

## **PARTICIPANTS BIOGRAPHIES: 2006 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FORUM**

**Simia Ahmadi** (FIDH) serves as the International Federation for Human Rights' (FIDH) representative to the UN's web-based NGO information and coordination (NGOIC) steering group that aids NGO networking for the first session of the UN Human Rights Council. Ms. Ahmadi has also served as a Rapporteur for the Martin Ennals Foundation.

**Ashley Barr** (The Carter Center) Ashley Barr is the assistant director for human rights at The Carter Center. Ms. Barr also recently served as the Center's country director in Liberia in 2005, and has managed other post-conflict election and human rights projects for the Center in Guatemala and Sierra Leone. Ms. Barr has contributed to additional Carter Center rule-of-law, civil society and election projects in Guyana, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Zambia. Before coming to the Center, Ms. Barr worked with local human rights and governance organizations as a consultant to The Asia Foundation and the International Human Rights Law Group (now Global Rights) in Cambodia, and the National Democratic Institute and PACT in Ethiopia. She taught law at the University of Peshawar for two years as a Fulbright Fellow and worked for local legal aid and human rights organizations in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Ms. Barr earned her J.D. at Harvard Law School.

**Sihem Bensedrine** (Tunisia) is one of the founders of the National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia (CNLT) of which she currently serves as spokesperson. Bensedrine published a human rights newspaper *Kalima* in 1999 for which she was harassed by the Tunisian government and even arrested in June 2001. She also sits on the board of the Tunisian League of Human Rights and founded the Observatory for Freedom of Press, Creation, and Publishing (OLPEC) in the May of 2001. Today Bensedrine serves as OLPEC's general secretary. Bensedrine wants to give her human rights struggle a regional dimension and to develop an Arab network to engage the community in pushing for institutional reforms in the Arab world.

**Joseph Biden** (U.S. Senate) is a U.S. Senator from the state of Delaware currently serving his sixth term in office. Since 1997, Biden has served as either Chairman or Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and is the Democratic party's chief spokesman on national security and foreign policy issues. Through his work on the Foreign Relations Committee, Biden has sought to promote the use of American power to stop dictators who commit crimes against

humanity or genocide. In the mid-1990s, Biden was among the first to call for active American leadership to end Serbian aggression in Bosnia, and likewise urged U.S. action in Kosovo to stop Slobodon Milosevic's genocidal actions there. He has urged strong U.S. and international action to prevent genocide in Darfur. In the late 1990s, he joined with Committee Chairman Jesse Helms on legislation to reorganize the government's foreign policy agencies, and co-authored the landmark "Helms-Biden" legislation authorizing the payment of nearly \$1 billion in back dues owed to the United Nations, provided the U.N. took concrete steps to reform. Senator Biden was also a former chairman of the Judiciary Committee from 1987 to 1995.

**Delphine Djiraibe** (Chad) is the founder and president of the Chadian Association for the Protection and Defense of Human Rights (ATPDDH) and is also the President of the Peace and Reconciliation Initiative Monitoring in her country. Delphine received the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award in 2004 and was a Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) fellow. She is currently a member of the Board of Trustees for CIEL and is a coordinator of the Civil Society Advocacy Network - a coalition of human rights and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women and farmers organizations and trade unions, seeking a sustainable development for Chad. She has been an out-spoken advocate for obtaining a thorough environmental impact assessment and an external control board for the World Bank-approved Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. Ms. Djiraibe has lobbied against government corruption in creating the pipeline and against its negative social and environmental consequences on the people of Chad. She has also worked to eliminate the death penalty and to compensate Chadian citizens for use of their land in government projects like the pipeline.

Guinea in the United Nations' Human Rights Commission. Gallon was a visiting fellow at the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame from 1998 to 1999 and has been a professor of human rights and constitutional law at universities in Bogota since 1979. He is also the author of several publications on the rule of law and human rights.

**Musa Gassama** (ISHR) is the current Deputy Director and Manager of the Human Rights Defenders Office in Geneva of the International Service for Human Rights. His organization is dedicated to the mission of enhancing the protection of human rights defenders and their work world-wide by developing appropriate preventive initiatives, promoting the development and effective implementation of regional and universal protection mechanisms, and empowering the

Development Studies, a research and advocacy institute in Cairo, concerned with issues of democratization and political and social development. He remains the director and chairman of the center's board of trustees. In the summer of 2000 he and 27 of his colleagues were arrested and tried before a state security court on several charges allegedly connected to their work. All 28 defendants were found guilty on some of these charges and several were sent to jail. Dr. Ibrahim was sentenced to a seven year term. He was ultimately acquitted of all charges and released in March 2003.

**Hina Jilani** (Pakistan/UN) is the United Nations Special Representative to the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders. She has practiced law since 1979 and opened the first women's law firm in Pakistan in 1980. She specializes in human rights litigation, and is especially concerned with the human rights of women, children, minorities, and prisoners. She has conducted several cases that have become landmarks in setting human rights standards in Pakistan. As an avid social activist, she was a founding member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the Women's Action Forum. Over the past two decades, she has been involved with the United Nations Center for Human Rights, the Carter Center, and the UN Conference on Women. She has received several awards for her human rights work from organizations such as the American Bar Association and Human Rights Watch.

**Nozima Kamalova** (Uzbekistan) is the founding chair of the Legal Aid Society of Uzbekistan (LAS), a leading nongovernmental organization that safeguards and promotes the rule of law and human rights in Uzbekistan by investigating high-profile human rights abuses and providing free legal services to the poor. Under Ms. Kamalova's direction, the Legal Aid Society also works with a number of respected international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First and Amnesty International. A highly respected human rights attorney who has been on the frontlines of the struggle for human rights and democracy in Uzbekistan, Ms. Kamalova has been instrumental in the revision of the Ural

**Barry Lowenkron** (U.S. Department of State) is the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL). Prior to this appointment, Mr. Lowenkron served as Principal Deputy Director of Policy Planning for the Department of State. From 1993 to 2002 he held a variety of positions in the Intelligence Community, including National Intelligence Officer for Europe, Director of the National Intelligence Council's Analytic Staff, and Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence. Mr. Lowenkron served two tours as Director of

Liberties Organization, of which he was its first executive director. In 1990, Mr. Nwankwo founded and worked as Executive Director of the Constitutional Rights Project, CRP, until February 2003. He led CRP to prominence and leadership in the Nigerian NGO community. Mr. Nwankwo has won several national and international honors and awards the Martin Ennals Award. As director of CRP, Mr. Nwankwo took initiatives in promoting human rights awareness and protection in Nigeria. Under his leadership, CRP organized several training workshops, seminars and conferences for lawyers, judges, law students and teachers and police personnel, as well as members and staff of Nigeria's National Assembly. Nwankwo also co-founded and was Chairman of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) in 1998, which observed the 1998/99 Nigerian elections and deployed more than 11,000 observers across Nigeria's 36 states and Abuja, the capital city. Mr. Nwankwo now serves as Principal Counsel for Law Rights Associates, a firm of lawyers and consultants working in the field of constitutional law, political economy, and institution and capacity building.

### **Antonio Pradjasto**





Foundation, named after Martin Ennals, the former Secretary General of Amnesty International. Thoolen also served as the Executive Secretary of the International Commission of Jurists in the seventies.

**J. Aloysius Toe** (Liberia) has advocated for human rights since his teenage years. From 1996 to 1999, Aloysius directed the Movement for the Defense of Human Rights, organizing 110 human rights clubs, raising awareness of the abuses of the Taylor government, and promoting human rights education within the Liberian school system. He also organized a network of 245 community-based human rights volunteers in rural communities to monitor and report violations. When he spoke out against Taylor's son, he was arrested and imprisoned. In 2003 he established the Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy, Liberia's first nongovernmental organization concerned with social, cultural, and economic justice. He now works on transitional justice issues and is involved in a campaign to bring former president Taylor to trial in a special court in Sierra Leone.

**Guillermo Vilela Diez de Medina** (Bolivia) has concentrated his professional life on the defense and promotion of human rights. Mr. Vilela is the president of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights in Bolivia (APDH). In his eighteen years at APDH, he has occupied different executive positions within the organization, including Secretary General and Vice-President. He is the national signatory representative for the "Quito Declaration: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" Quito, Ecuador. Mr. Vilela has two diplomas and a master's degree in economics, and is currently studying for a doctorate degree in human rights. Mr. Vilela has been a consultant to various international institutions, and representative or director of well-known organizations, including the Defense for Children International and the Julio Tumiri Javier Foundation.

**Marcel Wetsh'okonda** (DRC) is the Legislative Advocacy Program Officer of the NGO Global Rights dedicated to social justice and the protection of human rights. He has worked diligently to call for the referral of war crimes perpetrators to the ICC, and is an advocate for judicial reforms within the Congo itself. He has also served as the executive director of the Campagne pour les droits de l'homme au Congo (CDHC-ASBL).

## **World Bank**

**Leyla Yunusova** (Azerbaijan) was one of the founders of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (1989-1991) and also the founder of the first NGO for the protection of human rights in Soviet Azerbaijan in 1988. A Doctor of Historical Sciences, she has served as the Director for the Institute of Peace and Democracy since 1995. She also serves as the Co-chairwoman of the Society of Women of Azerbaijan for Peace and Democracy in Transcaucasus and the chairperson of the International Coalition for Human Rights—uniting human rights defenders from Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Yunusova is also the Chief of the one and only Women's Crisis Center in Azerbaijan. Recently, she helped monitor her country's parliamentary elections in November of 2005 and is dedicated to ensuring democratic freedoms in Azerbaijan.

**Yevgeniy Zhovtis** (Kazakhstan) is Director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR), which he founded in 1993. KIBHR has produced over 100 publications on the problems of democratization and economic transformation in relation to the human rights situation and rule of law in Kazakhstan. Zhovtis, the former Vice President of the Independent Trade Union Center of Kazakhstan from 1992-1996, is also a licensed defense lawyer and has served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the "Soros-Kazakhstan" Foundation (1999-2003). Recently, the International Helsinki Federation (IHF) awarded him the

2005 IHF Recognition Award. He has also previously co-chaired the Forum for Democratic Forces of Kazakhstan (2002-2003).