodyguard to Fidel Castro and Che Guevara

### **15:50 VENEZUELA: BUILDING UNITY TO CHALLENGE OPPRESSION**

**Hasler Iglesias**, Venezuelan youth leader, went into hiding to escape arrest by Maduro regime

### **16:00 PRESENTATION OF 2023 COURAGE AWARD**

**Félix Maradiaga**, Nicaraguan opposition leader and former political prisoner, targeted by the government on false criminal charges

*Presenter: Javier El-Hage*, Chief Legal and Policy Officer at Human Rights Foundation

*Interviewer: Melissa Mahtani*, journalist, former CNN producer

### **17:00 END OF #GENEVASUMMIT2023**

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# ALIREZA AKHONDI

On *IRAN*

## BIOGRAPHY

Alireza Akhondi is a Swedish MP committed to supporting the people of Iran.

Born in Iran, Akhondi emigrated to Sweden in 1992 and has been a member of Swedish Parliament since 2018. He currently sits on the Civil Affairs Committee and the Center Party's National Party Board.

Akhondi has been particularly devoted to social issues relating to freedom, equality and human rights. In 2015, he supported Serbia and Greece during the refugee crisis, organizing aid shipments from private donations. He similarly helped Ukraine in their humanitarian efforts in the months following Putin's invasion in February 2022.

Amidst the ongoing protests in Iran, Akhondi has dedicated himself to advocating for the Iranian people in their struggle for freedom and democracy.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English, Persian & Swedish

## MEDIA

[Iran International – Alireza Akhondi: We will stand without fear until the victory of the revolution of the brave people of Iran \(Farsi\) \(11 February 2023\)](#)





# SHIMA BABAEI

On *IRAN*

## BIOGRAPHY

Shima Babaei is an Iranian women's rights activist forced into exile in 2020 and daughter to Ebrahim Babaei, a political prisoner of the Islamic Republic since 2021.



An architecture student, Shima became a prominent women's rights activist in Iran. According to CNN, she became synonymous with the "Girls of Revolution Street" anti-hijab demonstrations from 2017-2019. Because of her activism, she was imprisoned twice and placed in Iran's infamous Evin prison, where she endured lengthy periods in solitary confinement and was denied access to legal representation. Facing six years of imminent imprisonment, a travel ban, and the deprivation of her citizenship rights, Shima fled Iran in 2018.

Continuing the fight beyond her country's borders, Shima advocates against gender discrimination and mandatory hijab. With the arrival of the Iran protests in September 2022, she became a central voice in the Iranian diaspora and was part of the first group of activists to meet with French President Macron. Her commitment to the women of Iran remains steadfast; so too is her dedication to raising her father's case.

An activist in his own right, Shima's father Ebrahim Babaei was a former professor of electrical engineering who was forcibly disappeared and imprisoned in December 2021 while attempting to flee Iran. Over the course of his life, he's born lashings and arrests for peacefully protesting the IRGC and for supporting his daughter. Today he faces imprisonment and multiple floggings.

## LANGUAGE(S)

Farsi

## MEDIA

[BBC News – An Iranian's search for the truth about her missing father \(3 May 2023\)](#)

[Iran International – Struggle has become a part of the Iranian people's lifestyle \(Farsi\) \(16 November 2022\)](#)

[Iran International – Shima Babaei, a human rights and civil activist, talks about strikes and protests in Iran \(12 October 2022\)](#)

# ALI EHSASSI

On *IRAN*

## BIOGRAPHY

Ali Ehsassi is a Canadian MP of Iranian heritage who serves as Chair of Canada's Foreign Affairs Committee.

The son of an Iranian diplomat, Ehsassi was born in Geneva and raised in New York City and Tehran. He and his family permanently emigrated from Iran following the revolution in 1979 and later settled in Canada. Ehsassi was elected a member of parliament in 2015 and has been chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee since June 2022.

Over the course of his political career, Ehsassi never abandoned his heritage and the plight of the people in Iran. He has publicly condemned the Islamic Republic's human rights abuses and has urged Canada to refrain from supporting the regime's terrorist agenda.

With the ongoing protests in Iran, Ehsassi has been an outspoken supporter of the Iranian people.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English

## MEDIA

[CBC News – Iranian-Canadian Liberal MP says government response to situation in Iran 'too little, too late' \(3 October 2022\)](#)



# HADRIEN GHOMI

On *IRAN*

## BIOGRAPHY

Hadrien Ghomi is a French MP central to France's response to the Iran Protests.

Ghomi is a first-term Member of Parliament from the governing Renaissance Party, who sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee and serves as party whip.

In wake of the mass protests following the death of Mahsa Amini in Iranian custody, Ghomi introduced a resolution in support of the Iranian protestors against the Islamic Republic in November 2022. It was approved unanimously.

Ghomi graduated from Sciences Po Lille in 2012 with a master's degree in public policy. He also earned degrees in politics from the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) and public law from Panthéon-Sorbonne University.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English, French & Spanish

## MEDIA

[Télématin – Les 4 Vérités avec Hadrien Ghomi \(19 December 2022\)](#)

[French Parliament – Proposition de résolution: Soutien au mouvement pour la liberté du peuple iranien \(30 November 2022\)](#)

[French Parliament – Question au gouvernement sur la question d'Iran \(4 October 2022\)](#)

[Sud Radio – Hadrien Ghomi: "Il y a une volonté, de la part de l'opposition, de mettre à mal le gouvernement." \(26 July 2022\)](#)



# SONGMI HAN

On *NORTH KOREA*

## BIOGRAPHY

Songmi Han is a North Korean defector who survived extreme poverty, oppression, and abandonment.

The arc of Han's life was dictated by two dramatic escapes made by her mother. The first escape was from Han's abusive father, leaving Han and her mother homeless and in near fatal starvation. Then in 2005, Han's mother escaped to South Korea. Abandoned and forced to perform manual labour to survive, young Han would receive a letter from her mother only two years later.

In exile, Han's mother sought to bring her daughter to safety and made the necessary arrangements for her to be smuggled. However, without knowledge of the freedom outside North Korea, Han refused her mother's efforts. It would take three attempts for Han to eventually agree to escape North Korea. She would reunite with her mother in South Korea after six years apart.

Suffering from the traumas of her childhood in North Korea and struggling to adjust to her new home, Han remained silent for a decade before co-authoring her memoir *Greenlight to Freedom: A North Korean Daughter's Search for Her Mother and Herself*.

Currently studying social welfare at college, Han is committed to speaking on the horrors of life in North Korea as a Keynote Speaker and North Korean Refugee Author Fellow at the Seoul-based non-profit Freedom Speakers International (FSI).

## LANGUAGE(S)

English & Korean

## MEDIA

[Voice of North Korea Yeomni Park – I risked my life to escape from North Korea \(16 October 2022\)](#)

[Korea Times – North Korean girl's story of searching for her mother, freedom and herself \(22 June 2022\)](#)

[North Korea Freedom Coalition – Unshackle the women of North Korea \(12 May 2022\)](#)



# FRANCES HUI

On *HONG KONG*

## BIOGRAPHY

Frances Hui is the first Hong Kong activist to be granted political asylum in the United States following the adoption of the National Security Law in 2020.



Hui became an activist at the early age of 14 as a standing committee member of Scholarism, a Hong Kong pro-Democracy student group known for staunchly defending the territory's education policy from Beijing influence and leading the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Going on to defend local interests and volunteering for numerous civil society initiatives, Hui retained her fervour for Hong Kong democracy even once she left to study journalism in the US in September 2016.

In April 2019, Hui made headlines with her article [“I am from Hong Kong, not China.”](#) a piece that discussed the foundations of pro-democracy activism in Hong Kong. Despite being abroad during the subsequent 2019-2020 protests, Hui did not abandon the democracy movement. She organized global solidarity rallies and briefed US officials on the plight of her people while facing scrutiny and opposition from the Chinese nationalists around her.

After graduating in 2020, Hui returned to Hong Kong. However, fearing for her safety upon the imposition of the National Security Law, she made the difficult position to seek asylum in the US shortly after.

Hui's activism led her to establish *We the Hongkongers*, an organization dedicated to promoting and strengthening the culture and identity of Hongkongers abroad. Her role as Policy and Advocacy coordinator for the *Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation* allows her to also seek CCP regime accountability and raise the issue of Hong Kong political prisoners to the international agenda.

## LANGUAGE(S)

Cantonese, English & Mandarin

## MEDIA

[Freedom Records – A Proud Hongkonger in America \(1 December 2022\)](#)

[The Diplomat – Op-ed: China is Making Support for Democracy a Crime in Hong Kong \(11 January 2021\)](#)

[NBC News – How this young Hong Kong student is fighting back against China \(23 August 2019\)](#)

# NILA IBRAHIMI

*On AFGHANISTAN*

## BIOGRAPHY

Nila Ibrahimimi is a 15-year-old Hazara activist who narrowly escaped the Taliban following their return in August 2021 through the initiative of the 30Birds Foundation.



In March 2021, when the Kabul Directorate of Education issued a discriminatory order banning school girls over the age of 12 from singing in public, Ibrahimimi courageously posted a video message through song encouraging girls to stand up for their education and their rights. The video gained outpouring support on social media. Despite her young age, Ibrahimimi galvanized others to protest, a phenomenon that resulted in a reversal of the Directorate's ban.

Upon the overthrow of Kabul in August 2021, Ibrahimimi's online notoriety as an activist and her status as a member of the Hazara ethnic community rendered her a target of the Taliban. As a result, she and her family undertook an arduous journey to flee their homeland, a decision that brought immense danger.

With land travel as their sole option, Ibrahimimi and her family travelled alongside other members of the Hazara community to Pakistan through the help of the 30Birds Foundation, an organization that instrumentalized the escape of over 450 Afghans to safety from Kabul. Their journey required repeated confrontations with the Taliban at checkpoints, dodging detection by the smallest margin. After reaching their safe house in Pakistan and hiding for a year, Ibrahimimi and her family eventually settled in Saskatoon, Canada.

In Canada, Ibrahimimi uses her freedom as an opportunity to continually platform the oppression of Afghan girls and Hazaras left behind under Taliban rule. She raises her voice to injustice through song, advocating for women's rights, peace, and humanity as a member of the Sound of Afghanistan Music Band.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English

## MEDIA

[30Birds Interview – Nila Ibrahimimi \(28 November 2022\)](#)

# DOLKUN ISA

*On UYGHUR PERSECUTION*

## BIOGRAPHY

Dolkun Isa is President of the World Uyghur Congress.

As a young adult, Isa became a champion for democracy and Uyghur rights and development. In 1988, he was a student-leader of the pro-democracy demonstrations in East Turkestan. He also founded the Students' Science and Culture Union at his university and worked on programs to eliminate illiteracy and to promote science for Uyghurs.



Due to his activism, Isa became the target of intense persecution from the Chinese government, a reality that forced him to flee China in 1994. Since resettling in Europe, he has dedicated his life to advocating for the rights of the Uyghur people, including at the United Nations, the institutions of the European Union and in individual states.

After having his name leaked to the CCP by the UN in 2012, Isa's entire family was retaliated against. His two brothers were sentenced to long prison terms and his mother was sent to a camp, where she later died in 2018. Despite this, Isa continues to advocate for the rights of the Uyghur people and to put an end to the ongoing genocide.

In 2022, Isa published "China Freedom Trap," detailing his experiences as a Uyghur activist and political figure in the West and the subsequent barriers he's faced as a result of China's global influence.

Isa has earned global recognition for his activism, winning the 2016 Human Rights Award from the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and the World Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy in 2019.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English, Mandarin, German, Turkish & Uyghur

## MEDIA

[BBC Select – Chinese Uyghurs - Whistleblowers: Inside The UN \(12 July 2022\)](#)

[The Washington Post – Opinion: The U.N human rights chief has failed us, our families - and the world \(1 June 2022\)](#)

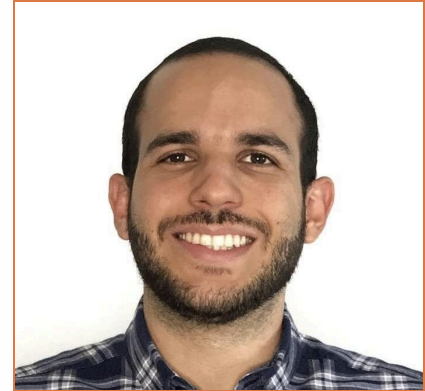
[VICE News – The Fight To Protect China's Muslim Minority \(26 December 2018\)](#)

# HASLER IGLESIAS

*On VENEZUELA*

## BIOGRAPHY

Hasler Iglesias is a Venezuelan social and political activist forced into exile in 2022.



Iglesias first became a democracy and human rights activist in 2010, when he was elected as Security General of the Engineering Student' Union at his university. Four years later, his activism intensified when he took part in the country's Student Movement, leading peaceful demonstrations urging regime and policy reform. His devotion to the cause further developed in his position as National Youth Coordinator at Voluntad Popular – a progressive and socially democratic political party in Venezuela – and in his involvement in several civil society initiatives.

As Iglesias' prominence within the country grew, he rapidly became a target of harassment and persecution by President Maduro. In 2015, he received death threats because of his activism. The following year, he was temporarily detained by authorities, preventing him from taking part in Venezuela's Universal Periodic Review at the UN.

The Venezuelan regime's persecution of Iglesias reached its peak in July 2021 when he and four other political leaders were falsely accused of cooperating with criminal gangs just days after an altercation with law enforcement. Arrest warrants were issued soon after, igniting a manhunt for the dissidents through a slew of raids and arbitrary detentions. Forced into hiding for six months, Iglesias narrowly escaped arrest and fled the country.

While Iglesias has since resettled in Spain, his commitment to Venezuela's democratic cause persists. He supports on-the-field initiatives in his home country and continues denouncing the regime's rampant human rights violations.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English & Spanish

## MEDIA

[Forum2000 – Transnational Repression: Authoritarian tactics to silence dissent across borders \(4 August 2022\)](#)

[Estada de Alarma Oficial – The case of the Spaniard persecuted by Chavismo; interview with Hasler Iglesias \(15 August 2021\)](#)

[VIVO – Hasler Iglesias: “It is the greatest threat this university has had in contemporary history” \(27 February 2020\)](#)

[Los Angeles Times – ‘I won’t let fear stop me’: A Venezuelan opposition leader fights on against an embattled president \(19 April 2017\)](#)



# SOOMAYA JAVADI

*On AFGHANISTAN*

## BIOGRAPHY

Soomaya Javadi is a young Hazara activist who fled Afghanistan following the overthrow of Kabul in 2021 through the initiative of the 30Birds Foundation.



With the return of the Taliban, Javadi's future as a dentistry student and a woman in Afghanistan was in peril. Her Hazara ethnicity further jeopardized her fate, belonging to one of the most targeted ethnic groups in the country and one historically persecuted by the Taliban during their initial rule in 1996.

Facing looming oppression, Javadi made the difficult decision to depart her homeland, one that carried immense danger and uncertainty. Racing to reach Pakistan, she and her family embarked on a nail-biting journey, forced to pass through various Taliban checkpoints.

In October 2021, Javadi and her family quickly resettled from Pakistan to Saskatoon, Canada with the first group of Afghan refugees brought by the 30Birds Foundation, an organization that successfully evacuated over 450 Afghans to safety from Kabul.

While Javadi left Afghanistan, she never abandoned her people. She continues to advocate against the intersectional racial and gender-based discrimination of Hazara women in Afghanistan and has taken part in numerous rallies and initiatives in the #StopHazaraGenocide movement. She has also begun rebuilding her life, working as an early childhood educator supporting refugee children and becoming a full-time student in the Biomedical Foundation Program at the University of Saskatoon.

Javadi's courage and activism drew the recognition of His Royal Highness Prince Charles, who invited her to meet him in Ottawa, Canada's capital, in May 2022.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English

## MEDIA

[CBC Listen – She fled Afghanistan. Now this young refugee is helping settle others in Saskatoon \(10 November 2022\)](#)

[CBC News – Canada gave me a new outlook on life, but my heart aches for friends left behind in Afghanistan \(28 June 2022\)](#)

[The Global Voice: World Refugee Day with Soomaya Javadi \(20 June 2022\)](#)

# ABRAHAM JIMÉNEZ ENOA

On *CUBA*

## BIOGRAPHY

Abraham Jiménez Enoa is a prominent Afro-Cuban journalist forced into exile.



Over the course of his journalistic career, Jiménez Enoa has devoted himself to revealing the true realities of life under authoritarian rule in Cuba. His work has come at the expense of repeated persecution by the Cuban authorities. Despite facing violent interrogations, arbitrarily enforced restrictions, blocked internet access, and house arrest, he continued writing, cementing himself as an outspoken critic.

As a columnist for *The Washington Post* and a regular contributor to numerous publications such as *The New York Times*, *BBC World*, *Aljazeera*, *Vice News*, *El País*, and *Revista Gatopardo*, Jiménez Enoa has exposed gross human rights violations committed by the Cuban regime.

Following his coverage of the 2021 anti-government protests, Jiménez Enoa was confronted with an impossible choice by the Cuban regime. He could either leave the country immediately or stay forever and face imprisonment and the persecution of his family. He fled for Spain with his family soon after.

In exile, Jiménez Enoa published “La Isla Oculta: Historias de Cuba” (translation: The Hidden Island: Stories of Cuba), a compilation of his articles on the real Cuba. Highlighting the regime’s violent and undemocratic rule, the book highlights the continued plight of the ordinary Cuban in face of totalitarianism.

Jiménez Enoa has earned international recognition for his work, winning the International Press Freedom Award from the CPJ among other distinctions.

## LANGUAGES

Spanish

## MEDIA

[VOA – Cuban journalist prioritizes truth over revolutionary roots \(03 October 2022\)](#)

[The Washington Post – How Cubas investment in artists came back to haunt it \(11 July 2022\)](#)

[The Washington Post – Opinion: I had to leave Cuba for the first time to feel like a real person \(22 February 2022\)](#)

# EVGENIA KARA-MURZA

*On RUSSIA*

## BIOGRAPHY

Evgenia Kara-Murza is a Russian human rights activist and wife of political prisoner [Vladimir Kara-Murza](#), twice-poisoned Russian opposition leader, imprisoned since 11 April 2022 for protesting the war on Ukraine



Born in Russia's Far East, Evgenia graduated with honors from the Moscow State Linguistic University. She worked as a translator and interpreter in Russian, English, and French for pro-democracy NGOs including The International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, The Institute of Modern Russia, and PEN America.

She subsequently joined her husband Vladimir at the Free Russia Foundation, a non-profit, nonpartisan international organization supporting civil society and democratic development in Russia. Advocating for human rights accountability and promoting civil society and democratic change in Russia, she serves as the foundation's Advocacy Coordinator.

Evgenia currently lives in exile with her two daughters. Alongside her work for Free Russia, she travels across the globe advocating for her husband's release.

## LANGUAGES

English, French, & Russian

## MEDIA

[The Washington Post – My husband is in a Russian jail for speaking the truth \(1 June 2022\)](#)

[Amanpour & Co – Twice-Poisoned Putin Critic Arrested. His Wife Speaks Out – \(21 April 2022\)](#)

[CNN – 'He believes in what he's doing.' Wife of detained Kremlin critic speaks out \(12 June 2022\)](#)

# ANDREY KURKOV

On *THE WAR ON UKRAINE*



## BIOGRAPHY

Andrey Kurkov is a highly-acclaimed Russian-born Ukrainian novelist who writes in Russian.

A democracy activist, Andrey is an unwavering critic of Vladimir Putin. Because of this, his books were banned in Russia in 2014 and he was placed on a Kremlin list of pro-Ukrainian activists. In this capacity, Andrey is also a contributor to various publications worldwide including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *La Liberation*, *Le Monde*, *Die Welt*, and *Die Zeit*.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Andrey was forced to stay in Ukraine as he was at the age of conscription. During that period, he regularly reported on the situation on the ground and published "Diary of an Invasion," a collection of his writings and broadcasts from Kyiv.

The author of over 20 novels and 10 children's books, Andrey was named "Ukraine's most famous living writer" by *The New York Times*. Through notable books such as "Death and the Penguin" and "Grey Bees," he is best known for his dark humour, and depictions of the Soviet and post-Soviet realities with elements of surrealism.

Andrey has been recognized worldwide for both his novels and activism. These include awards such as the Halldor Laxness Prize, the National Order of the Legion of Honour, the Medici Prize for Best Foreign Novel, The Freedom of Expression Award, and the Hans and Sophie Scholl Prize.

## LANGUAGE(S)

Russia, Ukrainian, English, French, German, & Polish

## MEDIA

[The New York Times – How Ukraine's Greatest Novelist Is Fighting For His Country \(24 May 2022\)](#)

[The New Yorker – Andrey Kurkov Is Banned in Russia But A Hit At PEN \(23 May 2022\)](#)

[PBS – Ukrainian Novelist Andrey Kurkov On Preserving His Country's Culture During War \(11 April 2022\)](#)

# DR. GYAL LO

*On TIBET*

## BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Gyal Lo is a Tibetan activist, educational sociologist, and a leading expert on China's assimilation and education policies in Tibet.



Born in Tibet, Dr. Lo obtained his master's degree from the Tibetan Language and Culture Department at Northwestern University for Nationalities in Lanzhou, China. He subsequently became an Assistant Professor in the same department, where he taught for the next decade and undertook extensive research on Tibetan education. After leaving the country to obtain his PhD at the University of Toronto, Canada, Dr. Lo returned home in 2015 but was refused his past employment due to political sensitivities over his time abroad.

Dr. Lo's return to Tibet also brought concerning news of his two grandnieces and their enrolment at a mandatory pre-boarding school. After witnessing its impacts on the two girls, he undertook academic field work for the next five years, visiting over 50 boarding schools for Tibetan children and documenting their impacts on the children and their communities at large.

Alongside his academic research, Dr. Lo attained a professorship at Yunnan University in 2017. However, three years into his contract, his position was terminated amidst a worsening political climate in China. Dismissed on the grounds that he was a "foreign Tibetan with a western background," Dr. Lo would leave the country soon after in December 2020.

Upon resettling in Canada, Dr. Lo decided to speak out and become an activist for the preservation of Tibetan language, culture, and rights. In February 2023, he testified at Canada's House of Commons' Subcommittee on International Human Rights with his extensive knowledge of China's colonial boarding schools in Tibet.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English, Mandarin & Tibetan

## MEDIA

[Testimony at Canadian House of Commons' Subcommittee on International Human Rights \(13 February 2023\)](#)

[CBC Listen – Dr. Gyal Lo on China's Colonial Boarding Schools in Tibet \(12 February 2023\)](#)

[Phayul Media – Perspective Interview with Educationist Dr. Gyal Lo \(20 November 2022\)](#)

# FADZAYI MAHERE

On ZIMBABWE

## BIOGRAPHY

Fadzayi Mahere is a leading democracy activist arrested multiple times as part of the new generation of freedom seekers in Zimbabwe.



Disheartened by the rampant corruption, injustice and poverty in Zimbabwe, Mahere joined the #ThisFlag Citizens Movement led by Pastor [Evan Mawarire](#) (GS '21) in 2016. Rising to be arguably one of the most recognized youth activists in Zimbabwe, she quickly became a mounting target of ZANU-PF, the ruling party of Zimbabwe. As a result, Mahere has persistently been harassed and arrested multiple times on trumped up charges, such as inciting public violence.

However, efforts to silence Mahere's voice have fallen flat as she fearlessly continues to expose the regime's abuses and advocates for the oppressed. Cementing herself as a champion of human rights and democracy, Mahere is the National Spokesperson for Zimbabwe's main opposition party, the Citizens Coalition for Change.

Beyond her activism, Mahere has led an established and honourable legal career in Zimbabwe and abroad. After working at the International Criminal Court and the UN International Human Rights Tribunal for Rwanda, she earned her Masters of Law from the University of Cambridge and returned home to pursue constitutional law.

Mahere is also a regular contributor to *The Guardian*, writing insightful and powerful pieces on the human rights crisis in Zimbabwe.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English

## MEDIA

[The Guardian – Women need to see themselves in politics. It's the only way change will come to Zimbabwe \(15 March 2022\)](#)

[In Conversation with Trevor – Advocate Fadzayi Mahere \(19 December 2019\)](#)

# FÉLIX MARADIAGA

*On NICARAGUA*

## BIOGRAPHY

Félix Maradiaga is a Nicaraguan academic, human rights defender and former political prisoner, currently recognized as one of the main opposition voices to the Ortega regime.



After serving as Secretary General of Nicaragua's Ministry of Defence (2002 – 2006), Felix dedicated himself to strengthening peace, democracy, and human rights in his country. He was the Director of the Institute of Strategic Studies and Public Policies and has led several civil society organizations.

Maradiaga is a widely published author on Central American Affairs and holds master's degrees in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School and in Renewable Energy Engineering from the University of Barcelona. Felix is a member of the World Economic Forum and the Aspen Global Leadership Network. In 2016, Forbes Magazine named him one of Central America's most influential people.

In 2021 Maradiaga announced his intention to run in Nicaragua's Presidential Election. He was arrested in June of the same year, the third opposition candidate to be forcibly removed from the race.

On February 10, 2023, Maradiaga was released from prison after 611 days alongside 221 political prisoners. Released on the condition that he relinquish his Nicaraguan citizenship, he was expelled to the United States.

Despite being stateless, Maradiaga has not abandoned the people of Nicaragua as he continues the fight for human rights and democracy abroad.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English & Spanish

## MEDIA

[PBS Newshour – Freed political prisoner discusses Nicaragua's slide toward authoritarianism \(23 February 2023\)](#)

[CNN – They were not able to break our souls, say freed Nicaraguan political prisoners \(15 February 2023\)](#)

[CNN en Español – Maradiaga confiesa que no está preparado para hablar de lo que pasó en la cárcel El Chipote \(14 February 2023\)](#)

# NEVŞİN MENGÜ

On *TURKEY*

## BIOGRAPHY

Nevşin Mengü is a prominent Turkish journalist, news anchor, and writer with a fearless conviction to uncover the truth.

Known best for her insightful coverage of political events and issues, Mengü was a correspondent in Iran during the Green Revolution before returning to Istanbul where she grew her career as a writer and journalist. Working for several major news outlets in the country, she eventually became a prime-time news anchor for CNN Türk in 2011.

Determined to report on the truth and call out oppression, Mengü was taken off the air in 2016 after making a minor correction on a claim made by President Erdoğan. She would subsequently be forced to resign from the network. The incident was not Mengü's first tussle with the President and his supporters; she had criticized the President's sexist remarks about women on social media.

Not allowing the dismissal to discourage her from covering Turkey's pressing socio-political issues, Mengü continued working as a journalist writing at *BirGün Newspaper* and the online publication *Diken*. She currently presents a weekly online news show on Youtube, amassing an audience of close to 500,000 subscribers.

## LANGUAGE(S)

English & Turkish

## MEDIA

[Talk Turkey – Everything you need to know about Turkey's elections \(19 March 2023\)](#)

[Integral Film – Stories from Turkey: Nevşin Mengü \(20 April 2020\)](#)





# KAKPOTIA MARIE-CLAIRE

On *FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)*



## BIOGRAPHY

Kakpotia Marie-Claire Moraldo is a feminist and activist fighting to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Kakpotia is the founder and director of the NGO Les Orchidées Rouges, an organization jointly based in Bordeaux and Abidjan which works for the elimination of FGM and organizes legal and medical support for its victims.

Kakpotia is a survivor of FGM, which she underwent at age 9. Her mother was opposed, but on a vacation with her father's family, she was lured to a "party" at which she was forcibly restrained and subjected to the procedure without any explanation or anything remotely resembling consent. The trauma and pain lingered for years.

Political crises and a successful career took her from Côte d'Ivoire to Senegal and eventually to France, where at age 34 Kakpotia underwent reconstructive surgery to reverse the damage done to her when she was only 9. Realizing that there was no organization to support women in her position, she founded Les Orchidées Rouges in Bordeaux.

The organization has since expanded beyond Bordeaux to other locations in France and in Kakpotia's native Côte d'Ivoire. Its centers campaign against FGM and violence against women and provide holistic and multidisciplinary support for victims.

Winner of the 2018 Global Woman Award in the activist survivor category, Kakpotia also received the medal of the city of Bordeaux in 2020 and the Woman in Choir first prize from Dr. Pierre Ricaud for her commitment against gender-based violence and her work for women's empowerment. She was a French government delegate at the Commission on the Status of Women at the UN headquarters in New York in 2023.

## LANGUAGES

English & French

## MEDIA

[DW – Fighting Female Genital Mutilation \(15 March 2022\)](#)

[France24 – En France, 125 000 femmes ont subi des mutilations sexuelles \(25 November 2021\)](#)

# ANASTASIA SHEVCHENKO

*On RUSSIA*



## BIOGRAPHY

Anastasia Shevchenko is a Russian civil rights activist, and former political prisoner. She was the first person in Russia found guilty of participating in an "undesirable organisation" under Russian Federation law.

Following the institution of Putin's law against "undesirable organisations," authorities raided Shevchenko's house and arrested her on 21 January 2019 for her supposed involvement with Open Russia. While Shevchenko was not part of Open Russia, her participation in a similarly-named domestic organisation that criticized Putin rendered her victim to the politically-fuelled charge. Subsequently, she was placed on house arrest for two years awaiting trial.

While on house arrest, Shevchenko was barred from visiting her eldest daughter, Alina, who was sent to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the local hospital. Despite numerous pleas to the court to visit her, Shevchenko was prohibited from leaving her home. By the time the court granted Shevchenko leave from her home, she arrived at the hospital within 10 minutes of her daughter's death.

On 18 February 2021, a Russian court handed Shevchenko a guilty verdict of a 4-year suspended sentence for her participation in an "undesirable organisation."

In August 2022, Shevchenko fled Russia with her children and moved to Vilnius, Lithuania. She has since been declared a fugitive by the Kremlin.

In September 2022, her documentary *Anastasia* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

## LANGUAGES

English & Russian

## MEDIA

[ABC News – Russian activist on decision to speak out 'in memory of my daughter' \(7 December 2022\)](#)

[CNN – Russian activist describes the moment she was forcefully separated from her daughter \(24 November 2022\)](#)

[BBC – Mothers' Fury: The cost of challenging Putin \(13 February 2019\)](#)

# KALBINUR SIDIK

*On UYGHUR PERSECUTION*

## BIOGRAPHY

Qelbinur Sidik is a Uyghur activist who was forced to flee Xinjiang after experiencing China's full-fledged persecution of her people in the region.



Born in Urumqi, Sidik became a Mandarin teacher at a local primary school in 1999. After decades as an educator, she was coerced into teaching at two “reeducation camps” in 2016. There she witnessed rampant abuse, torture, and sexual violence of fellow Uyghurs, though she was barred from sharing what she saw under the threat that her and her family would be sent to camps themselves.

At home, Sidik, like other members of the Uyghur community, endured persecution and harassment at the hands of the Chinese government. Amidst mounting night raids, she saw her neighbours being taken to the camps she knew all too well about. During that same period, she was forcibly sterilized three times, each of which brought intense medical complications that left her bedridden, and at times, hospitalized.

After receiving tubal ligation surgery in 2019, Sidik was finally granted permission by Chinese authorities to travel to The Netherlands to receive medical treatment. However, she would never return.

Despite ongoing threats and harassment by Chinese authorities, Sidik continues to speak out on the atrocities being committed at the camps and the broader persecution of Uyghurs in China.

## LANGUAGES

Mandarin & Uyghur

## MEDIA

[The Guardian – ‘Like a war zone’: Congress hears testimony of China’s abuses in Xinjiang ‘reeducation camps’ \(24 March 2023\)](#)

[BBC News – The cost of speaking up against China \(31 March 2021\)](#)

[The Guardian – Forced sterilizations and life in China’s Uighur Muslim internment camps \(8 September 2020\)](#)

[The Diplomat – Confessions of a Xinjiang Camp Teacher \(17 August 2020\)](#)

# BERTA VALLE

On *NICARAGUA*

## BIOGRAPHY

Berta Valle is a recognised Nicaraguan activist, journalist, and human rights defender.

With fifteen years of experience as a senior television anchor and station manager working with top morning shows in Nicaragua, Valle is one of the most-recognized broadcasters in the country. In 2016, she was nominated as an independent to represent Managua in the National Assembly by the Independent Liberal Party as part of its National Coalition for Democracy. However, Nicaragua's Supreme Court, controlled by Ortega loyalists, disqualified the party's electoral coalition and Valle was blocked from running.

Since 2018, Valle, her daughter and mother-in-law have been living in exile due to the political persecution faced by her husband Félix Maradiaga and his family. Maradiaga was forcibly disappeared by the regime in June 2021 after announcing his intention to run against Daniel Ortega in November's presidential elections. On February 10, 2023, Maradiaga was released from prison after 611 days and expelled to the United States, where he reunited with Berta and their daughter.

As a consequence of her work, the Nicaraguan National Police and Public Ministry have found Valle guilty of being a "traitor to the homeland." The only evidence presented was so-called "investigations" into her advocacy on behalf of her husband.

## LANGUAGES

English & Spanish

## MEDIA

[Nicaragua Actual – Berta Valle confirma el destierro de presos políticos en Nicaragua \(9 February 2023\)](#)

[France 24 Español – Berta Valle: "Actualmente en Nicaragua existen 170 presos políticos" \(2 February 2022\)](#)

[60 Minutes – "It's completely Orwellian" : How Daniel Ortega tightened his grip on power in Nicaragua \(19 June 2022\)](#)



# PETER YANG

*On CHINA*

## BIOGRAPHY

Peter Yang is a college student and son of twice imprisoned Chinese human rights lawyer Guo Feixiong, unlawfully detained since January 2022.



Guo Feixiong, the pen name of Yang Maodong, has been the victim of incessant harassment, imprisonment, and torture at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party for his legal activism. Best known for his role in the 2005 landmark human rights case defending the rights of villagers in Taishi Village against corrupt officials, Feixiong served eleven years in prison on two sentences for his activism between 2006-2019.

In July 2021, Feixiong was denied entry on a flight to the United States to care for his wife who was diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer. Amidst repeated attempts to visit her, he was given a travel ban by Chinese authorities and forcibly disappeared a few months later. Two days after his wife's passing, he was formally arrested in January 2022 for "inciting subversion of state power." He currently awaits trial.

Living in exile since 2009, Peter Yang has not seen his father since he was 7 years old. Without both of his parents, he is urgently working for Feixiong's immediate release.

## LANGUAGES

English & Mandarin

## MEDIA

[China Change – Remembering Zhang Qing: From her daughter, her son, and her friend \(30 January 2022\)](#)

[The Wall Street Journal – China Detains Prominent Activists as Olympics Near. Citing State Security \(19 January 2022\)](#)

[The Guardian – Chinese Activist Told He Could Not Visit His Dying Wife \(18 January 2022\)](#)

[The New York Times – A Chinese Dissent Tried to Fly to His Sick Wife in the U.S. Then He Vanished. \(2 February 2021\)](#)