



**Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human  
Rights Defenders (EMHRF)**

**ACTIVITY REPORT**

*Public Version*

**2006**

**[www.emhrf.org](http://www.emhrf.org)**

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## 1. Introduction

Human Rights Defenders are toiling in a more and more unstable environment and are targeted by increasingly harsher measures intended to criminalise or severely restrict their actions. The year 2006, which was profoundly marked by the conflict that devastated Lebanon during the summer and resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians, witnessed major political upheavals in several Mediterranean countries. Five and a half years after the attacks of 11 September 2001, the record is discouraging. While successive waves of democratic reforms have taken place in the world, similar attempts have failed in most countries of the Middle East and North Africa. An arc of ongoing crises exists in the region: Iraq has become a human and political disaster and is falling prey to civil conflict; Lebanon is going through a political crisis which seems inextricable; no progress has been achieved in the peace process in Palestine; the Maghreb has again been the victim of attacks. These developments are all the more worrying because they are occurring in a region that is suffering from political, social and economic paralysis.

Due to a broadening array of legal tools, many states in the region have imposed more and more restrictions on the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression of human rights defenders. States of emergency have been renewed in some countries in 2006 and remain in effect in others. Legislation and anti-terrorism measures aimed at restricting freedoms have been adopted and implemented. Laws governing civil society associations give governments almost absolute and unlimited power and control over the governance, the finances and even the activities of independent non-governmental organisations, which are subjected to several criminal penalties if they attempt to circumvent these measures.

The subversion of the justice system for political purposes remains an ongoing problem in the region. Many human rights defenders have been prosecuted in tribunals that did not comply with international standards of jurisdiction, independence and impartiality. Many others have been arbitrarily detained. Several countries have refused to register human rights organisations and then used that pretext to prosecute members of these organisations for 'illegal activities' and block all funding from abroad in an attempt to make them financially non-viable.

In some countries, human rights defenders are often treated as dissidents and are placed under constant police surveillance, prevented from travelling abroad and subjected to unwarranted dismissal from their employment, to wiretapping and the interruption of telephone services, to physical abuse, harassment of their families, threats and acts of vandalism, and media campaigns aimed at discrediting them.<sup>1</sup>

All the different measures taken against human rights organisations and defenders in the Euro-Mediterranean region have been in violation of the obligations set out in international instruments to which the countries of the region are party, undermining the application of these instruments.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of these developments, over the course of 2006 the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders received a growing number of emergency assistance requests and acted to provide support to 18 human rights organisations, groups and defenders.

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<sup>1</sup> Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, joint programme of FIDH and OMCT, *Annual Report 2006: Steadfast in Protest*, [http://www.omct.org/pdf/Observatory/2007/observatoire\\_rapport\\_annuel2006\\_eng.pdf](http://www.omct.org/pdf/Observatory/2007/observatoire_rapport_annuel2006_eng.pdf) and Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2007*, <http://hrw.org/wr2k7/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the EU Association Agreements with the Mediterranean countries and the ENP; the EU Guidelines on human rights defenders.

## 2. Executive Summary

The year 2006 highlighted a number of major issues faced by human rights organisations and defenders in the Mediterranean region. These issues are intimately linked not only to the nature of their activities but also to broad national and international trends. The requests received by the Foundation reflected these trends and served to emphasise the indispensable function as a 'strategic relay' that the Foundation must play in cooperation with regional and international organisations that are active in protecting human rights defenders in order to provide defenders with short-, medium- and long-term assistance. These trends, and EMHRF's response, are summarised in the following three paragraphs.

### *1. Deprivation of freedom and ill treatment*

As was already seen in 2005, more and more of the region's human rights defenders faced serious health problems in 2006 as a result of steps to deprive them of their freedom and of the ill treatment to which they were subjected. Not only was it necessary to arrange for medical examinations and the provision of drugs, but critical ongoing support was needed to enable them to receive psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration services. In some countries of the region, the needs in these areas have proven to be considerable. However, few regional and international organisations are mandated to cover the costs of these services, and it is rare to find existing groups on the ground capable of carrying out their rehabilitation activities freely and effectively. Accordingly, the Foundation decided to initiate a dialogue with organisations dealing with issues related to the rehabilitation of victims of torture in an effort to explore and work towards the implementation of long-term mechanisms and procedures of support for human rights defenders in the region.

### *2. Instrumentalisation of the judiciary and harassment*

Governments in some countries of the region continued to put pressure on human rights organisations and defenders in 2006. These measures included the subversion of the judicial system for political purposes, a freeze on or denial of legal recognition of human rights activities, and as a consequence, a freeze on the accounts of certain organisations, as well as the physical and psychological harassment of human rights defenders. As a result, human rights organisations sought concrete, secure and flexible financial support in order to pursue their activities at the national and international level. Some human rights defenders who were targeted or subjected to constant pressure expressed the desire to leave the country, even if only a temporary basis, in order to launch or continue their activities. The Foundation also urged human rights defenders to have as many contacts as possible with European diplomatic missions and EU Commission delegations, actively encouraged them to take part in the activities of other organisations abroad and prevailed upon institutions to provide human rights defenders with scholarships and accommodations abroad to give them the time needed to strengthen their ability to pursue their activities and refocus their priorities.

### *3. Lack of human resources and operating capacities*

Despite more and more repressive government policies directed against human rights defenders, several independent defender movements tried to reorganise their activities in countries of the region. There were also small groups who attempted to put their activities on a more professional basis. Because these groups act on a volunteer basis, they often do not have the qualifications or support needed to prepare and submit projects that meet the criteria set by the major funding agencies. Strengthening their human and operating resources by providing them with small grants was a necessity, especially since these types of resources are seldom supported by major international institutions. The Foundation also acted as an intermediary and advisor, encouraging the development of annual or multi-year action strategies coupled with a fund-raising programme. It was thus able to respond strategically to their needs or assist them in approaching other funding agencies better suited to support their activities on a long-term basis. In

addition, human rights defenders expressed the desire to benefit from the experience of other organisations, share information, explore synergies and coordinated activities, and receive training services that would enable them to effectively support their activities. In 2006, the Foundation encouraged these defenders, to the extent possible, to contact national organisations carrying out similar projects in other countries of the region as well as with regional and international networks involved in the promotion of human rights.

### **3. Interventions and activities in support of human rights organisations, groups and defenders**

The requests submitted to the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders during 2006 reflect the patterns summarised above. EMHRF's support to human rights defenders during the year can be summarised in the following three categories of intervention; it might be noted however that there is inevitably a certain overlap in particular between interventions that supported innovative projects and those that aimed at building human and institutional capacities.

#### *3.1. Emergency interventions*

Emergency, tangible and secure support was provided to several human rights defenders having experienced violations of their fundamental rights in their countries. The EMHRF supported defenders who had undergone psychological harassment, malicious legal proceedings and even financial strangulation by paying administrative staff and the rent of their offices enabling them to implement their activities aimed at the protection of human rights in the countries in question.

For example, the Foundation supported two human rights defenders from the legal profession, long time human rights activists for the protection of victims, who were subjected to violations of their rights and constant harassment by the authorities: police harassment, legal proceedings, threat of seizure of professional and personal goods, measures of expropriation and economic ruin.

Financial emergency support was also granted to groups of human rights defenders targeted by the authorities in the region (denial or suspension of legal recognition, legal proceedings, freezing of assets, etc). This support enabled them to reorganise their strategy of action and their activities essential for the reinforcement, promotion and defence of human rights and democratisation.

For example, the Foundation supported human rights groups whose accounts were frozen by government authorities without notification as a result of their international law-based criticisms of certain government policies.

Furthermore, the EMHRF provided emergency support to human rights defenders who have been subjected to ill treatment and constant physical reprisals. This support enabled them to undergo intense medical examinations abroad, to obtain medical and appropriate pharmaceutical treatments, and attend programmes of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Therefore, the Foundation supported four human rights defenders (three males and one female), long time militants for the struggle of human rights and democratisation in their country, whose ill-treatment had included from 4 to 29 years of imprisonment, and who during their detention had developed serious disorders and diseases including ulcers, pulmonary infection, weakness, cancer, traumatism of the spinal cord and arterial hypertension.

The enormous needs in terms of physical and psychological rehabilitation of human rights defenders in the region imprisoned due to their action in favour of human rights and democratisation encouraged the EMHRF to take the position of a 'strategic relay' in regard to this and other issues. The Foundation therefore initiated a debate, in collaboration with several international institutions, on the initiatives and alternatives which could facilitate the long term sustainable psychological and physical rehabilitation of these victims as well as their reintegration.

### *3.2. Interventions in support of strengthening institutional operations and human capacities*

Strategic financial support was provided to human rights organisations and defenders by reinforcing their operations and human capacities in order to enable them to create structures or implement activities effectively in the region. For example, the Foundation supported:

A human rights organization facing structural and administrative problems elected a new President and wished to kick-start its ongoing and future activities by reinforcing its executive team. The EMHRF provided financial assistance to the organization enabling it to employ an executive director in order to support the new policy and to raise and secure financial means for its activities in the future.

A pilot program carried out by a small structure providing tangible legal assistance and political support to refugees and in particular for those who are regarded as "national enemies" and who are subjected as a consequence to not-communicated and unspecified detention in the country concerned. The program had limited administrative and human resources, thus unable to receive financing from the main donors due to the sensitive nature of its activity. The EMHRF granted financial assistance to the program making it possible to strengthen its team by the recruitment of a part-time lawyer and to enable it to face the increase of its activities during the year.

A group of volunteers wished to launch a sensitive project in the region aiming at documenting acts of violation and discrimination against a specific population in order to protect them peacefully and plead for the reinforcement of the protection of their rights. The EMHRF granted financial assistance to launch activities by the group, thus permitting the time necessary to enable them to structure their action effectively and to fundraise.

The main objective of these interventions was to reinforce their human resources and operational capacities in order to strengthen the implementation of programmes and fundraising strategies in the long term. The EMHRF therefore encouraged and supported the development of annual and/or multi annual programme of actions and strategies for fundraising from human rights organisations and groups thus making it possible to respond strategically to their needs and/or to assist them in approaching other donors better positioned to support their activities in the long term. It has in certain cases facilitated contact, sent a list of potential donors and assisted them to present funding applications as necessary.

These advises supported most of the organisations to diversify their contacts and financing and thus to ensure the sustainability and continuity of their activities.

### *3.3. Interventions in support of innovative activities*

The EMHRF supported organisations wishing to carry out and develop innovative projects and programmes in the region (reinforcement of the participation of women, protection of minorities and refugees, forced disappearances, rehabilitation, reconciliation, etc.).

A human rights organisation working mainly voluntarily in the North planned to set up innovative projects on rehabilitation and reconciliation, and to establish its new structure and work in the South.

An innovative and significant project for the region aiming at bringing about legal support and aid for family unification, carried out by an organisation for the defence of human rights working in respect of the minorities rights and against exclusion.

A small structure aiming at providing legal assistance and training to underprivileged and marginalised women in order to enable them to enforce their rights in the public and private sphere.

Within the framework of its function as a 'strategic relay', the EMHRF encouraged contacts to be made by certain organisations and defenders with national institutions delivering similar projects in other countries in the region, and also with regional and international networks actively promoting the defence of human rights. Such contacts are aimed at enabling them to exchange information on their experiences, to consider coordinated synergies and actions and thus to benefit from effective support in the long term. In one case, these contacts resulted in the establishment of productive relationships that have enabled the implementation of a particular innovative project and the improvement of prospects for its sustainability.

## **4. Quantitative and comparative review of interventions and activities**

### *4.1. The intervention timeframes*

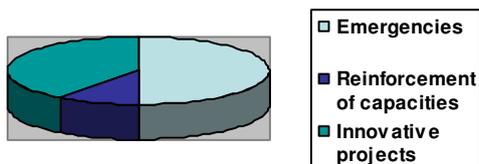
Emergency interventions are dealt with through a special procedure; in 2006, the average time period for processing files was 31 days from the submission of the application to the receipt of funding by the beneficiary.

Interventions aimed at providing support for strengthening human and institutional resources or for innovative activities are reviewed at the Board meetings. In 2006, the average time period for processing files was 60 days from the submission of the application to the receipt of funding by the beneficiary.

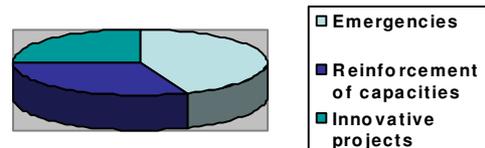
4.2. The grants

**Percentage distribution of the number of funding grants, by category of intervention**

2005



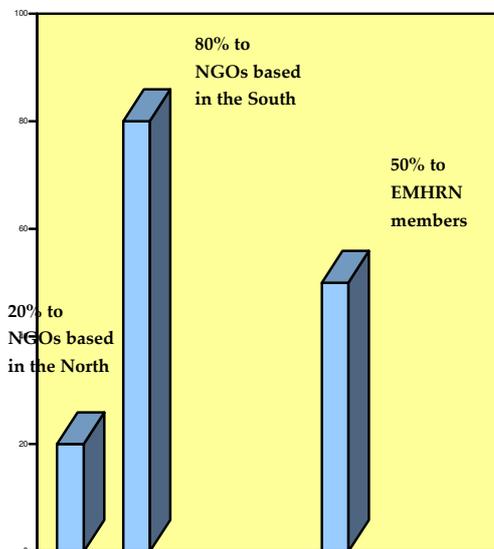
2006



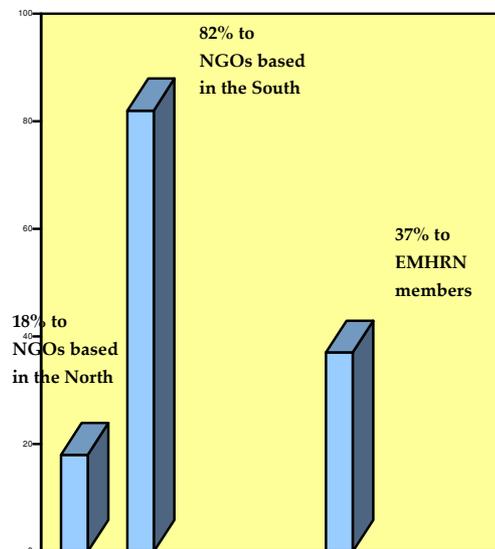
**Comments:** Emergency interventions represented the majority of the EMHRF's interventions in both 2005 and 2006. Interventions aimed at strengthening human and institutional resources grew significantly in 2006. This increase was mainly associated with the desire of many volunteer organisations to put their field activities on a more professional basis over the long term. In addition, few funding agencies include the strengthening of human resources of human rights organisations in the region among their priorities.

**Percentage distribution of grants showing North/South location of recipient NGO and membership of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)**

2005



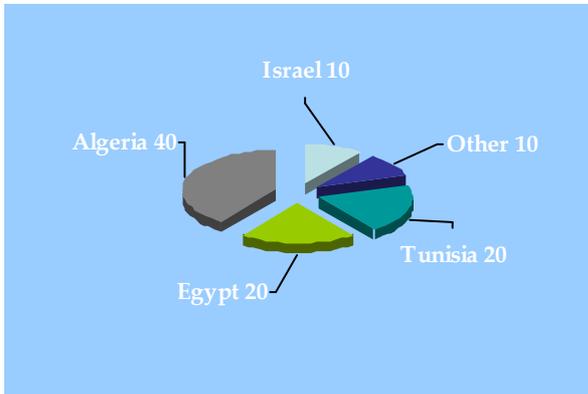
2006



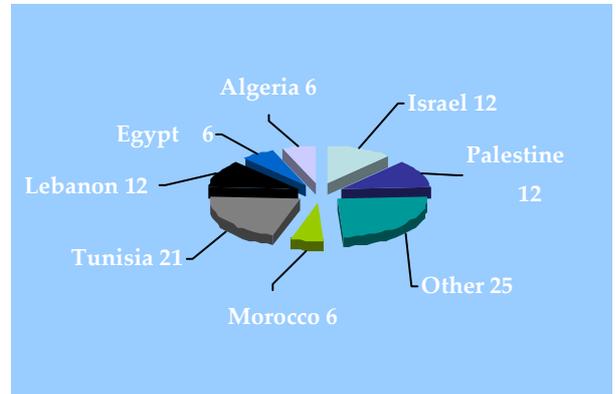
**Comments:** The distribution of funding grants to organisations based in the North and the South remained constant between 2005 and 2006. There was a slight decrease in the grants to EMHRN member organisations in 2006. This is mainly the result of increased awareness of the Foundation in the international and national arenas, which favoured an increasing number of grant requests from small structures outside the EMHRN membership.

### Percentage distribution of grants, by country

2005



2006



*Comments:* Data for 2006 show a broader geographic distribution of the Foundation's interventions than in 2005, mainly due to greater awareness of its activities in the region. The category of 'other' indicates grants made in countries where public disclosure of the grant location would pose a risk to the sustainability of human rights activities there. The apparent reduction in the number of grants to Algeria and Egypt in 2006 compared to 2005 is mainly due to the fact that certain grants were made late in 2005 and continued through 2006.

## 5. Meetings

The Board met three times during 2006, in pursuance of its mandate to establish the activities of the Foundation and to develop an effective strategy to assist human rights organisations and defenders in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Furthermore, the Council of Representatives of the EMHRF convened on 14th May 2006 in order to discuss the activities carried out and to evaluate the first working year of the EMHRF as well as to identify the needs and priorities of human rights organisations, groups and defenders in the region. Representatives mandated by the EMHRF also travelled to the region on several occasions in order to meet with human rights defenders and grantees. These travels aimed at assessing their needs in order to be able to reply strategically to the latter.

## 6. Information & Communication

In 2006 the EMHRF maintained a policy of confidentiality in regard to most of the information related to the beneficiaries of its grants. This policy was instituted and is maintained in light of the fact that the public release of particular data related to the activities of the EMHRF carries serious risk to the activities and the persons of certain candidates for or beneficiaries of its financial support, or indeed of other human rights defenders working for the promotion and defence of human rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The EMHRF ensures the transparency of its activities through fully informing its main donors of its activities of support for human rights organisations, groups and defenders.

During the year 2006, information and communication remained major activities for the Foundation, as a measure of strategic support to human rights organisations and defenders in the Mediterranean region, and to play a crucial part by providing reliable information to the public. In particular the Foundation set up a new website independent of that of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), clearly defining the specific mandate of the EMHRF, containing a clear detail of its operation, its procedures and its activities in the three working languages of the Foundation (English, Arabic and French) in order to make these data and background documents available to all: <http://www.emhrf.org/> The website was officially launched on November 17, 2006 and was regularly updated during the year. The methods of handling urgent and regular requests for funding were also specified in the three working languages of the Foundation with precise information of the deadlines set for applications to be submitted to the EMHRF.

A leaflet detailing the mandate, operation and procedures of the EMHRF in English, Arabic and French was also prepared and several samples printed in May 2006. The booklet of the EMHRF was distributed during consultations, meetings, visits and travels abroad.

## **7. Fundraising**

During the year 2006, the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders received the confidence of and generous contributions from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), as well as from private Danish Foundations.

## **8. Sustainability**

The sustainability of the EMHRF is built on the following postulates:

- That the EMHRF benefits from continued support from its major donors in 2007.
- That access to flexible, rapid, and concrete funds is highly needed in the region and will significantly enhance the capacity of human rights activists to work in a difficult environment and therefore contribute to the promotion of a human rights culture and the strengthening of a nascent civil society.
- That the EMHRF has direct access to the EMHRN members, which comprise eighty human rights organisations and defenders located in more than twenty countries in the region. The representatives provide the Foundation with a unique and highly qualified source of knowledge of and contacts with the human rights environment of the Euro-Mediterranean region and the opportunity to quickly obtain reliable and in-depth information needed for its operation, thus enhancing the quality and targeting of grants.
- That the EMHRF is the only agency with a distinct regional focus, permitting it to develop a specific public profile and placing it potentially as a leading donor in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- That the EMHRF takes carefully calculated risks in extending modest funding to small and nascent organisations as well as to innovative and catalyst activities in the field of human rights and provides quick and secure support to the needs expressed.

- That the EMHRF advises and mediates between activists and favours as far as possible the establishment of synergies by mobilizing broad networks in support of organisations and individuals in collaboration with local, regional and international partners.

The EMHRF aims at maximising the project's sustainability in the future by:

- Identifying, following-up, and monitoring the needs of human rights organisations, groups and defenders in the region in order to reply to these strategically
- Building and strengthening contacts and coordination between regional and international organisations involved in protecting human rights defenders with a view to providing effective assistance to defenders in the region.
- Pursuing its activities in diversifying and raising funds from public and private donors.

## 9. Organisational matters

Over the year 2006 the Secretariat of the Foundation consisted of the following members:

- Anne-Sophie Schaeffer (Master in international public law, Master in human rights, BA in Law) employed as full-time project coordinator in Copenhagen.
- Nels Lyngsø (graduate of auditing and accountancy) was employed part-time by the Foundation in the capacity as accountant in Copenhagen
- Berit Spangaard (BSc. in Business, Language and Culture) was employed part-time by the Foundation in the capacity as assistant for the period June - August 2006.

Furthermore, the EMHRF set up temporary solutions to support the work of the Secretariat and in particular where they could benefit from services provided by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network in 2006:

- Services of organisational supervision of the secretariat activities
- IT services
- Administrative services

The audit of the Foundation was entrusted to an independent company, *Deloitte* in Copenhagen, which met EMHRF staff members on several occasions to discuss procedures and financial management of its activities in the region. The completed activity and audited financial reports are published on the EMHRF website.