

# REPORTING THE TRUTH: JOURNALISM THAT ILLUMINATES THE WORLD

Fetisov Journalism Awards 2019

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**Fetisov Journalism Awards 2019**



FETISOV  
JOURNALISM  
AWARDS

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# FOREWORD

As this report is published, the world of journalism is being overwhelmed by the biggest story of the 21st Century. The worldwide crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented health emergency affecting the global population.

This is no time for propaganda or fake news. The yearning for trusted, reliable streams of information is evident in every country. Public use of trusted media brands is at unprecedented levels. When people's lives depend on it they turn to ethical, accurate and independent journalism they can trust.

It is support for such journalism that has inspired the Fetisov Journalism Awards (FJA) which launched in 2019.

In a world of disinformation and unreliable, often abusive, communications, journalism at its best provides sensitive and careful intelligence about the world around us.

It is something we often take for granted, however, and it is only in moments of extreme crisis that we realize how we need to nourish and support the work of independent journalists and editors, particularly in their efforts to expose the abuse of power, to protect our civil liberties, to defend our human rights and to help us to protect and sustain our fragile environment.

The FJA was launched to highlight excellence in journalism in these critical areas of media work. It inspires journalists and media the world over and it provides unprecedented financial rewards for excellence in journalism.

But this award is not just about financial rewards. It is about the promotion of informed, ethical and committed journalism that is both stylish and has public purpose. It makes the world a better place, it enriches the social, economic and cultural lives of citizens, and, above all, it reinforces the role that journalists and independent media play in protecting democracy and the rule of law.

***Aidan White***  
***Founder of the Ethical Journalism Network***

# INTRODUCTION

The Fetisov Journalism Awards were launched to promote and support outstanding journalism across the globe. The Awards celebrate truth-telling in a world of uncertainty, disinformation and propaganda.

At a time when people are overwhelmed and sometimes confused by an information landscape that is often chaotic and unreliable, communities struggle to find information they can trust. Everywhere, confidence in centres of political and corporate power is in decline and there is pressure on the universal human values of honesty, justice, courage and solidarity.

Recognising this challenge, the FJA has been launched to strengthen the role of news media, because through honest reporting and intelligent inquiry journalism is uniquely placed to empower and enrich the lives of individuals and communities. By the simple yet essential process of delivering useful and reliable information, journalism can help people solve their problems and transform their lives.

In times of crisis, as the coronavirus pandemic has shown, the pressure on journalists is intense. Even in normal times, many of them face threats and attempts to control their work, and relations between the media and the political class are increasingly strained as many politicians bypass journalists, preferring instead to put their messages out directly.

Against this background, the FJA recognises the need to nourish and strengthen the work of news media and to highlight the increasingly important role of journalists, particularly in the political sphere, for their important role as guardians of democracy.

The FJA has sought entries from media professionals around the world who share this vision and who recognise the universal values of journalism which transcend geographical, cultural and political differences.

Entries were solicited from journalists and the news media in four categories of work:

- **Outstanding Investigative Reporting**

For journalism requiring painstaking investigation and research that holds power to account, exposes secrecy and corruption at a local or national level, and that reveals the impact of malpractice in public life.

- **Outstanding Contribution to Peace**

For reporting that makes a significant contribution to peacemaking and towards promoting the paramount importance of saving and protecting human life.

- **Contribution to Civil Rights**

For journalism that highlights individual freedoms and promotes respect for the human rights of all, including minorities and children, and may focus, for example, on free expression, the right to exercise religious freedom, the right to privacy, or gender rights.

- **Excellence in Environmental Journalism**

For reporting that addresses the climate emergency and the threats to our natural environment, whether through pollution, global warming or hazardous social and economic activity, and that has an impact in holding to account those who are responsible for endangering the environment.

From hundreds of entries an expert panel selected 33 stories for a comprehensive shortlist. This shortlist was adjudicated by an equally eminent international panel of judges with a proven record in the defence of, promotion of, and engagement with journalism at the highest levels.

The selections they made were the first recipients of the biggest cash prizes in the history of international journalism, with the winners in each category sharing a cash prize of CHF 130,000 (around \$136,000).

Judging the entries was no easy task. In a field of high quality competitors, the jury looked for style and excellence, both in the writing and presentation of the work, but importantly they also focused on how journalists applied the tools of their profession, particularly their commitment to accurate and fact-based reporting.

They asked, ‘Does the story show due impartiality, honesty and fairness in the way the work has been done? Is it truly independent, without any hint of bias in the treatment of sources? Does it show humanity, and respect for others? And is the journalism itself transparent, with scope for readers and the public to hold the reporters and editors to account?’

Applying these values set a high bar, but in the end, using these benchmarks, the jury was able to distinguish some outstanding pieces of work, all of which have an impact on the communities they serve and which reflect the strength of public-interest journalism.

Because the adjudication process required the highest of standards, not all categories produced a full set of winners. In the category of Civil Rights a third place award was created and in the category of Contribution to Peace only a first prize was awarded.

The 2019 winners of the FJA are:

### **Outstanding Investigative Reporting**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Prize**

**Diego Cabot** (Argentina) for his report *The Notebooks of Corruption*

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Prize**

**Mathias Destal, Geoffrey Livolsi, Lorenzo Tugnoli, and Michel Despratx** (France) for their report *Made in France*

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> Prize**

**Roli Srivastava** (India) for her report *Missing Wombs: the Health Scandal Enslaving Families in Rural India*

### **Outstanding Contribution to Peace**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Prize**

**Mohamed Abo-elgheit** (Egypt) for his report *The End User: How did western weapons end up in the hands of ISIS and AQAP in Yemen?*

## Contribution to Civil Rights

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize

**Katie May** (Canada) for her report *Remote Life, Rough Justice*

## Excellence in Environmental Journalism

### 1<sup>st</sup> Prize

**Isaac Anyaogu** (Nigeria), **Petra Sorge** (Germany) for their report *Dying in Instalments*

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize

**Philip Jacobson** (United States), **Tom Johnson** (United Kingdom) for their report *The Secret Deal to Destroy Paradise*

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize

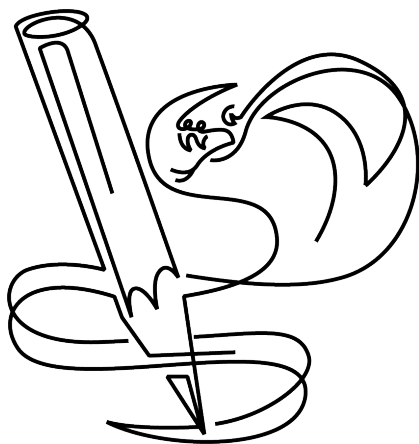
**Amos Abba** (Nigeria) for his report *How Nestle Nigeria Contaminates Water Supply of its Host Community in Abuja*

On January 22, 2020 the winners were honoured at the inaugural Fetisov Journalism Awards ceremony held in Lucerne, Switzerland, where they received diplomas, commemorative gifts, as well as unprecedented financial rewards.

Those in first place received CHF 100,000 (around 105,000 US dollars), runners up received CHF 20,000 (21,000 US dollars), and those in third place took home CHF 10,000 (10,500 US dollars). In total, these financial rewards are the highest in the history of journalism.

This report provides a short overview of the selection process and how the final winners emerged. Also attached are all of the entries that made the final shortlist.

**Aidan White**  
*Founder of the Ethical Journalism Network*



# **OUTSTANDING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING**



# OUTSTANDING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

If the notion of journalism as the Fourth Estate – a moral force holding power to account on behalf of the people – has any meaning at all, it is in the work of investigative journalists. The 12 entries in this category of shortlisted finalists for the FJA provide ample evidence that despite the threats facing courageous reporters, both legal and physical, the news media is still committed to the challenge of exposing corruption and dishonesty in public life.

Two entries focused on corruption issues in Nigeria – in the heart of government and within the education system. Both illustrated how important it is for ethical principles to be followed, particularly with regard to the right of reply for those accused and for clarity in the sourcing of information.

Another entry focused on a moving story of historical injustice and abuse in a faith based orphanage in the United States, and yet another examined a painful judicial process that threatens to disavow the rights of Jewish Holocaust victims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Similar echoes of the injustice of the past resonated in the story of people unearthing graves in Mexico for people who had been trying to identify loved ones among the thousands of people who have been murdered or simply disappeared in recent years.

Another story exposed the need for more transparency in dealing with terrorism in the United Kingdom, where the government has introduced a secretive public relations strategy designed to manipulate public opinion following acts of violence.

Other familiar topics for investigative reporting were also in contention, such as one report into human trafficking in Guatemala, and two powerful entries from Africa, one highlighting illegal Chinese mining in Cameroon and another, which could well have been a winner, on financial corruption and impunity in Gambia.

In the end the judges were able to identify three clear and worthy winners.

The overall winner was Argentinian journalist Diego Cabot for his report *The Notebooks of Corruption*, published in *La Nación*. This was a superb example of committed journalism and reporting that speaks truth to power in a stylish and compelling way.

The title refers to eight notebooks and other material gathered by a chauffeur working for the Ministry of Planning in Argentina over a period of ten years. The journalists, led by Cabot, carefully and diligently unpicked a story of corruption that led to the heart of government. Names, addresses, appointments, the dates of the transfer of millions of dollars in payoffs and bribes - all were revealed, carefully verified and then published.

A dozen people were arrested and put on trial and their testimonies in court exposed in detail how the administration of then President Christina Kirchner operated hand in hand with corporate power. Thanks to committed journalism, forensic examination of facts and astute policing Argentina saw the demise of an almost impregnable structure of ideological power built upon bribery and indoctrination.

The second prize in this category went to the French team of Mathias Destal, Geoffrey Livolsi, Lorenzo Tugnoli, and Michel Despratx whose work *Made in France* on the investigative website *Disclose* used a combination of text, graphics, photos and video to highlight France's involvement in the four-year civil war in Yemen, which has seen thousands of civilians killed, many indirectly via arms sold to the Saudi-led coalition.

The detail in the work was breathtaking, revealing the inventories, and the deployment locations of weapons produced and sold by France and other Western powers to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This was a shining example of good reporting. It highlighted government hypocrisy and ignited a national scandal. As a result, the reporters were summoned to court after France's domestic intelligence agency opened an investigation for 'compromising national defence secrecy' but the power of their reporting prevailed and the government was held to account.

Third place went to Roli Srivastava (India) for her harrowing story of suffering and scandal over the way women are brutalized and impoverished by doctors carrying out unnecessary hysterectomies in India. This detailed report was told with humanity and laced with journalistic endeavour and skill. It has made an important contribution to raising awareness of a public health scandal, prompting action by the authorities.

# FIRST PRIZE WINNER

**DIEGO CABOT (ARGENTINA)**

**“THE NOTEBOOKS OF CORRUPTION”**



Diego Hernán Cabot (Santa Rosa, La Pampa, Argentina, 1970) is an Argentine lawyer and journalist, Deputy Editor-in-Chief in La Nación where he has worked for 16 years. Diego and his team are famous for the investigation “The Notebooks of Corruption” based on eight notebooks written by Oscar Centeno, driver of Roberto Baratta, former undersecretary of Control and Coordination of the former Ministry of Federal Planning of Argentina. The investigation exposes Argentina’s greatest corruption scandal and is one of the most relevant journalistic works on corruption in the history of the country. Cabot received several awards for the investigation, including the King of Spain Press Prize (Premio Rey de España) and the Fetisov Journalism Awards.

Cabot holds a degree in Law from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), a postgraduate degree in Public Opinion at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Flacso) and another in Executive Development (PDD) at the IAE. He also holds a master’s degree in Journalism from Torcuato De Tella University (UTDT).

He is the author of the book “Los Cuadernos” based on his investigation “The Notebooks of Corruption”. He is also a co-author of the books “Hablen con Julio (2007)”, “El Buen Salvaje” (2008) and “Los platos rotos” (2014).

# THE BRIBE NOTEBOOKS: THERE ARE 12 PEOPLE IN CUSTODY AND MORE RAIDS ARE IN PREPARATION

*By Diego Cabot  
La Nación - August 1, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*

*<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/los-cuadernos-de-las-coimas-los-12-detenidos-de-la-causa-nid2158306>*

After months of investigation, authorities arrested ex members of the Kirchner administration and businesspeople, under a legal case that could become an Argentine Lava Jato. Some of the closest collaborators during the years of the administration of Nestor Kirchner and of his exminister of Planning, Julio De Vido, have been brought before the courts, accused of being part of an illegal association, dedicated, at least over 10 years, to collect bags full of money handed over by contractors of public works all over Buenos Aires.

Senator and ex-president Cristina Kirchner was ordered to attend an inquest hearing on August 13. The ex-minister De Vido; the ex-General Secretary of the Presidency and ex-director of the Federal Intelligence Agency (AFI is the acronym in Spanish), Oscar Parrilli; the ex-Cabinet Chief, Juan Manuel Abal Medina; and the ex-private secretary of ex-minister De Vido, José María Olazagasti, were also summoned by the court. As were the businessman Rudy Ulloa Igor and industrialist Juan Lascurain. Also summoned by the court was the ex-judge Norberto Oyarbide, who held meetings with people involved in the bribe scheme, according to notes taken over a ten year period by Oscar Centeno, ex-employee of the Ministry of Planning. Centeno worked as a chauffeur for Roberto Baratta, ex-under-secretary of Coordination and Management in the Ministry of Planning, and De Vido's right hand man. Both were arrested. Before

dawn today, at 4:30 a.m., several police vehicles were at the door of Mr. Baratta's home in the Belgrano neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Meanwhile, there was a wave of arrests and police raids in the city. Practically all the closest collaborators of the ex-minister of Planning were handed over to the courts.

The case, which is being investigated by judge Claudio Bonadío and public prosecutor Carlos Stornelli, involves ex-presidents Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, ex-minister De Vido and most of the senior officials closest to him, but also many of the most important building and energy companies in the country, that over many years gave millions of dollars in cash to the ex under-secretary of Coordination and Management of the Federal Ministry of Planning. According to the case file, all that was collected went to the Kirchner's private home, at the corner of Juncal and Uruguay streets in Buenos Aires; the official presidential residence, known as the Olivos Country House (Quinta de Olivos); or the Cabinet Chief's office.

Ex official / public servant Businessman

Carlos Wagner

Ex-president of Argentine Constructors Chamber and owner of the Esuc Company

Roberto Baratta

Ex-under-secretary of Coordination and Management Control

As ex-minister Julio De Vido's right-hand man, he followed the money wherever it went. He met with businessman to collect payments.

Javier Sánchez Caballero

EX CEO of IECSA

The Company belongs to Ángel Calcaterra, President Mauricio Macri's cousin.

Gerardo Ferreyra

Vice-President of Electroingeniería

He is a minority stock holder of Electroingeniería, a small company until 2003, when under the Kirchner administration it became one of the big players in public works.

Armando Roberto Loson

President of the Albanesi Group for 40 years

He also has a winery and is in the commercial airline business with two airplanes.

Hernán Camilo Gómez

Worked at the Ministry of Planning

He was a consultant for the Ministry and one of the main actors in the scheme for collecting bribes.

Ezequiel García

Ex director of Renewable Energy

He worked in the orbit of the Ministry of Planning from March 2008 to November 2012

Juan Carlos de Goycochea

Ex-President of Isolux for Latin America

He held meetings with people from the Ministry of Planning that collected bribes

Enrique Llorens

Ex-secretary of Coordination and Control of the Ministry of Planning

Walter Fagyas

Ex-President of Enarsa

He was one of the people present in the meetings with the Ministry of Planning

Nelson Lazarte

Mr. Baratta's ex-secretary

He was an important factor in the bribe collection scheme

Carlos Mundín

President of the BTU engineering company

He met directly with people from the Ministry of Planning in charge of collecting bribes

Hugo Martín Larraburu

Ex Technical Coordinator of the Cabinet Chief's office

He worked there under Abal Medina

Claudio Javier Glazman

Director of Sociedad Latinoamericana Inversiones

Jorge Guillermo Neira

Vice-President of Electroingeniería

The company that grew under the Kirchner administration

He was Ferreyra's second in command

Rafael Llorens, ex-secretary of Coordination and Control of the ministry of Planning; Walter Fagyas, ex-director of Energía Argentina SA (Enarsa), Nelson Lazarte, ex-employee in De Vido's office, and Hugo Martín Larraburu, ex-employee in the Cabinet Chief's office, had already been arrested.


But the arrests did not end there. Powerful businessman with links to public works and energy were also arrested. Gerardo Ferreyra and Luis Neyra of Electroingeniería, and Javier Sánchez Caballero, of ex-Iecsa, were also taken into custody before dawn. Six other businessmen and officials, some of them in the interior of the country, will be arrested.

It all started with an investigation by three journalists of La Nación –Diego Cabot, Candela Ini, and Santiago Nasra- that the Court developed further starting in April, checking thousands of notes taken by the chauffeur, Baratta, over the course of the 10 years he worked for the Ministry of Planning. Names, sums, addresses, dates, places, and domains involved in the operation were compiled by the journalists: these are detailed in eight notebooks, copies of which were handed over by the team to public prosecutor Stornelli.

Yesterday afternoon, Bonadío ordered the arrest of Oscar Centeno, Baratta's ex-chauffeur and author of the notes contained in the notebooks, the existence of which was ignored by the men that in the past, when they were government officials, were driven to collect the dollars. His precise and detailed notes generated a record with precisions about the operations that were unknown up to now.

According to estimates by the public prosecutor's office, 160 million dollars were collected only considering the money that came by way of the Toyota Corolla driven by Centeno, the arrested ex-chauffeur, though the investigators agree that the sum could have been 50% higher, considering notes where no specific amounts are mentioned.

The notebooks include thousands of details that were validated by the court investigators. The money was taken in cash to two destinations while Néstor Kirchner was alive: the Olivos Country House and family apartment, where Senator Kirchner lives now when she is in the City of Buenos Aires.



After Nestor Kirchner's death, Centeno interrupted his notes. He restarted them in 2013, tracking routes. Then operations changed: They started using cars from the Cabinet Chief's office. All the cars that transported the money belong or belonged then to the Cabinet Chief's office or to automobile companies that gave them to the government for use of the Presidency. The money collected apparently was delivered directly to the Pink House (Casa Rosada).



# THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY OF THE BRIBE NOTEBOOKS

*By Diego Cabot*  
*La Nación - August 2, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*  
[www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/la-historia-detras-de-la-historia-nid2158444](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/la-historia-detras-de-la-historia-nid2158444)

January 8 was a suffocating day in Buenos Aires. At 1:38 p.m., when a box containing the notebooks with one of the most detailed descriptions of a corruption scheme known to date came to my hands, the temperature was unbearable.

When I opened it, I found a notepad, six spiral notebooks and a blue hard-cover notebook, that could have belonged to some nostalgic that decided to keep his old high-school notes. Also receipts from a leather-store from the commercial district of Once, proof of the purchase of bags.

Those were not the only surprise. Along with the notebooks I found videos and a few not very clear photos. All those pieces showed the path of the bribes that started with instructions from Néstor Kirchner, continued with the routes of Julio De Vido's aids that brought them to state contractor companies to collect bags full of millions of dollars of dirty money, which ended up in the Olivos Country House, the Cabinet Chief's office or the family apartment of the expresidents at the corner of Juncal and Uruguay.

The chauffeur of the car, silent witness of what transpired in his Toyota Corolla, in which he drove Roberto Baratta for at least ten years, took notes of everything he could hear or see, with the precision of a goldsmith. With each detail he tried to give veracity to his account. He did not miss even some number he saw for a moment, he jotted down addresses, the names, the amounts, and described the physical appearance of people he did not know. He even registered the weight of the bags or the suitcases with money.

The magnitude of what I had led me to make a decision: after working alone briefly, I invited to students of the Master in Journalism of the Di Tella University (UTDT) and La Nación. Candela Ini and Santiago Nasra came to work with one premise: we would structure the information and then start working on the journalistic story. We did not establish any deadline to start telling the story. Only a few persons knew of the existence of those notebooks and the people arrested or investigated, who always ignored the existence of this proof, were not among them. Then came long hours in the night, before dawn, ordering the registers, with long debates, surprised over the names that appeared, and astonished by the impunity with which those officials and businesspeople had acted and still did.

We agreed to work silently and not publish anything. Those were nights of typing, obtaining information and drinking coffee, in which many of the people now arrested and that we did not know became familiar to us.

We listed names, addresses, government posts, companies, amounts and ownership of cars. We checked each one and came to several conclusions. All silently. Thus we created a powerful data base with details of each movement registered in the ten years of notes, which we wanted to share online at some point.

The notes in the notebooks led us to the garages where the bags were exchanged and we were able to determine how much dollars weigh, “the fresh”. We also visited rooms in hotels named by the chauffer, Baratta, we climbed to the top of powerful towers in Puerto Madero (one of the more exclusive districts of Buenos Aires), walked, hand in hand with corruption, out on the balconies on the thirty-something floors from where everything looks very little. We found people we knew, strolled by suspicious façades, photographed houses, and, finally began to confront information with several of the people in the notebooks.

One day I met a businessman in the same café where he did business with the people in the government in those days and I saw how his face transformed when I gave him data, dates, and names. The poker face of somebody used to applauding at official ceremonies came undone that noon. Another time somebody said with impunity: “They have nothing, I will never get caught”. This is what an old businessman, experienced in delving with dirty money, said to his press officer when I told him we

had registers of when and where he had paid bribes. Today he is trying to be released on bail.

At that point in the investigation we began consulting with journalists whose professional careers I respect. We had come far and had to make a decision. One of the options analyzed was to present the information and the conclusions in an important story, with the risk of being exposed to the possibility that the chauffeur deny his texts. The other was to write a fiction with the story of the people involved in the bribes, and lastly, try to understand the way business was conducted over many years between the State and many contractors. We chose this last option, which meant ceding a scoop and leaving in the hands of the courts the investigation we had conducted up to that point.

La Nación decided not to publish a single line until the courts acted. And that is what we did: we handed over our work and I offered my testimony.

On April 10 of this year, after five hours in the offices of one of the courts, the secretary of the public prosecutor looked at me and said: “I will bring you another coffee so you do not fall asleep” It was the third I drank in that small room seven feet by ten. He took a capsule and put it in a machine on one side of his desk full of papers. “Do not worry, it will not do you harm; it is decaf”, he said. There were two desks and hundreds of files on shelves, on the floor, in the corridors, everywhere. There was a window that looked out on the docks and that brought some fresh air into the room.

While the secretary –a bit cold in his manner but willing- typed, I imagined the consequences of that long deposition. There were several more months of silence, nothing published, when we speculated on how much time the judiciary process demanded. But the courts have much more powerful means for verifying the veracity or not of a document or hundreds of them, as in this case.

The chauffeur was arrested the day before yesterday and yesterday we began to see the consequences of the investigation we began in the summer. Nobody imagined that this cautious witness had created enormous proof of the scheme of corruption in Argentina. He did it right in the face of the officials. But impunity blinds people, so much so that Mr. Baratta never imagined that this man, to whom he once gave as a gift an empty suitcase from which he had taken the 4 million dollars it had contained a few minutes before, was creating the most consistent proof of what had been his role in the Kirchner government.

# THE MOST BRUTAL NARRATIVE OF HOW CORRUPTION WORKS IN ARGENTINA

*By Diego Cabot  
La Nación - August 12, 2018*

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[www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-relato-masbrutal-Dde-la-historia-sobre-como-funciona-la-corrupcionen-Dla-argentina-nid2161618](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-relato-masbrutal-Dde-la-historia-sobre-como-funciona-la-corrupcionen-Dla-argentina-nid2161618)*

There was a moment of anxiety the day before yesterday in the afternoon in the Court Building at Comodoro Py Avenue (in the Retiro district near the docks and the River Plate in Buenos Aires). “We already know that, it does not give us anything new”. I will leave you alone to speak what you need. I will see you in an hour”, said the public prosecutor, Carlos Stornelli. Carlos Wagner, ex-president of the Construction Chamber understood he would remain in jail. An hour later he began the most brutal narrative of corruption in Argentina. “I graduated as an engineer 52 years ago and have worked in my profession to this day. In 1966 I started working at Esuco. In the projects we have in progress, by ourselves or with other companies, there are 3500 people working”. Those were his first words.

And then, decidedly, without handcuffs and in the custody of the Federal Penitentiary Service that waited for him outside, Wagner, an important actor in the halls of power during the Kirchner era, began his confession: “Everybody knew I was Julio De Vido’s friend. In 2004 the architect called me to his office and told me that on orders from the president [Nestor Kirchner] he had to personally guarantee the success according to the interests of the government in competitive tenders for public works from that moment, fundamentally in road projects, which command the largest amounts of

money and are the most significant. Because public works –he told me- would be one of the methods of collecting money for political needs”. Thus Wagner started to obtain his release.

At the end of the 1990s’ Esuco started to work in the province of Santa Cruz in public projects. One of the first contracts was for building the airport at El Calafate. De Vido, who had immigrated to Santa Cruz as an employee of Entel (then the state phone company), was already an official in the provincial government. “I met the architect and (then governor of Santa Cruz Néstor) Kirchner in successive visits they paid to the works”, he explained as to the origins of the relation that ended with him in jail.

Not too long after that the governor became president and the architect his main minister. “I had been thirty years in the Construction Chamber. At the time I was third vice president” Wagner narrated.

A new leader was to be elected at the time in the business association. In 2004 came the proposal from De Vido: Kirchner needed him in a key post to generate flows of dirty money back to officials. “Public works would be one of the methods of collecting money for politics. For example, once a tender for some project was called, the interested parties paid the legal fee to enter the competitive bid and met in different places to determine the winner” the businessman told the prosecutor.

According to Wagner, one of the meeting places was in the third floor of the building at 736 of Venezuela Street, headquarters of the Chamber of Road Building Companies. And then he went straight to the point. Among those that went to that place where projects and millions were distributed, the constructor mentioned Perales Aguiar, Vial Agro, Biancalani, Losi, Fontana Micastro, Marcalba, Iecsa, Chediack, Equimac, Coarco, Cartellone, and Vialco. “I promise to name more companies as I remember them” he added.

Then the story came to the core of the corruption scheme. “The companies met in preestablished places and determined who the winner of the bid would be according to their interest in the project and how much work they had. Once the project had been awarded to a company, they had to pay what had been agreed for political expenses, for political needs, what had been established beforehand” he clarified.

But the details kept coming. Wagner said “the percentage of the financial advance was 10 to 20 percent of the project: once taxes were deducted, they had to pay what was left of the financial advance as a kickback”. The constructor was lapidary.

The scheme described by the owner of Esuco also included what happened if the project did not include advances. “Equivalent amounts were established and they were deducted from the first three payments by the state. I want to say my company was not exempted from this mechanism”, he pointed out as if there were any doubt that he paid bribes too.

Then he came to the methodology of the payments. Just like all the other “arrepentidos” (the repentants, willing to collaborate with the investigation in exchange for their freedom), the expresident of the Construction Chamber said the money was given to one of the collectors. “Roberto Baratta established who was going to collect; and so did the engineer [José] López. Both decided what person would collect the money and where. That remained the same over time, it was always the same” he told the prosecutor.

But Wagner, the key player placed there by Kirchner and De Vido, was not limited to being the host of the meetings where projects were handed out. He then said: “My function was to guarantee that whoever won the bid paid. If the contractor did not comply, I was made responsible and had difficulties with the certificates my company was supposed to get paid by the government. And the company that didn’t comply also had difficulties getting paid (sic)”.

Along with being in charge of the interests of the Kirchners in the construction industry, Wagner also got several public works projects. “In the case of the public works assigned to my company they said when they would come for the money and where. López and Baratta were always who we spoke with. They didn’t care which company won [money], only that they did the job well and paid the money they were supposed to. Baratta generally sent [Né]lson Lazarte to collect the money. I don’t remember who José López sent. De Vido explained the system of kickbacks in that meeting I told you about. I asked what they pretended and he established the amounts”, said the constructor, one of the businesspeople pampered by the ex-president Cristina Kirchner.

The kickback to the officials was not only the advance to begin the projects. According to Wagner's confession, that was under oath to tell the truth, for each payment after that they had to give some money back. "They demanded the same percentage of kickback on additions and modifications of the projects".

When Esuco was the "winner" of the bid, Wagner said he paid at places like the Café La Puerto Rico, on the 400 block of Alsina Street, a block from the Casa Rosada; at the NH Hotel, two blocks from 50 Balcarce (the address of the casa Rosada), or at some parking lot. "In public places. Sometimes they came to 151 San José Street [the headquarters of the company], but mostly they collected in other places", he confessed.

He added that payments were generally in pesos, while there were foreign exchange restrictions. Before that, in dollars. According to the manual of corruption in public works, narrated by one of the main actors of those last years, the money was tied up in packages.

"A person in my trust made them. If they collected in mi company headquarters I gave them personally to the collector and if the meeting place was outside the company, I sent a representative, for example, Mauro Guatti. The amount of money, that is to say the financial advance of the project that was to be paid, was given to the collector in one, two or three payments", he explained.

While the money paid as an advance went to the pockets of the officials, work in the project began with a minimal percentage. Wagner said "the VAT that was retained and that had to be paid to AFIP (the tax authorities) at 30 and 60 days, was used to start work". That is to say, for every 100 pesos plus VAT (121 pesos) paid by the state to employ workers and buy supplies, 100 went back through the Baratta, De Vido, and Kirchner line, and only 21 went to the project. And a debt with the tax authority remained".

There was more detail to the most corrupt scheme ever described in court. "Who was the money for?" they asked him. "I am under the impression that the internal system determined that once the money was collected, it went up. That is what Baratta and López said. It was money for above", he answered.

Wagner signed the statement and was free. In a few sheets he left the most detailed narrative of the "public works club" that made him rich, but also landed him in jail.

# "THE PUBLIC WORKS CLUB": THE OBSCENE SHOW OF CORRUPTION

*By Diego Cabot  
La Nación - August 19, 2018*

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[www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-club-obra-publica-obsceno-show-corrupcion-nid2163761](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-club-obra-publica-obsceno-show-corrupcion-nid2163761)

The testimonies accumulated in recent days in court allow us to reconstruct in detail how the Kirchner system operated, having businesspeople as their counterpart.

Argentina has seen in these last 20 days the demise of the most impressive structure of power, millions, indoctrination, and favors, ever known. The popular saying is that the bigger they are the louder the noise when they fall. Possibly that is why the bursting of that bell of silence and complicity that lasted more than a decade resounds so strongly.

The Federal Ministry of Planning, which now has practically all its most prominent officials in jail, was the most efficient machine for the political construction of Kirchnerism. Through the hands of the now multi-charged Julio de Vido from 2003 to 2015 passed some 740.560 million pesos. But if we take the exchange rate of the last day of each year, that office spent 126.000 million dollars, about 27,6 million dollars a day, including Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays.

According to data from the Argentine Budget Society (Asociación Argetina de Presupuesto, ASAP), compiled from the consolidated accounts of the Ministry of Economy, De Vido always had an increasing budget that was only interrupted in 2012 and after the rail tragedy in Once (when a train crashed into the station, killing 50



passengers and wounding hundreds), when he lost the secretary of Transport, that went to the ministry of the Interior.

The first big cash box was public works. Everybody knew, but those millions that were distributed had a sedative effect for all. The collectors accumulated millions; the politicians inaugurated public works; and the businessmen smiled behind mountains of false invoices and double accounting. Now all is out in the open.

Several businessmen that confessed in the courts at Comodoro Py produced a millimetric crack in the crystal bell that kept the silence. Angelo Calcaterra, the cousin of the president, ex owner of Iecsa, and Juan Carlos Goycoechea, one time number one of Isolux, said they paid kickbacks. They were the first constructors to recognize their crime. But once the dyke breaks, the pressure of the water does the rest. A few days later, Carlos Wagner, ex-president of the Construction Chamber, disclosed everything.

“Everybody knew I was De Vido’s friend. In 2004 the architect called me to his office and told me that on orders from the president [Nestor Kirchner] he had to personally guarantee the success according to the interests of the government in competitive tenders for public works from that moment, fundamentally in road projects, which command the largest amounts of money and are the most significant. Because public works –he told me- would be one of the methods of collecting money for political needs”.

What followed was almost pornographic. Now we know the projects were assigned in an office on the third floor of 736 Venezuela Street, then the headquarters of the Chamber of Road Building Companies. The constructors went there and took what was assigned to them. José López or Julio De Vido, depending on the area, continued with the case. With a simulated bid, a winner was established. Then the resolutions or decrees awarding projects were approved, and the money started to flow. Those processes rarely were questioned or observed.

What came after that was the advancement, between 10 and 20 percent of the project, paid with VAT. Wagner explains very clear and simply. Everything went back to the officials, the payment of taxes was differed and with that percentage the work began. As an example. If a project cost 100 pesos, an advance of 20 pesos was agreed and

it was paid with VAT, which comes to 24.20 pesos. The project should have started with those 24.20, but it started slower, with only 4.20. The rest went to the bags. This generated an enormous fraud against the state. And not only because of excessive costs, but because of the difficulty of finishing a project with high inflation. “They kept moving the goal and for each extra payment we had to give them another 20 percent”, said a businessman that went to Comodoro Py these last days. The theory of contributions for the political campaign fell.

Luis Betnaza, one of the most important executives at Techint, confessed he also paid through this collecting mechanism. They prefer to speak of extortion and not bribes. But the truth is another investigative line opened up: Venezuela. Claudio Uberti and José María Olazagasti were arrested because of that. The first confessed; the second is silent and in jail.

Uberti, angry with his old chiefs, said his job, apart from “controlling” companies with highway concessions, was to fetch a bag with 150.000 dollars from each concessionary and take it to the Kirchners. There were eight corridors. So if Uberti did his job right, between 2003 and 2007 he handed Kirchner 1.2 million dollars a month and in his years in office transported a little more than half a ton of dollars, specifically 576 kilos.

The new line of investigation Uberti opened up inevitably leads to the highway concessionaries. Several of them are construction companies that created consortiums and already were in the courts in Comodoro Py. It does not seem very possible that they will be able to maintain they were contributing to the political campaign.

The contributions of some constructors also led to Ernesto Clarens, owner of Invernes, the finance company in charge of financial operations. His testimony was under secret of the court, but the case this week will no doubt center on “black” dollars and money with no controls. The people in the judiciary do not think this financier could have generated such an amount of “black” money. They consider some first level financial companies could be involved in operations.

Other constructors suffered the devaluation of what they had to say. They said what their colleagues already told the prosecutor –that they paid bribes to Roberto Baratta– but their words no longer had any value. Aldo Roggio (Metrovías) and Gabriel Romero



(Ferrovías) had to speak of the transport sector. Roggio said he paid 5% of the subsidies he received from the state to the Transport Secretary. Romero, along with recognizing he paid some of these officials, confessed he paid for a decree.

The day before yesterday was again a Friday of Fury. José López, cuddled by many governors in the 12 years of Kirchnerism, also said he was ready to collaborate with the court. López is threatening to destroy a large swath of politics. They say he was very nervous and reticent when he arrived. But a few hours later, and after they conceded him a different place of detention, he was happy. Now he is in detention but far from the prison. He is easy, the opposite of a large segment of the politicians that benefited from his favors over the years.

# SECRET STORIES, PRISONERS AND CONFESSORS: FRANTIC HOURS IN THE FIRST DAYS OF THE CASE

*By Diego Cabot*  
*La Nación - September 24, 2018*

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<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/historias-secretas-presos-confesores-horas-freneticas-primeros-nid2174457>

On July 31, several businessmen traded calls. “Do you know anything?” There were comments of an important case in the courts. Two of them consulted with their lawyers. Nobody knew anything. Meanwhile, in the judiciary, some judges and public prosecutors were asked their opinion as to how the law for repentants works and what its scope is. “I was consulted but did not know why” public prosecutor Carlos Rívolo, one of those now involved in the notebook case, confessed to a confidant.

In the early hours of August 1st, one of the lawyers of a businessman began calling a political operative. He answered after the third call. “My client has been arrested. What is this?” Ángelo Calcaterra, President Mauricio Macri’s cousin, woke up early. A phone call alerted him that number two of what had been his construction company, Iecsa, Javier Sánchez Caballero, had also been taken by the police and was in custody.

At the home of Juan Manuel Abal Medina everyone was incredulous. The ex- Cabinet Chief knew all the processes that could have him involved. “I had the map of the courts in my head, but that surprised me to the point of disbelief” he confessed in an apartment in San Telmo (a district close to Casa Rosada) to a couple of people, one of them of his utmost trust. There was a moment when he thought it was a mistake, that the Hugo Larraburu arrested was not his loyal collaborator. He always called him Martin. But he finally read it: his complete name is Hugo Martin.

Those were the first minutes of the bribe notebooks case, the investigation La Nación gave over to the courts in April. “How many people know?”, was the question everybody was asking in the newsroom. Doing the numbers was not simple, but to arrest 16 people and carry out 36 raids, at least 200 people had to be informed.

Within the court building at Comodoro Py there was anxiety. During Tuesday afternoon, in the dispatches of public prosecutor Carlos Stornelli and Judge Claudio Bonadío, the imminence of proceedings led to more members of those offices in the fourth and fifth floors being aware of what was coming. Stornelli did not sleep. He stayed at home and received information from the court. At 6:52 Wednesday morning there were 11 arrested out of 16. At 7:01 La Nación changed the information on its digital site and surprised public opinion with details unknown until then. The most intense week in recent years began at Comodoro Py. Also in the main criminal lawyer offices, and, of course, in the business community. Everything revolved around the most secret case surrounding the interpretation of corruption in Argentina.

It was Wednesday. Criminal lawyers began trekking through the corridors of the federal courts building. “It is a show of Italian suits” crowed an actor of that vertex of power in reference to the lawyers’ clothes. Two of them confessed later that, though they specialize in business criminal law, they did not know where the detention centers were. “We never have our clients arrested” he admitted. It was their debut.

There were meetings on the fourth and fifth floor, while some that had not been arrested called their consultants to see what was coming. Events on Thursday determined to a great extent what came later. Oscar Centeno admitted to writing the notebooks and gave specific and precise details of what was in that log. He obtained his freedom and went to a place only few people know and no one reveals. The so called repentant law was starting to assert its importance.

The effect of that was not unnoticed by the lawyers. One of them said a few days ago: “It was a mirror. It meant freedom for your client. People in this profession know that. Everybody wants to be free”.

A cataract of confessions was in the making. Juan Carlos de Goycochea was one of the people that were not at their homes when they went to arrest him. He found out in Esquel (a mountain resort town in Patagonia, in the south of Argentina),

where he was on vacation. Javier Landaburu, a lawyer of the firm Landaburu, Feder & Rosental, was possibly who precipitated much of what happened after. He got in touch with his client and told him to come to Buenos Aires to turn himself in. De Goycoechea got in his car and drove directly to Comodoro Py. He did not want to go through an airport, fearing he would be arrested.

### *The Importance of Words*

He appeared in the court building late on Friday. His lawyer went up and down, from the prosecutor to his client. At the time, also, formal notifications were being sent to most of the businessmen being summoned to give their statements on Monday, August 6.

De Goycoechea and Landaburu understood before anyone else the importance of words at the time, a glass of water in the desert. “If you want, we can sit with the prosecutor and see what happens” the lawyer said. And so it was. A few minutes later, at Stornelli’s office the first statement in which one of the people that had paid kickbacks recognized the facts took form. “There was never a meeting of the prosecutor or the judge with my client alone. I was always present. At intervals we went to another office to speak alone. The treatment was cordial”, said the lawyer, remembering an anecdote: Mate (the Argentine national drink) made the rounds that Friday afternoon at Comodoro Py.

Another partner of that lawyer firm was with Calcaterra. The constructor did not listen too much to advice: he was convinced that the second man in his company had to take responsibility. On Friday night, De Goycoechea signed his statement but made a decision: he preferred to remain in jail for the weekend to avoid the media.

The people arrested were in the Dangerous Drugs Division of the Federal Police. One of those held there defined it as “a sewer”. On Saturday, Sánchez Caballero was taken to another police facility, at Del Libertador Avenue and Cavia Street, in Palermo. It was a sign that something was happening. Hours earlier, Calcaterra had communicated his decision to Mauricio Macri. On Monday he would sign as a collaborating accused.

That weekend Techint was debating its strategy. At the home of one of the executives there were successive meetings, on several occasions including Paolo Rocca, the leader of the organization. They called several lawyers to give their interpretation and define a strategy. They finally decided on the path chosen by a majority of the colleagues: to confess. In part at least.

On Monday, at 8, the inquests of Rodolfo Poblete; Manuel Santos Uribelarrea; Eduardo Peduto; and Alejandro Ivanissevich were supposed to start. But things were delayed. Calcaterra appeared at 7 in the morning. He gave his statement and his second at Iecsa was freed. The strategy that led to the light was clear; as was the one leading to darkness.


At that time the businessmen were being taken to Marco Paz prison; the ex-officials to the Ezeiza penitentiary. In the penal establishments they met with other inmates also detained over cases of corruption. At Marcos Paz, for example, none of them met with the most famous of the prisoners: Julio De Vido.

### ***The Key Week***

At noon on Monday, August 6, it was time for the inquests. Poblete was one of those who maintained the strategy agreed upon in the weekend meetings: he denied the facts. A few minutes later he was taken to Marcos Paz. Ivanissevich and Uribelarrea took another path: they confessed to the payments but said the amounts were less than what had been said. They were freed.

The lawyers of the businessmen started to clearly see there was no way out. To lie had a heavy cost and saying the whole truth also. Then the second pilgrimage of the lawyers began. One by one they made the prosecutors offers of information –Rívolo was already part of the team from their clients. They came and went with proposals.

Also, the people in prison were putting pressure on the lawyers. At Marcos Paz there were very strict visiting hours –in the morning for the women and the afternoon for the men. So much so that the wife of one businessman went at the wrong time and had an exchange at the prison entrance: “My husband told me I could come at this time” the lady insisted. “Mam, I think you do not understand where your husband is” the



guard answered. The detainees received visitors in a multi-purpose room with tables. All together, with not much intimacy.

There is a different air in that place. And you think differently. Several looked when one left. They knew that path: Comodoro Py, agreement to confess, homologation and freedom.

Several of the company number ones that had their second in command arrested followed the Calcaterra doctrine. More or less slow to incriminate themselves, Gerardo Fereyra, of Electroingeniería; Enrique Pescarmona; Gabriel Romero, of Emepa; and Jorge Balán, of Industrias Secco, exchanged criminal acts for the freedom of their employees. In the construction companies they understood the situation speedily: run to the courthouse as soon as you are mentioned. Several made their appearance with their half-truths. Patriots, they confessed to paying in pesos. Nobody can believe a constructor that never even publishes an ad offering a studio apartment in pesos would pay bribes in local currency.

It was the way other investigations were opened and the case progressed at an incredible speed, with ex officials that broke down and, in exchange for their confessions, asked not to remain in custody along with those that shared rented cars and millions. It was a little more than fifty days that changed the history of the fight against corruption in Argentina.



# SECOND PRIZE WINNER

**GEOFFREY LIVOLSI, MATHIAS DESTAL,  
MICHEL DESPRATX, LORENZO TUGNOLI (FRANCE)**

**MADE IN FRANCE**



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# MADE IN FRANCE

*By Geoffrey Livolsi, Mathias Destal, Michel Despratx, Lorenzo Tugnoli  
Disclose - April 15, 2019*

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<https://made-in-france.disclose.ngo/>

An unprecedented leak of secret documents has revealed the massive use of French-made weapons in the ongoing civil war in Yemen. Following several months of investigation, Disclose reports on how these weapons have been used against the civilian population.

## PART 1 YEMEN PAPERS

<https://made-in-france.disclose.ngo/en/chapter/yemen-papers>

*A leak of classified French defence ministry documents, revealed here, details the massive use of French-made weapons in the ongoing, four-year-old war in Yemen.*

“Minister, I have a question which is going to annoy you.” The warning came during a January 20<sup>th</sup> 2019 interview on French national radio station France Inter with France’s defence minister Florence Parly.

Interviewer Ali Baddou stared at the minister and, raising his voice slightly, asked: “Should there be a halt to weapons sales to Saudi Arabia?”

It was a subject that had been asked over several months, but which had met with no official response. Yet the issue of arms contracts between France and Saudi Arabia is part of a demanding moral, political and legal debate: should France supply weapons to a client who has been using them, over the past four years, to bomb civilians in Yemen?

On March 26th 2015, at the head of a coalition with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and eight Arab states with a majority Sunni Muslim population, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered a series of attacks by air and sea against targets in Yemen. The objective was to defend the ruling Yemeni regime against a military offensive launched by the country's Houthi movement, from Yemen's Shia Muslim minority, and which is supported by Iran.

Today, the country is gripped by what the United Nations (UN) has described as "one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world". Many among Yemen's population of more than 28 million continue to face aerial bombing raids by the Saudi-led coalition which, according to statistics from the Yemen Data Project, an independent NGO that researches and cross-checks data on coalition strikes, have already killed more than 8,300 civilians, including 1,283 children.

The minister, placing her hands flat on the table before her, ended the questioning with the single comment: "I have no knowledge as to whether [French] weapons are being used directly in this conflict."

Disclose has been given access to classified French official documents, which come under the term "Confidentiel Défense", the first level of classified "Secret défense" documents in France relating to officially protected information on military matters. The documents, contained in a 15-page report authored by officers from France's military intelligence agency, the DRM, are dated September 25<sup>th</sup> 2018.

The report, entitled "Yémen - situation sécuritaire" ("Yemen – security situation") was submitted to French President Emmanuel Macron and his defence minister Florence Parly. It was also submitted to the French prime minister's office and to French foreign affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, on the occasion of a select defence council meeting on the war in Yemen which was held at the French presidential office, the Élysée Palace, on October 3rd 2018.

The leaked DRM report, illustrated with maps and graphics, reveals here for the first time what the French government has thus far attempted to conceal, namely a detailed list of French weapons that are part of the arsenal employed in the conflict in Yemen.

These include Leclerc battle tanks, long-rod penetrator ammunition, Mirage 2000-9 fighter jets, COBRA counter-battery radar systems, Aravis armoured troop-carrying vehicles, Cougar and Dauphin helicopters, and CAESAR truck-mounted howitzers. The report precisely details each model and indicates whether the equipment was sold to Saudi Arabia or its coalition partner, the UAE. Above all, it reveals that a number of French-made weapons are being used in combat operations in Yemen, including in civilian zones.

**“The leaked DRM report reveals, here for the first time in public, the list of French weapons used in the war in Yemen.”**

The CAESAR gun is a star product of the French weapons industry, manufactured in the town of Roanne, in central France, by Nexter, an arms manufacturer entirely owned by the French state. The howitzer, mounted on an all-wheel-drive truck chassis, can fire six shells per minute onto a target up to 42 kilometres away. According to Nexter’s presentation brochure, the gun has a “firepower that is heightened by the rapidity with which it can be set up, its lengthened range and its great precision”.

CAESAR howitzer on the border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia in June 2018.

Since 2010, France has sold 132 CAESAR howitzers to Saudi Arabia, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), an independent Swedish body dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Further deliveries of the weapon are due over the coming months (see “The itinerary of a secret weapons shipment”).

The DRM report includes a map entitled “Population under threat of bombs”. This shows where 48 CAESAR guns are positioned close to the Saudi-Yemeni border, their turrets facing three different zones in Yemen, in which are located towns, villages, farms and farmers’ hamlets.

On the map, around the locations of the CAESARs, are circles, drawn in red, which show the range of the guns, and which touch on inhabited areas.

Are these habitations the target of the French-made guns? The answer is found on page 4 of the report given to President Macron, where it notes that the CAESARs “back up loyalist troops and Saudi armed forces in their progression into Yemeni territory”. Put

more simply, the guns are used to bombard Yemeni territory to open up a path for the tanks and armoured vehicles invading the country.

Over the past four years, several NGOs have closely monitored the course of the war, and notably its consequences upon the civilian population. One of them is the US-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) whose researchers study and cross-check information from Yemeni media sources and websites reporting bombing offensives.

The country's principal news agency, the Yemen News Agency, reported that on June 14th 2018, Saudi "artillery fire" in the north of the country left two children dead and several adults wounded. The report was cross-checked by ACLED. The site of the artillery bombing was the village of Bani Faid, in the Midi district, which was in range of the French-made CAESAR guns. Artillery weapons made in the US, Britain and China are also employed to shell targets in northern Yemen, but according to the DRM report, the village was not within their range.

On August 25<sup>th</sup> 2018, another incident of "coalition artillery fire" targeted a location close the town of Harad (22,000 inhabitants). A house was destroyed, killing one person and wounding three others. The position of the location on the DRM map shows it to be within range of the CAESARs deployed on the Saudi side of the border with Yemen.

There were more civilians wounded, and buildings damaged, in shelling on April 28<sup>th</sup> 2018 of Al Mazraq and the village of Al Atn, close to the Saudi border in the same region of northern Yemen where, according to the DRM map, only the range of the CAESAR guns can threaten the population.

What about other French-made weapons used by Saudi Arabia and the UAE? Speaking before the defence affairs committee of France's lower house, the National Assembly, in July last year, defence minister Florence Parly said: "To my knowledge, land-based equipment sold to Saudi Arabia is used not for offensive means but for defensive purposes at the border with Saudi Arabia." That implied that French-made tanks and guns are used inside Saudi Arabia to protect the kingdom from Houthi attacks. But what the minister presented as a "defensive" war is not that which is detailed in the DRM report.

According to the military intelligence agency, 70 Leclerc-type tanks are employed in the conflict. Of these, the UAE army has reportedly grouped around 40 in military camps at Mocha and Al-Kwakhah, on Yemen's western coast. According to the DRM, those tanks largely remain within their bases and have never been "observed on the front line" of the fighting. Never? The report adopts an important nuance: "They are nevertheless deployed in the zone of Al-Khawkhah, at 115 kilometres from Hodeidah."

According to our study of images recorded on the frontline, and matched against satellite images, the Leclerc tanks have taken part in several major coalition offensives.

One of these was on Yemen's western coastal region, over the period between June and December 2018. The Leclerc tanks left their bases and travelled along a route north, passing by the town of Al-Khawkhah and the historic town of Zabid. They were heading for Hodeidah, a port city controlled by Houthi forces since 2014. It is Yemen's principal hub for imports of essential produce, such as wheat, rice and sugar, and as such a priority military objective for the coalition.

The most devastating attacks by the coalition are air raids. In their report, the French military intelligence officers noted: "Since March 2015, Riyadh has led a campaign of massive and continued aerial bombings." According to the DREM, the coalition has carried out 24,000 air raids since 2015, including 6,000 in 2018.

"Action by Saudi Arabia is essentially carried out by air," commented French foreign affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, speaking on February 13th 2019 before the foreign affairs commission of France's National Assembly. He dismissed any French responsibility in the attacks. "We supply nothing to the Saudi air force," he insisted. But that was not true, as demonstrated by the DRM report which, while the parliamentarians had no knowledge of its existence, Le Drian had already received on his desk four months earlier.

The DRM documents detail precisely that Saudi fighter-bomber aircraft are equipped with a technological marvel designed and maintained by French engineers. This is the pod Damoclès, a high performance, long-range targeting pod made by French defence group Thalès, which, fixed to the underside of an aircraft, allows pilots to guide by laser any type of missile onto its target.

It can even be used to steer missiles from the US defence firm Raytheon. According to an investigation by news channel CNN, shrapnel from a Raytheon laser-guided missile was found beside the wreckage of a vehicle destroyed on September 20th 2016 in the north Yemeni district of Al-Mutama. The attack reportedly killed 15 people, 12 of them children.

An indispensable tool for targeted bombings, the pod Damoclès is also used by the UAE air force on its French-made fighter planes, such as the multi-role Mirage 2000-9 which, it is established, “operates over Yemen”. Just what missiles the jets use is not mentioned in the DRM report. But what it does detail is that the Emirati air force bought guided missiles co-developed by France and the UK called Black Shaheen (manufactured by multi-national defence firm MBDA), along with AASM missiles (manufactured by French firm Safran), both of which can be used on the Mirage 2000-9 deployed over Yemen. The UAE has a fleet of 62 fighter-bombers, according to SIPRI, an independent Swedish institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.

Other French-made air attack weaponry is directly involved in the war in Yemen. This includes the Cougar combat helicopter which transports Saudi troops. There is also the A330 MRTT refuelling tanker aircraft, built by the France-based consortium Airbus, which has delivered six of the tankers to Saudi Arabia, and three to the UAE. These nine air-to-air refuelling and transport planes play a key role in the conflict, capable of simultaneously refuelling mid-flight several of the coalition combat planes.

**“It is a priority for France that humanitarian aid can get through.”**

FRENCH DEFENCE MINISTER FLORENCE PARLY

OCTOBER 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Since the spring of 2015, warships of the Saudi-led coalition have filtered access to Yemen’s Red Sea port of Hodeidah. Officially, the Saudi and Emirati navy vessels are enforcing a UN embargo against shipment of arms for Houthi forces, by carrying out an inspection of onboard cargo deemed to be suspicious. But in reality, they are blocking supplies of food, fuel and medicines destined for more than 20 million Yemenis. The blockade “has denied entry to vessels on a seemingly arbitrary basis” concluded a report by the UN office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published in August 2018.

By publicly announcing that the ending of the Red Sea blockade of shipping was a “priority” for the French government, France’s defence minister Florence Parly overlooks an essential point, about which she was informed by the DRM report: two French-made warships “take part in the naval blockade” which is starving millions of Yemenis (see ‘The war of starvation’). The warships are the Al-Ryadh-class (derivative of the La Fayette-class) frigate Makkah for the Saudi Royal Navy, and a missile-launching Baynunah-class corvette belonging to the UAE navy. According to the DRM report, the latter is part of “support for terrestrial operations carried out on Yemeni territory”. In short, the corvette takes part in shelling the Yemeni coast.

At the end of 2017, amid the war in Yemen, the UAE placed firm orders for two French-built Gowind 2500 corvettes. French President Emmanuel Macron, announcing the news at a press conference in Dubai on November 9th 2017 said: “This contract consolidates our relationship with the country in naval matters, and also completes a very strong cooperation we have had these past years regarding all these weapons.”

French commercial interests have placed it in a very contradictory situation. France is the world’s third-biggest exporter of weapons, and between 2008 and 2017 Saudi Arabia and the UAE were, respectively, its second and sixth biggest arms export markets, according to data from the French defence ministry. But France has also signed up to the UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which imposes upon it, like all other signatories, the prohibition of “any transfer of conventional arms” if it has knowledge that they “would be used in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, attacks directed against civilian objects or civilians protected as such, or other war crimes.”

Meanwhile, how can it be established, once their trace is lost, whether weapons supplied by a country’s arms industry have been used against civilians?

The report by the DRM recognised that without information sources “in the zone” in Yemen it cannot be able “to measure in precise terms” the military arsenal engaged by the coalition. As to the quantity of French-made equipment that is deployed, the military intelligence agency simply admits that it has “no information” on their precise use in the conflict in Yemen, nor regarding their presence at the border. That is a very embarrassing confession for the French government, but which was – until now – protected by the information classified as “secret défense”.



## PART 2

# ITINERARY OF A SECRET SHIPMENT

<https://made-in-france.disclose.ngo/en/chapter/the-route-of-a-secret-shipment>

*During the war in Yemen, France continued its arms deliveries and signed new armament contracts with Saudi Arabia.*

The CAESAR is one of the most powerful weapons France has sold to Saudi Arabia. Manufactured by Nexter, an entirely state-owned French defence company, it is an artillery piece made up of a mighty gun mounted on an all-wheel-drive truck chassis. It is now suspected that the CAESAR units exported to Saudi Arabia are being used to shell zones in Yemen which are inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people (see our first report). The French government, despite knowing of the risks of this, continues to supply the weapon. No less than 129 CAESARs are due to be delivered to Saudi Arabia between now and 2023.

Disclose has traced the path of one of these deliveries, carried out in September 2018.

The journey began one morning in September 2018, in the town of Roanne, in central France, where Nexter's production plant is based. It was from there that at least ten CAESAR guns were sent 587 kilometres north to the Channel port of Le Havre. After arrival at the port, they were loaded into the cargo hold of a freighter called Bahri Jazan, operated by Saudi Arabia's national transport company Bahri. The freighter lifted anchor on September 24th, arriving 19 days later in the Saudi port of Jeddah, its final destination.

Using satellite images and information obtained from open sources, Disclose has produced a video of the itinerary of the CAESAR guns which were delivered at the end of 2018.

## A New Contract with Saudi Arabia

The codename is ARTIS. These five letters are rarely pronounced within Nexter, the leading European manufacturer of terrestrial weapons, and when they are it is only under the veil of secrecy. This new export contract, signed off in December 2018, again places the French executive in face of its contradictions. On October 30<sup>th</sup> 2018, French defence minister Florence Parly told news channel BFMTV: “We have no ongoing negotiations with Saudi Arabia.” But at that very same date, the French government was involved in negotiations over the final details of the contract with Saudi Arabia, which covered a period lasting up to 2023. “Exports of military equipment were not wholly interrupted after 2015,” said the French prime minister’s office, contacted by Disclose. “But their authorisation, on a case-by-case basis, is naturally the subject of heightened attention”.

Against the backdrop of the war in Yemen, Nexter and the French government refrained from any public announcement about the contract. The word had been sent out to all concerned to be as discreet as possible about ARTIS; the recipient country should never appear in communications, either internal or external. However, the contract does indeed appear on the “hunting list” of the company, as Nexter CEO Stéphane Mayer boasted within its offices.

Disclose has obtained a confidential document handed out during a meeting of Nexter’s economic commission in February this year. It is headed “Context and strategic orientations”, and represents one of the rare pieces of evidence of the existence of the ARTIS contract. A second document, whose understated title is “Delivery plans”, details the equipment to be sent to Saudi Arabia between 2019 and 2024. This includes the armoured infantry carrier Titus, one of the latest of Nexter’s products, and also a towed howitzer, the 105LG, which are both part of the ARTIS contract. Contacted by Disclose, Nexter did not respond to our request for an interview.

“The success of the ARTIS contract is politically sensitive,” said a Nexter employee, who spoke on condition their name was withheld. Indeed, NGOs which include Amnesty International, anti-corruption organisation Sherpa and also Oxfam France, are keen to identify the weapons sold to a country which the United Nations (UN) suspect of committing war crimes. But also interested in the issue is member of the

French parliament (MP) Sébastien Nadot, a former member of President Macron's LREM party and now affiliated to a separate "Progressist Movement" group, who has over many months called for a parliamentary inquiry into the arms exports, along with other MPs from the radical-left La France insoumise party. But the calls have been in vain. If the government has kept a low profile, it has also avoided debating the issue. "French arms exports are the subject of annual reports sent to parliament," said the prime minister's office in a written reply to Disclose. "These reports are public." But that statement omitted to mention that the information contained in those reports does not detail the type of equipment sold, the manufacturer, or the quantity which is exported.

Contrary to Germany, another major weapons exporter to Saudi Arabia and which has recently put in place an embargo on further arms supplies to the kingdom, France continues with its arms supplies to the country, and it does so in decisions taken behind closed doors.

Before signing a contract such as ARTIS, Nexter was required to first obtain an export licence from France's general directorate of armament, the DGA, which is part of the defence ministry. Subsequently, such contracts must be approved by the CIEEMG, a special commission that sits under the authority of the French prime minister's office. In making its decision, the CIEEMG is supposed to take account of "the interior situation of the country that is the final destination [of the weapons], and also of its practices regarding the respect of human rights". Questioned, the CIEEMG said that, "The risks for the civilian population are obviously at the top of the criteria for examination that are taken into account".

The export application is then submitted before the French prime minister who, alone, can deliver a final stamp of approval.

## PART 3

# FOOD WAR

<https://made-in-france.disclose.ngo/en/chapter/food-war>

*(The original article contains data visualization. See the maps on the website.)*

*How the Saudi-led coalition uses French weapons to starve millions of civilians in Yemen.*

For the past four years, an Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates has been carrying out daily bombing missions in Yemen. Using information sourced from the Yemen Data Project (see note at bottom of page\*), we have analysed the details of 19,278 aerial bombing raids recorded between March 26th 2015 and February 28<sup>th</sup> 2019.

The results: these show that 30% of the bombing raids were against civilian targets. The intent of the coalition was clearly to destroy infrastructures that are essential for the survival of Yemen's population of 28 million people.

A total of 1,140 bombing missions targeted agricultural production and the country's food and water supplies, including farms, markets, fishing boats and reservoirs of drinking water. That figure places the food sector as the third most important military objective for the Arab coalition, behind military targets (4,250 raids) and inhabited zones (1,883 raids).

These bombings have greatly contributed to creating in Yemen the worst humanitarian crisis seen anywhere in recent history. According to the United Nations (UN), no less than 80% of the country's population are in need of urgent food supplies.

Our investigation reveals a deliberate strategy of causing famine in Yemen, a war of starvation led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with planes, guided bombs and navy vessels 'Made in France'. Since the beginning of the conflict, the coalition has enjoyed with the unwavering diplomatic support of the French government.

**“Using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare may constitute a war crime.”**

UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2417

ADOPTED ON MAY 24<sup>th</sup> 2018

The coalition has bombed **659 farms** in Yemen since 2015. Most of the targets are situated in the north-west of the country, where the Houthi rebels are based. There is no doubt that these sites were deliberately targeted. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), just 3% of land in Yemen is arable, and of that percentage just 1% is farmed on a permanent basis.

Most Yemenis live in rural and mountainous areas, and about 70% of the total population depend upon local markets for their daily food requirements.

The coalition forces have bombed **218 food markets**. In remote regions like the north-west governorate of Hajjah, inhabitants depend entirely on these markets for their food supplies. Now they have become highly dangerous sites for thousands of people.

On January 6th 2018, a series of air raids devastated a fruit and vegetable market in the north-east governorate of Saada. No military forces or weapons were located in the market, nor any of the sites nearby.

A total of 138 air raids targeted sites involved in the production, storage and transport of foodstuffs, including grain and flour silos, fruit and vegetable stocks, bottling plants and bakeries.

Coastal areas have also been the target of repeated coalition bombardments. Fighter jets, together with weapons launched from Saudi and Emirati warships, have attacked villages, ports and fishing boats.

At least **222 boats** have been destroyed both at sea and in bombings of ports along Yemen's Red Sea coastline, while 35 small fishing boats were also destroyed. Fish markets have also been targeted by coalition raids. Out of a total of around 7,000 fishing vessels, 4,586 have halted all activity according to Yemen's fisheries ministry.

The civil war in Yemen has caused the collapse of the country's economy. Since the start of the conflict, the average price of food has risen by 150%, while fuel prices

have leapt by 200%. This huge rise in costs has had dire consequences for agriculture, transport, electricity and water supplies, and upon people's health.

Coalition air strikes have been launched against **91 sites supplying drinking water**, including reservoirs, wells, water pumps, and also irrigation canals and water treatment plants.

In 2019, the UN estimated that 16 million Yemenis did not have access to drinking water. The crisis has led to a widespread cholera epidemic in the west of the country. Since October 2016, there have been 2,906 recorded deaths from cholera. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 1.1 million people are infected with the disease.

**“We are losing the fight against famine.”**

MARK LOWCOCK, UN HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS CHIEF AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR,  
SEPTEMBER 2018.

In the coming months, 14 million people in Yemen are at risk of becoming trapped in a situation of “pre-famine”. Over the past four years, an estimated 85,000 Yemeni children have died from hunger or illness.

The strategy of starvation is also practiced at sea. Since April 14th 2015, the date when the UN adopted a resolution for an embargo to be placed on weapons supplies to Houthi forces, warships of the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE have imposed a maritime blockade in the Red Sea. This does not respect the terms of the UN resolution, because it includes systematic interceptions of cargo shipments heading for Yemen. As a result, there have been significant delays in humanitarian aid supplies reaching the country. Delays have also been caused to shipments of vital commodities reaching the port of Hodeidah, Yemen's principal maritime hub for imported goods.

**“[The UN] strongly condemns the unlawful denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supply and access for responses to conflict-induced food insecurity in situations of armed conflict, which may constitute a violation of international humanitarian law.”**

UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2417, ADOPTED ON MAY 24<sup>TH</sup> 2018

Through its air attacks and maritime blockade, the Saudi-led coalition has a heavy responsibility for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. But the Houthi forces also have a part of the responsibility. The UN accuses them of hi-jacking food aide destined for the civilian population, and also of targeting food stocks.

“It is a humanitarian crisis the likes of which have never been seen before,” said French defence minister Florence Parly, speaking about the crisis in Yemen in an interview with French news channel BFM-TV on October 30th 2018. “It is a priority for France that humanitarian aide can get through,” she added, in a stern tone.

But at that very moment, Florence Parly was aware of the use of French-made weapons in the Arab coalition’s maritime blockade of Yemen-bound cargo in the Red Sea and which is starving the civilian population.

\* This investigation includes data sourced from several entities monitoring the crisis in Yemen. One is the Yemen Data Project, a not-for-profit initiative set up in 2016 to provide independently researched facts and figures about the unfolding war in Yemen, including unbiased data relating to the coalition’s bombing campaigns. The information it receives is studied and compared against other data collected by the NGO Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

Other data cited in this investigation comes from publicly accessible information provided by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a body partnered by UN agencies, governments and NGOs to provide analyses of situations of food insecurity and malnutrition.

## PART 4

# YEMEN: A MAN-MADE CRISIS

<https://made-in-france.disclose.ngo/en/chapter/yemen-a-man-made-crisis>

*Lorenzo Tugnoli is an Italian photographer, based in Beirut, from the photo agency Constrato. He won the World Press Photo 2019 reportage award for his work on Yemen. He is one of the last photographers to visit the country between November and December 2018 in the Houthi controlled area. Disclose publishes its report exclusively in France.*

Rageed is a small bundle in his grandfathers' arms. He bears the unmistakable signs of malnutrition. A swollen abdomen and sagging skin around his tiny arms.

His father is not at home; from the remote village of Al Abar he walked through the mountain to beg in the market of the nearby town to try and scrape some money to feed his children.

The family lives in a mud house on top of a small hill. Inside the hut, I squatted and took some images of Rageed's grandmother as she fed him the last batch of powdered milk; after this there will be no food left for him.


Four-month-old Rageed Sagheer is not the only child in this condition; in every village and town of Hajjah province there are children like him.

The markets are full but prices more than doubled in the last few years and the poor farmers in the region, who survived with few dollars a week, plunged into famine.

Over two extensive reporting trips last year I encountered starving children in hospitals and refugee camps all across the country. This humanitarian crisis was not created by a natural disaster; it is a man-made famine that has been used by both warring parties as a tool of war.

The Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels have been at war for four years, now more than half of the population lives in conditions of near starvation.





A Saudi-led coalition of Arab states, in support of the Yemeni government, imposed restrictions on the import of food, medicine and fuel.

Saudi arabia and its allies wanted to weaken the rebels but it is the civilian population who felt the consequences more strongly. The blockade, the bombs and the devaluation of the currency ravaged the economy.

At a clinic in Aslam, rooms after rooms are filled with mothers, they hold on to their malnourished children, sometimes sharing a bed with another patient. Most of the mothers are themselves malnourished.

The clinic is a short drive away from Al Abar village but some children, like Rageed, will never make it here, the soaring price of fuel and transportation made it too much of a burden for his family.

They come from remote regions of the Hajjah province. Bordering with Saudi Arabia, Hajjah is one of the most affected areas by malnutrition, also because of the ongoing combat. The poverty is so deep that often families have to decide which child to feed and usually girls and disabled children are left behind. In Yemen, 85,000 children under the age of five may have died of malnutrition since 2015, according to Save the children. They often live in remote parts of the country that the conflict made challenging to reach for the Humanitarian agencies.

Some children have been treated in the clinic more than once. Their conditions improve while they are fed high-energy milk and supplements but then their health quickly deteriorates again as soon as they go back to the provinces.

I spent several days photographing the work in the clinic. Every day new children arrived, but only the ones in life-threatening medical conditions could be admitted for lack of space.

They are weighed and measured and then assigned an empty bed with their mothers. They would spend a few months in the clinic before they could be discharged, but some of these children will not make it.

Throughout Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition has carried out air raids using weapons supplied by the US and other countries. Infrastructure such as roads, factories

and power stations have been targeted and as a consequence, the production and distribution of goods in a country already strongly dependent on food import became extremely expensive.

Most of the fighting is centered on the city of Hodeidah, especially after the coalition launched an offensive to retake the city from rebel control. Hodeidah's port is the main point of entry for food imports and humanitarian aid into the Houthi-controlled northern part of the country, where most of the population of Yemen lives.

Taking this important city on the western coast could have changed the course of the war for the coalition. Instead it amplified an already shattering humanitarian crisis and choked the import of humanitarian aid. A stock of wheat from the World Food Programme that could have fed almost four million people remained stuck for months because of the combats, and operations in the port came to an almost complete stop.

When I am finally allowed to visit the port in Hodeidah I find it empty. Some day laborers are sitting along the deserted docks, a single ship moored in the bay. In the distance I can see the cranes destroyed by Saudi airstrikes and the charred remains of silos and warehouses.

At the same time, thousands of miles away, in Sweden, the warring parties are sitting in front of each other to decide the fate of the city.

Dusk is falling over the quiet waters and silence descend over the place. I doubt the negotiations would bring any lasting peace; other deals have been done and broken, and the abandonment of the once thriving port did not inspire much hope in the future.

# THIRD PRIZE WINNER

**ROLI SRIVASTAVA (INDIA)**

## **MISSING WOMBS: THE HEALTH SCANDAL ENSLAVING FAMILIES IN RURAL INDIA**



Roli Srivastava is a Mumbai-based journalist with the Thomson Reuters Foundation and reports on slavery in supply chains, gender, health and migration, focusing largely on India's marginalized communities. Her investigations on deaths of sand miners and on missing wombs in rural India have led to corrective government action. In a career spanning over two decades, she has worked with major Indian newspapers including The Hindu and The Times of India in senior editorial roles.

# MISSING WOMBS: THE HEALTH SCANDAL ENSLAVING FAMILIES IN RURAL INDIA

*By Roli Srivastava  
Thomson Reuters Foundation - 8 May 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<http://news.trust.org/item/20190507234611-scfuj>*

*The cost of hysterectomies - often prescribed for treating minor ailments - is leaving families destitute and trapping them in debt bondage.*

KARAULI, India, May 8 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Farm labourer Dharmendra Meena's first year of marriage with his wife Vijanti in northwest India was "beautiful and carefree".

But their first pregnancy changed everything.

First came the infection during childbirth, then the stark choice presented by a visiting doctor: undergo a "life-saving" hysterectomy - the removal of her uterus and ovaries - or die.

The couple took a loan of 100,000 rupees (\$1,400) to cover the procedure, trapping Dharmendra in slave labour and joining thousands of people in rural India estimated to have been duped by unscrupulous doctors into having unnecessary hysterectomies.

A Thomson Reuters Foundation investigation found many women - often young - targeted by doctors whom medical experts say seek to profit by prescribing the surgery for minor ailments, with the operation and later costs driving families into debt.

Having a hysterectomy brought on the menopause for Vijanti, also a farm labourer, then aged 19, while Dharmendra was forced to work on the money lender's farm

for long hours and low pay as he tried to clear his debt - becoming a victim of debt bondage.

He ended up having to do other jobs and take more loans to support his wife and child, and now - seven years after the surgery - earns less than the monthly interest of 6,000 rupees.

“The interest on the loan is rising every month,” Dharmendra told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, sitting in a sparse hut next to his wife in Taroli, a village in the state of Rajasthan.

“We don’t sleep any more. We fear the money lender,” he said before Vijanti listed their losses - the wedding jewellery they sold, her fertility, his freedom and their hopes for the future.

### ***Seeking a Solution***

About 3 percent of Indian women have had the surgery, found a landmark survey in 2018 by the government, which is trying to improve medical standards and reduce malpractice after media reports and a lawsuit drew attention to hysterectomy scams.

The cost of hysterectomies driving families into slavery has largely gone under the radar, human rights activists said.

The Indian Council of Medical Research is writing guidelines for hysterectomies, and the health ministry plans to publish a standard operating procedure for gynaecologists to follow.

But Dinesh Baswal, deputy commissioner of maternal health in the health ministry, said it was a complex problem as women sought hysterectomies thinking that it would help resolve abnormal bleeding or painful periods that stopped them working.

“A majority of cases can be handled with the assurance that it will go on its own,” Baswal said. “But how do you counsel them? They keep going back to the doctor for a solution.”

Medical experts and health campaigners said they were concerned action was too slow with India overlooking the financial distress and bonded labour involved post-surgery.

The popularity of hysterectomies was once attributed to its coverage by state health insurance schemes for the poor. But the surgery has continued after many states removed the cover due to reports of hospitals carrying out the procedure to claim funds.

In visits to about a dozen villages in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Telangana states over five months, the Thomson Reuters Foundation found hysterectomies were routinely leaving families destitute and trapping people in modern-day slavery.

Interviews with 38 women who said they were struggling financially post-surgery uncovered 10 cases of debt bondage, with families selling jewellery, livestock and land to survive.

In most cases, their husbands or sons had no choice but to toil for the money lender, who used the debt as leverage to compel them to work without any contract, rights or recourse.

The families reported the surgery costing between 30,000 and 100,000 rupees, but many ended up paying more for post-procedure problems. With many women unable to return to work, families' incomes were halved, increasing their dependence on loans.

### ***“War on Women”***

India is home to an estimated 8 million modern-day slaves, working at farms, factories and fisheries, trapped in the sex trade or forced into marriages, according to the Global Slavery Index by the Australia-based charity Walk Free Foundation.

While factors ranging from India's caste system to rural-urban migration or drought and deforestation are often cited as causing debt bondage, the financial impact of hysterectomies has received little attention, human rights campaigners say.

In a first step to map the problem after years of activism on the medical malpractice, the government last year released data on the number of women who had undergone the procedure.

Various states from Telangana to Chhattisgarh have in the past decade cracked down on small private clinics that performed the surgery frequently to claim state health insurance funds.

But India has not grasped the scale of how many unnecessary hysterectomies are being performed nationwide, according to activists who said the 2018 survey was only a small first step.

More than 22,000 Indian women aged 15 to 49 out of 700,000 surveyed - 3 percent - had undergone a hysterectomy, it found.

Half of the women had never gone to school and two-thirds of surgeries were performed in private hospitals, the data showed.

Campaigners fear without a crackdown on unscrupulous clinics across rural India, the practice will continue to endanger women's health and trap families in debt bondage.

Some medical studies have linked hysterectomies to early onset of osteoporosis and other serious health side effects.

"This has to be recognised as a cause of indebtedness and bonded labour," said Bharath Bhushan, founder of Centre for Action Research and People's Development (CARPED) - one of the first organisations to study the medical malpractice in 2005.

"This (a hysterectomy) is a big expense for poor families, and it leads to loss of wages as the women are unable to work post-surgery," Bhushan said. "They have lost their health, and livelihood. This is crazy ... this is war on a woman's body."

## ***Bonded***

Over the last decade, activists have recorded thousands of hysterectomies in villages in Telangana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Karnataka and Odisha, among other states.

Deepali Laute was 21 when she had a hysterectomy after being told she could die of her abdominal pain. Laute was a mother of two and the doctor said she no longer needed her uterus anyway.

As farm workers in Budhiyad village in Maharashtra, Laute and her husband earned 200 rupees daily. They took a loan of 20,000 rupees from their boss that trapped them in debt bondage.

Three years later, she is still recovering from the surgery and cannot work, while her husband Dashrath repays the loan by spending longer hours on his employer's farm for far less money.

"We were always poor, but I never had a loan on my head," said Dashrath. While he earns about 250 rupees for a day's work, the loan repayment leaves him with only 50 rupees to take home.

"My loan is constantly increasing as I keep borrowing more for recurring medical expenses. Deepali is still not well."

Despite their strife, the couple do not regret the surgery.

"The doctor said I will die if I don't get my womb removed. I feel a lot of pain after the surgery in my limbs, but at least I am alive," said Laute, feeding goats tied outside her tin shed home in the middle of a pomegranate farm as dusk drew nearer.

Baswal, from the health ministry, said various states have started requiring doctors to gain government approval to perform a hysterectomy - to curb unnecessary surgery and fraudulent claims for money.

But now people pay for the procedure themselves and move to nearby villages or far-off towns to repay the debt, said Archana Kharche of Astitva, a Maharashtra-based women's rights charity that has mapped the malpractice in 20 villages in the area.

About 400 km (245 miles) east of Budhiyad is Mohammed Nagar village in Telangana state, where generations have undergone the procedure as doctors in the area defy sporadic state crackdowns.

Telangana has the highest number of hysterectomies in India - government data shows - with Maloth Bhuti among those who believed the surgery was her best shot at curing period pains.

The surgery halved her family income as Bhuti, whose mother and daughter-in-law are among 50 women in the village to have undergone the procedure, was unable to return to her farm work.

"I can no longer work. My children take care of me. My husband had to leave the village to work on the money lender's farm. He had no choice," said Bhuti, 45, a mother-of-four.



Telangana health director G. Srinivas Rao said the state was informing women in villages of the health risks of the surgery.

“We have also asked hospitals to fill out details of each hysterectomy case, which is then audited by health officials. There is some change,” said Rao, a doctor.

### ***“Unnecessary and Unethical”***

In Dausa, Rajasthan, advocate Durga Prasad Saini recalled how he started tracking hysterectomies in five private hospitals in the neighbouring town of Bandikui almost a decade ago.

“We were discussing the problem of female foeticide, when someone said: ‘But where are the wombs?’” he said.

“Nearly 80 percent of all procedures carried out were hysterectomies. We counted 1,000 hysterectomies in a year in the five (private) hospitals,” he said.

His findings formed part of a petition filed in 2013 against the practice in the Supreme Court by physician-campaigner Narendra Gupta, founder of non-profit Prayas based in Rajasthan, who sought compensation for the women who had the surgery.

The petition - which is still pending in India’s top court - and subsequent requests to officials prompted the government to carry out the first-ever national hysterectomy survey, he said.

Rural women often do not get a proper consultation at state hospitals so they go to private doctors, where they are advised to undergo “unnecessary and unethical” hysterectomies, he added.

“There are enough studies and reports that show clearly that there is a rising number of hysterectomies,” Gupta said.

“A lot ... are being conducted without other non-invasive methods being explored.”

While hysterectomies in the West are common post-menopause, activists say many rural Indians are having the surgery young -after being told it offers a quick fix to their period problems.

Some doctors say they offer the surgery based on demand.

“Women think if the uterus is removed, they will be free of (period pains),” said C.K. Sharma, a doctor who runs a hospital in Karauli, which is popular with women in nearby villages.

“If I say no (for a hysterectomy), they will go to another doctor to get it removed,” said Sharma, who declined to give his full name and did not respond to further requests for comment.

### ***Desperate for the Doctor***

Hysterectomies, medical experts say, are never the solution to the problems that women present to doctors, and its demand highlights the issue of private doctors cashing in on ignorance.

“Doctors link all of it - their pelvic pain or lower back pain - to the uterus,” said Subha Sri, the head of Commonhealth - a Chennai-based coalition of health charities.

Subha Sri reviewed hysterectomy cases in southern Karnataka state and said the procedure - which should be carried out only in rare cases - was being arbitrarily done by doctors.

“They are introducing health problems and often not treating women for what they had come for,” she said.

Couples such as Dharmendra Meena and Vijanti said they felt they had no option but to opt for surgery that was presented as a life-or-death choice at a desperate time.

But Vijanti often wonders about what could have been.

“I could have continued working on the farm if I hadn’t had the surgery. I would have had another child,” the 26-year-old said. “The surgery changed everything.”

(\$1 = 69.2750 Indian rupees)

Reporting by Roli Srivastava; Editing by Kieran Guilbert and Belinda Goldsmith.



**OUTSTANDING  
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**SHORTLISTED  
PUBLICATIONS**

## **ABDULAZIZ ABDULAZIZ (NIGERIA)**

# **BUSTING A POWERFUL NIGERIAN MINISTER: THE KEMI ADEOSUN SERIES**



Abdulaziz Abdulaziz was born, and schooled to university level, in Kano, Nigeria. He started out as a creative writer and newspaper contributor before he picked his first journalism job in 2007. Since then, he has worked in different roles within the media landscape in Nigeria. Abdulaziz is currently Associate Editor at the online newspaper, PREMIUM TIMES. He has attended a number of journalism and creative writing workshops, including the British Council writing workshop facilitated by Bernadine Evaristo and Farafina Trust/Chimamanda Adichie workshop (2012). In 2010 he won the short story award in an anticorruption literary competition organised by the Kano State Public Complaints and Anticorruption Commission. In December 2018, Abdulaziz was awarded with the Wole Soyinka Prize for Investigative Reporting for his journalism work exposing fraudulent claims on national service (NYSC) by a sitting finance minister. He was 2019 first runner up for the Nigerian Diamond Award for Media Excellence (DAME) in the investigative category, and was shortlisted for the Fetisov Journalism Awards, the same year. His poems are anthologised.

# EXCLUSIVE: WHY FINANCE MINISTER, KEMI ADEOSUN, IS DOING OUR BIDDING – LAWMAKERS

*By Abdulaziz Abdulaziz  
Premium Times - July 6, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/275201-exclusive-why-finance-minister-kemi-adeosun-is-doing-our-biddings-lawmakers.html>

Some senators have provided insights into why the Minister of Finance, Kemi Adeosun, has remained exceptionally generous in funnelling billions of naira to federal lawmakers, sometimes even against the wishes of her bosses at the presidency.

PREMIUM TIMES had in a series of reports revealed how the minister repeatedly enriched lawmakers, including by funding unapproved projects and making unappropriated cash payments to the legislative arm of government.

In April, this newspaper reported details of the controversial release of N10 billion to the National Assembly by Mrs Adeosun.

The lawmaking arm then wasted the money on exotic cars and dubious contracts. Some of the companies to which the contracts were awarded were not even registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission and the Bureau of Public Procurement.

In June, this newspaper reported how the minister spent about N12 billion to finance projects the presidency wanted removed from the 2017 budget.

The minister's action generated uproar nationwide, especially among civil society activists who wondered the motive of such curious financial relationship with federal lawmakers reputed for being self-centred, greedy and corrupt.

Two months of asking questions is beginning to provide some insights into the real reason the minister has maintained such cosy relationship with the lawmakers.

At least five senators who spoke to this newspaper said the abnormal actions of the minister were activated by the top echelon of the legislature.

“We have never had a finance minister so generous to the National Assembly,” one senator said. “But it is not for nothing. The truth is we were able to dig up something unsavoury about her and our leaders are holding her by the jugular.”

One ranking senator simply said, “The minister is being gagged by our people”.

He however said he was not sure what his colleagues were using to “gag” the minister.

Yet another senator said, “What I am aware of is some of our people said they have an ammunition they can use to silence her. That has given way for the leadership (of the National Assembly) to intimidate her, knowing that they could get her out of her job if she doesn’t cooperate.”

Another ranking senator, who also asked not to be named, said Mrs Adeosun was indeed being blackmailed by lawmakers.


“Not everything is out in the public because every single one of us are beneficiaries of this situation,” he said. “But I can tell you the woman is being harassed and blackmailed into doing many things she would ordinarily not so. She is helpless in the hands of our people.”

The minister is said to be afraid of being exposed or investigated by the legislative body, which may lead to her losing her position.

PREMIUM TIMES learnt that the real “ammunition” is known only by a few high profile leaders of the National Assembly who have turned it into what an official called “a secret tool for extortion.”

But when contacted, the President of the Senate, Bukola Saraki, said the finance minister was not being blackmailed in any way.

“There is nothing like that and I am very sure of that,” Yusuph Olaniyonu, the spokesperson to Mr. Saraki, told PREMIUM TIMES. “If there is anything like that I



would know. Oga will hint or she will tell me. There is absolutely nothing like that. It is not true.”

Mr. Olaniyonu described Mrs Adeosun as the “most cooperating minister” who answers lawmakers’ summons at all times. But he insisted that her conduct was not because of fear of any blackmail.

The spokesperson to the finance minister, Oluyinka Akintunde, also denied his boss was being blackmailed by lawmakers.

“I wish to state that there is no such thing,” Mr. Akintunde said. “The Honourable Minister has always operated within the ambit of the law in the discharge of her responsibilities.”

This newspaper is however working hard to uncover what the real “ammunition” being used against the minister is, and will provide updates as information becomes available.

# EXCLUSIVE: FINANCE MINISTER KEMI ADEOSUN SKIPS NYSC, FORGES EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE

*By Abdulaziz Abdulaziz  
Premium Times - July 7, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/investigationspecial-reports/275319-exclusive-finance-minister-kemi-adeosun-skips-nysc-forges-certificate.html>

Nigeria's Finance Minister, Kemi Adeosun, did not participate in the mandatory one-year national youth service scheme. Instead, she forged an exemption certificate many years after graduation, PREMIUM TIMES can authoritatively report.

The year-long service, organised by the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC), is compulsory for all Nigerians who graduate from universities or equivalent institutions at less than 30 years of age.

In addition to being a requirement for government and private sector jobs in Nigeria, the enabling law prescribes punishment for anyone who absconds from the scheme or forges its certificates.

Eligible Nigerians who skipped the service are liable to be sentenced to 12 months imprisonment and/or N2,000 fine, according to Section 13 of the NYSC law.

Section 13 (3) of the law also prescribes three-year jail term or option of N5,000 fine for anyone who contravenes provision of the law as Mrs Adeosun has done.

Subsection 4 of the same section also criminalises giving false information or illegally obtaining the agency's certificate. It provides for up to three-year jail term for such offenders.



Mrs Adeosun's official credentials obtained by PREMIUM TIMES show that the minister parades a purported NYSC exemption certificate, which was issued in September 2009, granting her exemption from the mandatory service on account of age.

### ***How It Happened***

Mrs Adeosun graduated from the Polytechnic of East London in 1989, at the age of 22. According to her curriculum vitae, Mrs Adeosun was born in March 1967.

The institution changed name to University of East London in 1992. Mrs Adeosun has her certificate issued in the new name.

Having graduated at 22, it is obligatory for Mrs Adeosun to participate in the one-year national service, for her to qualify for any job in Nigeria.

However, at the time of her graduation, the young Folakemi Oguntomoju, as she then was, did not return to Nigeria to serve her fatherland.

Upon graduation in 1989, the Applied Economics graduate pursued fast-paced career in the British public and private sectors.

She first landed a job at British Telecoms, but left after a year to join Goodman Jones, an accounting and investment firm, as audit officer. She served there till 1993.

In 1994, Mrs Adeosun joined London Underground Company as Internal Audit Manager, before switching to Prism Consulting, a finance firm, where she worked between 1996 until 2000.

In 2000, Mrs Adeosun was hired by PricewaterhouseCoopers, where she worked for two years.

When she eventually returned to Nigeria in 2002, Mrs Adeosun still did not deem it necessary to participate in the NYSC scheme. She simply accepted a job offer at a private firm, Chapel Hill Denham.

However, ostensibly concerned that she might run into trouble for skipping the mandatory scheme, Mrs Adeosun, sometime in 2009, procured a fake exemption certificate.

The NYSC does not issue exemption certificate to anyone who, like the minister, graduates before turning 30, top officials of the scheme familiar with the matter told PREMIUM TIMES.

Mrs Adeosun's 'certificate' is dated September 9, 2009, and was purportedly signed by Yusuf Bomo, a former director-general of the corps.

Officials said Mr. Bomo stepped down from the NYSC in January 2009, and could not have signed any certificate for the corps eight months after. The retired brigadier general passed on in September 2017.

### ***Illegal Jobs***

Using that fake certificate, Mrs Adeosun went on to clinch high-profile jobs at Quo Vadis Partnerships (managing director), Ogun State Government (commissioner for finance), and Federal Government of Nigeria (minister of finance).

By the provision of Section 12 of the NYSC Act, employers must demand NYSC certificates from prospective employees. The law also mandates employees to present only genuine certificates for that purpose.

Section 12 of the Act reads:

“For the purposes of employment anywhere in the Federation and before employment, it shall be the duty of every prospective employer to demand and obtain from any person who claims to have obtained his first degree at the end of the academic year 1973-74 or, as the case may be, at the end of any subsequent academic year the following:

- a. a copy of the Certificate of National Service of such person issued pursuant to section 11 of this Decree
- b. a copy of any exemption certificate issued to such person pursuant to section 17 of this Decree
- c. such other particulars relevant thereto as may be prescribed by or under this Decree.”

A lawyer, Sagir Gezawa, described jobs Mrs Adeosun has had in Nigeria as illegal.

“The combined effect of sections 12 and 13 of the NYSC Act is that it is illegal to hire a person who graduated but failed to make himself or herself available to serve, or falsify any document to the effect that he or she has served or exempted from serving.”

However, without demanding or verifying the veracity of the certificate presented by Mrs Adeosun, two Nigerian companies, the Ogun State Government and the Federal Government of Nigeria employed her at various times.

On becoming governor in 2011, Ibikunle Amosun nominated her into his cabinet. She proceeded to serve as commissioner of finance for four years.

In November 2015, Mrs Adeosun was sworn in as minister by President Muhammadu Buhari, and assigned the all-important finance ministry, after a supposed security and Senate screening.

The State Security Service, charged with vetting appointees to top government positions, failed to detect that her NYSC certificate was fake.

The Senate, which received the fake certificate as part of the documents Mrs Adeosun submitted for her confirmation hearing, detected the discrepancy, PREMIUM TIMES understands.

But it nonetheless proceeded to clear her for the top office. Those familiar with the matter said the leadership of the National Assembly used that information to blackmail and extort Mrs Adeosun for years.

### ***Fake Certificate?***

We investigated Mrs Adeosun’s so-called NYSC certificate for months, determining eventually that it is fake.

“This one is an Oluwole certificate,” a top official of the corps said after we showed him a copy of the document. “We did not issue it and we could not have issued it.” Oluwole is a location in Nigeria’s commercial capital, Lagos, where fraudsters possess an amazing dexterity in the art of forging all kinds of documents.

Several current and former officials of the scheme told this paper that the NYSC would never issue an exemption certificate to anyone who graduated before age 30 and did not fall into the categories of persons exempted by the corps' enabling Act.

By that law, there are four categories of Nigerians eligible for exemption certificates. The first are those who graduated after turning 30. The second are holders of national honours. The third are persons who served in the armed forces or the police for up to nine months. The last category are staff of intelligence agencies, or the armed forces.

Therefore, having graduated at 22, and with no record of national honours or service in the intelligence or armed forces, Mrs Adeosun is not qualified for exemption, officials said.

Yet, the so-called exemption certificate she holds gave age as the reason for her exemption.

"This is not the size of our exemption certificate," another top official of the corps remarked when shown a copy of the minister's 'certificate'. "The calligraphy is also different".

On another day, another staff questioned the genuineness of the 'certificate' based on the font of the serial number.

"Look at this, look at this other one, the numbering is different," the staff said while comparing Mrs Adeosun's certificate with a genuine one on file.

Mrs Adeosun's name also failed to pop up during multiple checks of the exemption certificates registers kept by the corps, officials said.

One official, who perused the register recently, noted that the sequence of serial numbers for certificates issued in 2009 did not correspond to that in Mrs Adeosun's purported certificate.

The signature on the 'certificate' is also suspect. As indicated earlier in this report, it was purportedly signed by an official who left the corps eight months before the document was made. One official described that claim as "barefaced lie and total impossibility".

## ***A Tool for Blackmail***

PREMIUM TIMES reported Friday how the certificate scandal was turned into a tool for blackmail by a National Assembly cartel that used it to coerce the finance minister to keep releasing funds to the lawmaking arm.

Some federal lawmakers revealed to this paper that the discrepancy was detected by the Senate during the minister's confirmation hearing. But rather than probe the issue, they turned it into a tool against Mrs Adeosun.

The report linked the certificate scandal to the minister's excessive, even illegal, funding of the lawmakers, including recently funnelling a N10billion largesse to that arm of government.

## ***Minister, NYSC Won't React***

Although several of its officials informally cooperated with our reporters in the course of this investigation, the NYSC leadership declined to respond to our official correspondences.

We first sent a letter to Director-General Sule Kazaure (brigadier-general) requesting him to help determine the authenticity or otherwise of the minister's 'certificate'.

After we received no response for several weeks, we sent in a Freedom of Information request on the matter. Weeks after, we are still waiting for response.

Insiders say authorities of the corps have been under severe pressure in the past weeks not to respond to our inquiries.

One of our reporters also requested a reaction from Oluyinka Akintunde, the spokesperson to Mrs Adeosun, who was briefed on the outcome of our investigations. He is yet to send a response to our inquiry.

# COMPARE & CONTRAST: ORIGINAL AND FAKE NYSC EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE

*By Abdulaziz Abdulaziz and Richard Akinwumi  
Premium Times - July 10, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/275675-compare-contrast-original-and-fake-nysc-exemption-certificate-for-2009.html>*

*(Note: Graphics for this story was done by Richard Akinwumi thus his name in the by-line)*

An exemption certificate obtained by PREMIUM TIMES Tuesday morning has further rubbished the authenticity of the purported NYSC certificate being paraded by Finance Minister Kemi Adeosun.

By the provision of the National Youths Service Act, some categories of Nigerians are eligible for exemption from the mandatory service.

However, Mrs Adeosun remains ineligible because she does not satisfy any of the requirements for eligibility.

After a three-month investigation, PREMIUM TIMES on Saturday published details of how the finance minister submitted a fake NYSC's exemption certificate to the Nigerian authorities after she skipped the mandatory national service upon graduation at 22.

Details published by this newspaper on Monday showed that the questionable certificate was among credentials submitted by Mrs Adeosun to facilitate her appointment and screening in 2015.

On Friday this newspaper reported how the National Assembly used the certificate mess as a tool for blackmail to get undue favours from the minister.

The minister had variously released money illegally to the lawmakers and funded projects not approved by the presidency.

The scandal has generated outrage from Nigerians who asked the minister to resign from her post or be fired by President Muhammadu Buhari.

### ***Discrepancies***

Mrs Adeosun's 'certificate' is dated September 9, 2009, and was purportedly signed by Yusuf Bomo, a former director-general of the corps.

Officials said Mr. Bomo stepped down from the NYSC in January 2009, and could not have signed any certificate for the corps eight months after. The retired brigadier general passed on in September 2017.

A number of NYSC certificates for the latter part of 2009 sighted by our reporters carried the signature of Maharazu I Tsiga, the brigadier general appointed into the position by President Umaru Yar'Adua.

A number of retired and serving NYSC personnel, as enumerated in our earlier story published on Saturday, pointed out many discrepancies in Mrs Adeosun's 'certificate'.

Some of the discrepancies identified include font of the serial number, the calligraphy, size of the certificate and the signatory.

### ***Between Fake Versus Original***

A Certificate of Exemption issued in July 2009, two months before Mrs Adeosun obtained her own, was obtained by PREMIUM TIMES Tuesday.

A cursory look at the certificate reveals a document that is completely different from what the minister presented for her appointment in late 2015.

On a close look at the two documents, PREMIUM TIMES identified about ten differences that stand out the fake from the original.

Some of the discrepancies identified corroborated the verdicts passed by NYSC officials as reported earlier.

The serial number placed at the top right-hand side of the certificate, appear different. The font characters are different, so also are their placements, with the one on the fake one farther away from the edges.

The numbering sequence also suggest that the fake certificate has doctored numbering. The original is numbered 000131816 (one hundred and thirty one thousand, eight hundred and sixteen) while the numbers in the doctored one, instead of going up, comparable to the period between the two dates of issue, nosedived to 000048932 (Forty eight thousand, nine hundred and thirty two).

The fourth difference comes in the line reading “Certificate of Exemption” while the wordings are bold in the certificate issued in July, in Mrs Adeosun’s that was issued in September, the characters were not emboldened.

Additionally, the “T” beginning the line; “This is to certify” was in bold in the original while the fake certificate carried it in plain style.

**Point six:** The original line has “of” written in between the space separating day and month, while the fake one was just a straight line without the “of” separator.

Another difference is in the calligraphy which markedly differ between the two. Calligraphy discrepancy is one of the areas staff of NYSC pointed out to PREMIUM TIMES in the course of determining the veracity of Mrs Adeosun’s ‘certificate’.

**Eighth:** The writings below the name quoting relevant sections of the NYSC Act to justify the exemption are spaced in the fake certificate while in the original they are without any space.

Most importantly, however, the certificate issued in July was signed by Maharazu Tsiga, the then director general while the purported certificate of Mrs Adeosun, allegedly issued in September, carries the signature of Yusuf Bomo, who left the agency in January.



# EXCLUSIVE: WE COULDN'T HAVE ISSUED ADEOSUN'S 'EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE' – EX-NYSC DG TSIGA

*Abdulaziz Abdulaziz  
Premium Times - July 12, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/275920-exclusive-we-couldnt-have-issued-adeosuns-exemption-certificate-ex-nysc-dg-tsig.html>

Finance minister, Kemi Adeosun, is not entitled to National Youth Service Corps' Certificate of Exemption, and even if she had applied for one, the man who was in charge of the Corps in 2009 said there was no way he could have approved such request.

On Wednesday, Maharazu Tsiga, who assumed office at the NYSC as director general in January 2009 broke his silence to PREMIUM TIMES in telephone chat from his Katsina base.

Mr Tsiga, a retired general, further provided clues that further reinforced positions of NYSC's serving and retired personnel, including a retired director of mobilisation, Anthony Ani, all pointing to the invalidity of the said 'certificate'.

Mr Tsiga repeated the point earlier made by Mr Ani that verifying any certificate claimed to be from the NYSC is an easy task.

"We have what is called strong room. I believe from there they can easily identify if a certificate is issued by the NYSC or not," he said when asked about the NYSC's claim about an ongoing investigation.

Answering question whether anybody who graduated below the age of 30 but applied later to the NYSC for exemption could be exempted, Mr Tsiga said "It is not possible".

He said even one had reached 100 years, one would still have to serve.

“In as much as you have not served, no matter how old you grow, in as much as you were not mobilised to serve at the time you were supposed to serve, they can never give you exemption. You must go for service,” he said.

PREMIUM TIMES on Tuesday published a detailed juxtaposition of an original Certificate of Exemption alongside the one paraded by Mrs Adeosun, which clearly shows that the minister’s ‘certificate’ is fake.

The points enumerated by this newspaper were further corroborated by Mr Ani in his Channels TV interview, where he stated that there was no way a director general who left in January would sign a September certificate, among other reasons.

“I don’t know where the certificate come from but (what) I say is that NYSC cannot make that mistake. The NYSC that I served, that I know, can never make that type of mistake,” Mr Ani concluded.

Mrs Adeosun has been in the eye of a storm since the publication of an exclusive story by PREMIUM TIMES on Saturday exposing how she skipped the mandatory national service and fraudulently obtained a purported exemption certificate.


Curiously, the Nigerian government has adopted studied silence since the scandal broke out, aside a tacit statement issued by the NYSC on Monday, which was adopted by Information Minister, Lai Mohammed, on Wednesday.

The minister has also remained silent and she and her media adviser have not responded to media enquiries all the while.

NYSC claimed in a statement by the Corps’ Director of Public Relations, Adenike Adeyemi, that “Mrs Adeosun did apply for Exemption Certificate”, but in the same breath said it would investigate the source of the certificate being brandished by the minister.

### ***The Bomoi Signature***

The former DG, Mr Tsiga, said there was no way his predecessor, Yusuf Bomoi, could have signed a certificate issued in September as he (Tsiga) had taken over from him in January, except for any unscrupulous reason.



“There is no way that somebody would come and sign after hand over,” he said of his predecessor’s signature.

The retired general said he started signing certificates from the first batch of youth corps members mobilised after he resumed office.

Checks by PREMIUM TIMES show that the first batch in 2009, Batch A, was mobilised reported to camp on March 3, while Batch B was mobilised in July.

Mr Tsiga said aside from the time the certificate is signed, the most important thing to ascertain is the genuineness of the document in itself. He said the outcome of that first search would provide the first clue from where to unravel the scandal.

He reiterated that faking NYSC documents was a recurring issue.

“As I told you, we have had fake corps members, even fake NSYC camp” he said.

The revelations by Mr Tsiga and Mr Ani have further validated a number of observations made by some NYSC officials who volunteered information to our reporter in the course of this investigation.

# AZHAR KALAMUJIĆ (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)

## JUDGE FAZLAGIĆ DISINHERITED HOLOCAUST VICTIMS



Azhar Kalamujic is a journalist with the Center for Investigative Reporting in Sarajevo, who has published numerous investigative projects including the foreign investment funds' corrupt wheeling-and-dealings in Bosnia; uncovered how Balkan politicians use services of the local drug lords; how expert witnesses and judges take bribes to do the bidding of private businessmen; how major energy traders in the Balkans break the law; and revealed abuses in the military and pharmaceutical industries that Bosnian taxpayers had to shoulder. Kalamujic reported how a Sarajevo-based company sold its claim on a pre-war debt from DR Congo to a New York-based vulture fund for a pittance. Kalamujic's story was a part of BBC's and the Guardian's investigation that led the British Parliament to stop 'vulture funds' from profiteering from third world countries' debts.

Kalamujic was the recipient of the annual award of the Sarajevo daily 'Oslobodjenje' in 2000 and 2002 for his reporting on corruption. He was named the Journalist of the Year in BiH in 2016 for stories about the controversial takeover of one of the biggest generic drug makers in the Balkans. In 2019, Kalamujic received the first award at the international journalism competition "Dusko Jovanovic" in Montenegro for the story exposing a judge who disinherited dozens of property owners in Sarajevo through fraudulent lawsuits. Some of those houses, condos, and offices belonged to Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

As a senior reporter and a former editor, he took part in nearly all of CIN's investigative projects that have received numerous international awards over the past 13 years.

# JUDGE FAZLAGIĆ DISINHERITED HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

*By Azhar Kalamujić*  
*www.cin.ba*  
*April 26, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*  
<https://www.cin.ba/en/sutkinja-fazlagic-raskucila-zrtve-holokausta/>

The houses, condos, and offices of Sarajevo Jews who perished in the Holocaust have been deeded to new owners through the illegal rulings of a judge who also grabbed two prime properties in downtown Sarajevo for herself.

## ***By The Center for Investigative Reporting***

For years, a former Municipal Court judge in Sarajevo, Lejla Fazlagić, meted out justice to both the dead and alive. She conducted fake property litigations in her courtroom sometimes involving plaintiffs and defendants who had already gone on to the afterworld. The result of these fabricated proceedings was always the same – the real estate of a departed person ended up titled in the name of judge Fazlagić, her relatives, or friends.

Between 2011 and 2016, Fazlagić disinherited dozens of real property owners in Sarajevo by deeding their houses, condos, offices, and real estate to people with no claim to them. She mostly targeted the properties of Sarajevo Jews who perished during the Second World War as well as those of other dead Sarajevans. Then again, some of the property belonged to a few firms.

The Prosecutor's Office of Sarajevo Canton filed an indictment against Fazlagić in the beginning of 2018 listing 19 properties worth nearly 8 million KM as illegally deeded. She was helped in this enterprise by certain judges, attorneys, notaries, court and

municipal clerks and others. Prosecutors say that they were a part of an organized criminal group led by Alija Delimustafić, a former interior minister of the war-time Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina.

Some properties were sold soon after the court cases wound up, while Fazlagić and her father kept two apartments in downtown Sarajevo valued at 1.46 million KM.

After the investigation opened in 2016, Fazlagić resigned and fled to Croatia. She told reporters from the Center for Investigative Reporting in Sarajevo (CIN) that she did not belong to any group and that she had been set up.

### ***Departed Granny as Plaintiff***

The indictment describes how the last year of Fazlagić's career as a Sarajevo judge was marked by illegal dealings – abuse of office, money laundering, forgery of documents and fraud all committed via her connections in the government.

Prosecutors charged her with setting up fabricated property litigations in which she abused personal data of deceased persons and handed down rulings based on forged documents and fake consent agreements.

The indictment states that she would get tipped off about properties that were the subject of litigations from a friend, the former head of the Department for Property and Legal Affairs of Stari Grad Borough, Lejla Cerić.

Boris Kožemjakin, president of the Jewish Community in Sarajevo, said that Cerić on several occasions asked about the abandoned property of Jews, most of them properties that belonged to Holocaust victims.

“She conducted proceedings and in some ways filed requests to the community to see if there was anyone who stood to inherit some condos, land etc.” said Kožemjakin.

Cerić did not want to comment on allegations she played a role in the group, while Fazlagić denied that she got tips about abandoned condos from the former borough official. Fazlagić said the two of them were not on good terms: “I have no idea what she was doing, nor do I know about Stari Grad Borough.”

When Fazlagić learned that smack in the city center near the Cathedral of Sacred Heart, was an abandoned building that had belonged to Jewish families named Cindorf, Baruh and Maestro, she moved to grab it. In early 2012, Fazlagić unsealed from the archive a case on which she had worked and based on it she opened a new case and assigned it to herself. In this way, she got around a computer system that randomly assigns cases to prevent judges from handpicking them.

Fazlagić told CIN that she should not be blamed for that and instead pointed a finger at attorneys and at the court clerks who maintain the computer system. In the new case file, she inserted a fake lawsuit that listed her grandmother Selveta Crnalić as a plaintiff against defendants Albin and Erna Cindorf. Crnalić, who had been dead for 26 years by then, seemed to be demanding more than half of their building. According to the Jewish Community in Sarajevo, the Cindorfs died in Israel.

In May 2013, in order to give legitimacy to the proceedings, Fazlagić sent courier Zaim Spahović with a lawsuit to made-up addresses in the neighborhoods of Hrasnica and Butmir on the outskirts of Sarajevo, according to the indictment.

Spahović returned a dispatch note with fake Cindorf's signatures confirming that they had been served the lawsuit. Fazlagić also inserted another fake document into the case file with which the Cindorfs accepted the lawsuit. Spahović did not want to talk to CIN.

Based on these documents, the judge ruled in favor of her deceased grandmother, and in mid-2013, Crnalić became a 67 percent co-owner of a 243 square-meter property in downtown Sarajevo.

Having received a title, Crnalić was allowed to go back to being dead when Fazlagić opened probate proceedings. She titled her grandmother's newly acquired property to her father Fahrudin Fazlagić. She did this without his knowledge by forging a power of attorney for which she hired lawyer Ismet Hamzić, according to prosecutors.

Hamzić told CIN that the power of attorney was legitimate and that this was a routine task for him. In March 2014, the property was titled in her father's name. According to an expert witness appraisal, it is worth more than 1.2 million KM.

## ***Murdered Jews' Consent***

Having deeded the Jewish property to her family members, judge Fazlagić went on to conquer new space in the same building. She filed a request with the Stari Grad Borough's Department of Zoning asking for approval to upgrade the roof space into residential and office space. To the request, she attached a document claiming that all owners and tenants consented to this change. Her grandmother and two other owners were all dead at the time. Death certificates show that Regina Maestro and Roza Baruh died in Croatian concentration camps in Jasenovac and Đakovo.

However, the documents the judge filed to overhaul the roof, portrayed the three woman as living in Germany, from where they'd sent in powers of attorney verified by a stamp from the BiH consulate in Frankfurt. The diplomatic mission later informed the Sarajevo Canton Prosecutor's Office that the documents were forgeries.

The only living signature party to the consent was a Sarajevo attorney Kemo Kapur. The indictment alleges that he kept mum about his dead neighbors. He resided with his family in the building based on an agreement with Sarajevo Housing Stock. His law office is also registered at the address.

The upgrade was approved by the borough. In 2015, judge Fazlagić took title to an 87 square-meter loft worth around 235,000 KM based on the fake consents.

Several months before the approval was issued, Kapur filed a fake lawsuit on behalf of his wife Fatima against the deceased Regina Maestro and Roza Baruh to get a deed to the apartment in the same building. Fazlagić took the case, again by by-passing the computer. The case file then got a made-up reply from the long-deceased Maestro and Baruh confirming to had received the lawsuit. According to Sarajevo Canton prosecutors, attorney Kapur wrote and undersigned the reply. Fazlagić ruled in favor of Fatima Kapur, who thus became the owner of the apartment worth 614,285 KM at the end of 2013. The Sarajevo lawyer did not want to talk to CIN about charges against him.

## ***Mother's Lawsuit***

On several occasions Fazlagić abused the identity of her deceased grandmother in fake property lawsuits. In one though, she used personal details of her



mother Džemila who died in a 1988 car accident. In order to hide the connection between herself and the plaintiff, Fazlagić used her mother's maiden name – Filipović.

Fazlagić followed her regular pattern. In an old archived case file, she filed Džemila Filipović's lawsuit against the late Šarika Farhi. This time the booty was Farhi's house in the Alifakovac neighborhood of Stari Grad Borough. This time again, the fake documents certifying that Farhi received the lawsuit were filed.

When Farhi did not respond to the court's summons, Fazlagić ruled in her mother's favor. The house was titled into her mother's name.

Fazlagić said that she could not speak in more detail about the charges because she was preparing her defense. While investigating the genealogy of the Jewish family Farhi, CIN reporters uncovered that Šarika died in Serbia in 1985 and that her property passed to her son Boris Farkić, a doctor from Loznica. The Farhies changed their name after the Second World War to Farkić because of anti-Semitic sentiments.


Boris's son, a Belgrade physician Mihajlo Farkić, was surprised to learn from CIN reporters about the fate of his grandmother's house. According to an appraisal prosecutors ordered, the inheritors of Šarika Farhi have been damaged for 340,000 KM.

To keep the house in her mother's name was too risky for Fazlagić, so the judge came up with a new litigation. This time, Arif Ibrahimović, Fazlagić's plumber and painter, filed a lawsuit against her mother, claiming that the property belonged to him.

Sarajevo Municipal Court Judge Milena Rajić ruled in favor of Ibrahimović in June 2015. She said that Filipović approved the lawsuit. The prosecutors accused Rajić of handing down an illegal ruling because she knew the defendant was a dead person.

CIN reporters tried to interview Rajić, but she did not answer their calls.

In middle of the following year Ibrahimović sold the house to a Sarajevo businessman Almir Hamamdžić for 180,000 KM. He built a hotel on the plot. Despite fetching a good sum for the sale of Alifakovac property, Ibrahimović lives in the basement of a decrepit house on the sides of a Sarajevo hill Hum. He did not want to talk to reporters.



Even though Fazlagić told CIN that she was not interested in material things, the judge owns valuable properties in BiH and Croatia. Apart from Sarajevo condos she acquired through suspicious litigations, the judge and her father also own a summer house in Mala Duba, a pretty town in Makarska Riviera where she now lives with her daughter. In Croatia Fazlagić co-owns apartments in Mali Ston on the Pelješac Peninsula. She bought that with Goran Cerić, the funeral director of a public company JP Pokop Sarajevo.

According to information from the contract, Cerić and Fazlagić paid €20,000 for a quarter of a decrepit building of 61 square-meters and 263 square meters of garden. The house was reconstructed and the two of them told CIN that Cerić nearly paid out the judge for her investment.

The BiH Ministry of Justice has sent a request for extradition of Fazlagić to its Croatian counterparts, but Republic of Croatia Ministry of Justice is still deliberating.

“For me this whole case is a show trial and I will prove that,” said Fazlagić. “I will return to my Sarajevo. I will become a judge again.”

**CHRISTINE KENNEALLY (AUSTRALIA)**

## **THE GHOSTS OF THE ORPHANAGE**



Christine Kenneally is an award-winning journalist and author who has written for The New Yorker, The New York Times, The Atlantic, Scientific American, The Monthly, and other publications. She is the author of two books: *The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures* and *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language*. Before becoming a reporter, she received a Ph.D. in linguistics from Cambridge University and a B.A. (Hons) in English and Linguistics from Melbourne University. She was born and raised in Melbourne, Australia.

# THE GHOSTS OF THE ORPHANAGE

*By Christine Kenneally*  
*BuzzFeedNews - August 27, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*  
<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/christinekenneally/orphanage-death-catholic-abuse-nuns-st-josephs>

Millions of American children were placed in orphanages. Some didn't make it out alive.

## A BUZZFEED NEWS INVESTIGATION

### *We Saw Nuns Kill Children: The Ghosts of St. Joseph's Catholic Orphanage*

**It was a late summer** afternoon, Sally Dale recalled, when the boy was thrown through the fourth-floor window.

"He kind of hit, and —" she placed both hands palm-down before her. Her right hand slapped down on the left, rebounded up a little, then landed again.

For just a moment, the room was still. "Bounced?" one of the many lawyers present asked. "Well, I guess you'd call it — it was a bounce," she replied. "And then he laid still."

Sally, who was speaking under oath, tried to explain it. She started again. "The first thing I saw was looking up, hearing the crash of the window, and then him going down, but my eyes were still glued—." She pointed up at where the broken window would have been and then she pointed at her own face and drew circles around it. "That habit thing, whatever it is, that they wear, stuck out like a sore thumb."

A nun was standing at the window, Sally said. She straightened her arms out in front of her. "But her hands were like that."

There were only two people in the yard, she said: Sally herself and a nun who was escorting her. In a tone that was still completely bewildered, she recalled asking, *Sister?*

Sister took hold of Sally's ear, turned her around, and walked her back to the other side of the yard. The nun told her she had a vivid imagination. *We are going to have to do something about you, child.*

**Sally figured the boy fell** from the window in 1944 or so, because she was moving to the “big girls” dormitory that day. Girls usually moved when they were 6, though residents of St. Joseph's Orphanage in Burlington, Vermont, did not always have a clear sense of their age — birthdays, like siblings and even names, being one of the many human attributes that were stripped from them when they passed through its doors. She recounted his fall in a deposition on Nov. 6, 1996, as part of a remarkable group of lawsuits that 28 former residents brought against the nuns, the diocese, and the social agency that oversaw the orphanage.

I watched the deposition — all 19 hours of grainy, scratchy videotape — more than two decades later. By that time sexual abuse scandals had ripped through the Catholic Church, shattering the silence that had for so long protected its secrets. It was easier for accusers in general to come forward, and easier for people to believe their stories, even if the stories sounded too awful to be true. Even if they had happened decades ago, when the accusers were only children. Even if the people they were accusing were pillars of the community.

But for all these revelations — including this month's Pennsylvania grand jury report on how the church hid the crimes of hundreds of priests — a darker history, the one to which Sally's story belongs, remains all but unknown. It is the history of unrelenting physical and psychological abuse of captive children. Across thousands of miles, across decades, the abuse took eerily similar forms: People who grew up in orphanages said they were made to kneel or stand for hours, sometimes with their arms straight out, sometimes holding their boots or some other item. They were forced to eat their own vomit. They were dangled upside down out windows, over wells, or in laundry chutes. Children were locked in cabinets, in closets, in attics, sometimes for days, sometimes so long they were forgotten. They were told their relatives didn't want them, or they were permanently separated from their siblings. They were sexually abused. They were mutilated.

Darkest of all, it is a history of children who entered orphanages but did not leave them alive.


From former residents of America's Catholic orphanage system, I had heard stories about these deaths — that they were not natural or even accidents, but were instead the inevitable consequence of the nuns' brutality. Sally herself described witnessing at least two incidents in which she said a child at St. Joseph's died or was outright murdered.

It's likely that more than 5 million Americans passed through orphanages in the 20th century alone. At its peak in the 1930s, the American orphanage system included more than 1,600 institutions, partly supported with public funding but usually run by religious orders, including the Catholic Church.

Outside the United States, the orphanage system and the wreckage it produced has undergone substantial official scrutiny over the last two decades. In Canada, the UK, Germany, Ireland, and Australia, multiple formal government inquiries have subpoenaed records, taken witness testimony, and found, time and again, that children consigned to orphanages — in many cases, Catholic orphanages — were victims of severe abuse. A 1998 UK government inquiry, citing “exceptional depravity” at four homes run by the Christian Brothers order in Australia, heard that a boy was the object of a competition between the brothers to see who could rape him 100 times. The inquiries focused primarily on sexual abuse, not physical abuse or murder, but taken together, the reports showed almost limitless harm that was the result not just of individual cruelty but of systemic abuse.

In the United States, however, no such reckoning has taken place. Even today the stories of the orphanages are rarely told and barely heard, let alone recognized in any formal way by the government, the public, or the courts. The few times that orphanage abuse cases have been litigated in the US, the courts have remained, with a few exceptions, generally indifferent. Private settlements could be as little as a few thousand dollars. Government bodies have rarely pursued the allegations.

So in a journey that lasted four years, I went around the country, and even around the world, in search of the truth about this vast, unnarrated chapter of American experience. Eventually I focused on St. Joseph's, where the former residents' lawsuits had briefly forced the dark history into public view.



The former residents of St. Joseph's told of being subjected to tortures — from the straightforwardly awful to the downright bizarre — that were occasionally administered as a special punishment but were often just a matter of course. Their tales were strikingly similar, each adding weight and credibility to the others. In these accounts, St. Joseph's emerged as its own little universe, governed by a cruel logic, hidden behind brick walls just a few miles past the quaint streets of downtown Burlington.

When I first started looking, it seemed that all that remained of St. Joseph's were deposition transcripts and the sharp, bitter memories of the few remaining survivors I was able to find. But over the course of years I found that there was far more to discover. More than the former residents themselves knew, and more than was uncovered during the 1990s legal battle. Through tens of thousands of pages of documents, some of them secret, as well as dozens of interviews, what I found at St. Joseph's and other American orphanages was a vast and terrible matrix of corroboration.

The Diocese of Burlington, Vermont Catholic Charities, and the Sisters of Providence, the order of nuns who worked at St. Joseph's, all chose not to speak with me about these allegations. At the end of my reporting, Monsignor John McDermott, of the Burlington Diocese, provided a brief statement: "Please know that the Diocese of Burlington treats allegations of child abuse seriously and procedures are in place for reporting to the proper authorities. While it cannot alter the past, the Diocese is doing everything it can to ensure children are protected."

For decades, Sally Dale, like so many of the children of St. Joseph's, avoided speaking about what happened there. Many of the orphans went on to marry, and to have children and grandchildren, without letting on that they had spent any time in an orphanage. Some, their trust forever shattered, had been unable to forge any close connections. Robert Widman, the attorney who sat beside Sally, offered them a chance to be heard, and to force the world outside the orphanage to reckon with what went on inside its walls.

That legal effort lasted three years. It cost Widman's law firm dearly, and it pushed him to the edge emotionally. Decades later, he described it as one of the most wrenching cases of his life.

For the former residents of St. Joseph's — and for people in Albany and Kentucky and Montana who emerged from orphanages with similar stories — the fight was something much more. It was a chance most of them had never had before: to be heard, and maybe believed.

For the Catholic Church, too, the stakes were enormous. If the Burlington plaintiffs won, it could create a precedent and encourage civil cases at a massive scale. The financial consequences would be hard to fathom. Widman and his band of orphans posed a profound threat, and the church was going to bring all its might to oppose it.

**Philip White** was sitting in his large, third-floor law office one afternoon in 1993 when the mysterious caller arrived. He said his name was Joseph Barquin.

White invited him to have a seat and tell his story. Barquin asked White to send his secretary out so the two men could speak privately.

Barquin said he had recently married, and that his new wife had been shocked by the sight of terrible scars on his genitals.


Barquin told White what he had told her: that in the early 1950s, when he was a young boy, he had spent a few years in an orphanage called St. Joseph's in Burlington, Vermont. It had been a dark and terrifying place run by an order of nuns called the Sisters of Providence. Barquin recalled a girl who was thrown down stairs, and he remembered the thin lines of blood that trickled out of her nose and ear afterward. He saw a little boy shaken into uncomprehending shock. He saw other children beaten over and over.

A nun at St. Joseph's had dragged Barquin into an anteroom under the stairs and forcefully fondled him, and then she cut him with something very sharp. He didn't know what it was; he just remembered that there was blood everywhere.

Barquin's wife had encouraged him to go to therapy. To get help with the cost, and to get an apology, Barquin spoke to two priests at the diocese, but he received very little response. Now he wanted to sue.

He had come to the right lawyer. As a prosecutor in Newport, Vermont, and then as a private attorney, White had devoted his career to challenging and changing the prevailing wisdom about young victims of sexual abuse.





Before 1980, White told me, social services typically steered child abuse victims away from court, because the process was thought to be too traumatic for the children and the cases were too hard to prove. White maintained that the fear of trauma had more to do with the adults' discomfort than with the actual needs of the children. So he and some of his colleagues brought together social services, police, and probation officers and created a new set of protocols for how abuse should be addressed. White and his colleagues traveled around the state, and eventually the country, encouraging different agencies to work together, and educating mental health workers and teachers about how and why to report abuse. When prosecutors said they didn't go after child sexual abuse because they couldn't face the guilt of losing, White would reply, "If you don't bring the case, how can you sleep?"

White's team developed a way for children to testify on closed-circuit TV so they wouldn't have to tell their story in front of their abuser. Whenever a young client testified, White threw a party, with cake and balloons and streamers. He told the children that regardless of how the case was decided, they had spoken their truth, and that was the victory.

When bearing witness to the most disturbing experiences of Vermont's children became too much, White would find the steepest ski slope and fly down, screaming his head off all the way, until he felt calm enough to return to his work.

For all the cases he had worked on, however, he had never heard a story quite like Barquin's.

He knew from experience what it was like to challenge the diocese. Barquin's assault had taken place decades ago, which would make it hard for White to find corroboration — and easy for the church to question Barquin's memory. And as hard as it would still have been, in that era, to convince jurors that a priest could be a sexual predator, making that argument about a nun was going to be much harder.

Still, White decided to take Barquin's case. He lodged a complaint in the US District Court at Brattleboro, Vermont, on June 7, 1993, seeking damages for Barquin's injuries from physical, psychological, and sexual abuse at St. Joseph's Orphanage 40 years before. The defendants he named were the Burlington Diocese, Vermont Catholic

Charities, the orphanage, and, because Barquin didn't know the name of the nun who abused him, Mother Jane Doe.

The diocese was represented by Bill O'Brien, a lawyer who worked for the church, as had his father before him. O'Brien noted that according to Vermont's statute of limitations, adults who were abused as children have six years from the moment they realize they were damaged by the abuse to bring suit. Barquin had had 40 years to work out what had caused his injuries, O'Brien said, during which time relevant evidence or witnesses may have been lost. In a long memo to the judge, the church's lawyers lectured White on points of law, quoting an opinion from a medical malpractice suit that said "the law is not designed to aid the slothful in evading the results of their own negligence."

White arranged a press conference for Barquin to tell his story, in hopes it might bring other St. Joseph's survivors out into the open.

In his years since leaving the orphanage, Barquin had led an adventurous life. He had worked as a diver, unearthing old shipwrecks and ancient fossils. He had spent time at the famous Naropa Institute in Colorado, hanging out with Ram Dass and Allen Ginsberg. He'd even led dolphin encounters. But the day of his press conference, Barquin felt like he was lighting a match inside a dark and ominous cave. He was scared, but hopeful that he might inspire others to do the same.

White hoped he might hear from a few more former St. Joseph's residents. He heard from 40. Soon a support group called the Survivors of St. Joseph's Orphanage and Friends formed. Participants said it grew to 80 members.

The meetings were unpredictable. Some former residents said that the orphanage was the best thing that ever happened to them. Others recounted constant cruelty and physical abuse. Some threatened violence against clergy members. One woman said she was writing a book. Another, who had been at the orphanage in the 1920s, called to tell her story, weeping in fear that God would punish her for saying it aloud. One man turned up outrageously drunk. Another spoke about how, at home, he would regularly lock himself in a box. Someone wrote to White to warn him that the diocese had sent a spy.

Around that time, one former resident killed himself. Survivors fought among themselves about what strategy to pursue. At one meeting, a woman was shouted down when she suggested that they all contact the bishop together. Some wanted therapists present at the meetings, but others were appalled by the suggestion.

Eventually White decided to convene a big gathering at the Hampton Inn in Colchester, Vermont, on the weekend of Sept. 18, 1994.

Sally Dale received an invitation. It said the event was a reunion for “survivors” of St. Joseph’s, which struck Sally as an odd word to use. She hadn’t been in touch with people from the orphanage for a long time, and she thought about it as little as possible. But she was curious to see some of the old faces and find out who was still around.

She was only a few steps inside the conference room when a man exclaimed, “You little devil!”

It was Roger Barber, one of the boys from St. Joseph’s, who was there with his two sisters. Little devil: That’s what they used to call her. She hadn’t thought of it in so long.

“Sal, you look good for everything you went through,” one of Barber’s sisters said.

“You were our Shirley Temple of the orphanage!” said the other. She reminisced about the way Sally sang “God Bless America” and “On the Good Ship Lollipop” when she was little.

Sally remembered some of those things. She sometimes remembered bad things too, such as times when the nuns hit her. But it was a long time ago. She recognized few of the 50 or 60 people in attendance. Little Debbie Hazen was there, and so was Katelin Hoffman, along with Coralyn Guidry and Sally Miller. Some of the women recognized each other not by name but by number: *Thirty-two! Fourteen!*

White began the day by introducing Barquin and some other people who were there to help. A man spoke about the Bible and turning to God in times like these, and two therapists said they were available for anyone who wanted to talk. Local journalists were on hand too.

Then Barquin told everyone about the nun taking him into the closet. Roger Barber spoke next. Sally remembered him saying that a nun told a group of older boys to rape

him. As the stories tumbled out, former residents melted down in the meeting room and in the hotel's hallways. A lanky, weathered man stood up and addressed another man before the whole crowd. *I'm here because back in the orphanage I bullied you*, he said. *I felt bad about that all of my life. I just want to say I'm sorry.* Then one woman spoke about how nuns wiped her face in her own vomit, and Sally started to remember that the same thing had happened to her. She could hear the voice of one sister telling her, after she threw up her food, *You will not be this stubborn! You will sit and you will eat it.*

A woman said she'd watched a nun hold a baby by its ankles and swing its head against a table until it stopped crying. As Sally listened to the awful stories, something ruptured inside her. She shook her head and began to say, "No, no, no, no, no, it's not true." But the memories were already flooding back.

Though the reunion was a two-day event, Sally left that first afternoon with a crushing headache. The next morning she had diarrhea and was unable to speak without heaving. She spent that night sitting bolt upright, remembering things she hadn't thought about for decades, and saying, "No, no, no, no, no." When her husband asked her why she was saying "no," she just replied, "No."

*South of Lone Rock Point, where North Avenue runs high above the eastern shore of Lake Champlain, beyond the winding paths that meander through the cemetery, behind the heavy doors of the large redbrick building, Sally was back in the orphanage. Probably not yet 6 years old, she was being marched toward the sewing room, compelled by a furious nun.*

*Sally had been caught running and giggling in the dormitory. The nun, Sister Jane of the Rosary, was known for her constant companion: a thick razor strap that the girls called "the green pill," bitter medicine for any child who came near it.*

*Sister Jane of the Rosary took Sally to the little bedroom off the sewing room and made her lie facedown, dress yanked up, panties pulled down. Then the nun sent in Eva, a seamstress, who along with another lay employee, Irene, was one of the only two people that Sally felt safe with.*

*Eva came into the little room, looked at Sally — face down, dress up, defenseless — and stood frozen for a few long moments. The strap lay beside her on the bed. Then she left.*

*Irene came in next, but she couldn't do anything, either. Even Sister Jane of the Rosary, usually so quick to punish, came in but did nothing.*

*At last Sally heard Sister James Mary announce that she had “no problem” performing the task. Entering the room, she brought the strap down hard on Sally, from the back of her neck all the way down to her ankles. Once, twice. Ten times. Too many times to count.*

*Sally recoiled with each downstroke, but she tried her best to hold back the tears. The silence only enraged Sister James Mary, who kept hitting her. On and on, the blows kept coming. “You will cry!” the nun insisted.*

*Eventually Sally did. She began to weep.*

*Sally couldn't twist around far enough to see the damage. But when Irene looked, she gasped.*

*“How many times do we have to tell you?” Sister Jane of the Rosary demanded from above. “If you cry, you cry alone. If you smile, the whole world smiles with you.”*

*Irene brought Sally across the long hallway, down the marble stairs, past the foyer, and into the office of the mother superior herself. Irene showed her Sally's wounds. It wasn't right to do that to a little girl.*

*Mother Superior replied that Sally was going to end up in reform school anyway.*

*The next time Sally was sent to Irene and Eva for a beating, Irene said she would deal with the child herself.*

*Irene hit her, but only on her bottom. Sally was so overwhelmed with gratitude that the next day, she told Irene that she loved her.*

**As the Burlington** survivors group gained momentum, Joseph Barquin emerged as an extraordinary force for change. A judge had allowed his sexual assault case to go forward, and he was proving himself to be a tenacious litigant, rallying others to the cause and even doing his own investigative work. He visited a number of Sisters of Providence nuns at the local motherhouse, interviewing them on tape: “Who was the sister that was a real disciplinarian?” But his outsize role and expectations complicated matters. Having been the first to come forward, he believed that his ideas should carry extra weight. His relationship with White deteriorated over what Barquin perceived to

be a lack of respect. Relations with the group frayed as well. Eventually a delegate said several members felt threatened by Barquin.

White came to the painful conclusion that he could not continue to represent Barquin and encouraged him to find new counsel. White planned to focus on the claims of the other former residents. But as all that was going on, White's doctor told him that he had adult-onset diabetes. He had two children, one of them newborn, and it became clear that his firm was too small to provide all the resources needed to handle all the cases coming his way. White realized that if he was going to represent the orphans with integrity and competence, he would have to sacrifice everything else. "I'd basically have to leave my family, find a miracle drug for my diabetes, and find a new law firm," he said later.

Around the same time, the bishop made a formal offer: \$5,000 per person, in exchange for which the recipients would waive their right to further legal action.

White hated to see the cases end like that, but he knew that the statute of limitations would have prevented some of the plaintiffs from ever getting their day in court. And for many of them, \$5,000 was serious money. He told his clients that he could not advise them what path to choose, but if anyone wanted to settle, he would help.

The Burlington Free Press reported that according to church officials, 100 people accepted the payment, for abuse they said they suffered. Plaintiffs said as many as 160 individuals, who had been at the orphanage from the 1930s to the 1970s, pursued the bishop's offer.

For every one of those he represented, White sent a letter to Bill O'Brien, the church's attorney.

"Dear Bill," one of the letters said, "K remembers that Sister Madeline and Sister Claire ... slapped her head and face, pulled her hair, struck her face with the backs of their hands, so that their rings split her lips, and tripped her and knocked her down."

"Dear Bill ... To this day, C will not enter a closet if it has a hanging light."

"Dear Bill ... If L was caught not paying attention, the nuns would take a needle and regularly prick his fingertips."

“Dear Bill ... The nuns would also force G and other children to hold their arms up at their sides, with their palms up in the air, balancing a book on the palms. If G dropped his arms before the requisite time was up, he would be beaten and forced to repeat the punishment all over again.”

The bishop published a letter around the same time. In a larger sense they were all victims, he said: children who had been abused, as well as the good priests and brothers and nuns. “If anyone has been hurt by any church official in anyway,” he wrote, “I am heartily sorry.”

Sally Miller, the woman who had suggested contacting the bishop at one of White’s survivors meetings, went ahead and visited him herself. She said he told her that if modern-day laws had been in place when he was a child, his own father would have been charged with child abuse, and yet he had got over what had happened to him. He didn’t understand why other people couldn’t get over what had happened to them.

*They were just kids*, Miller later testified that she told him.

*Well, these nuns were just frustrated ladies, she said he replied. They didn’t have children of their own, and they didn’t know how to handle them.*

...

Full version of the article is via the link: <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/christinekenneally/orphanage-death-catholic-abuse-nuns-st-josephs>

*Emma Loop, Jeremy Singer-Vine, John Templon, and Kevin Townsend contributed reporting to this story. Sam Hemingway generously provided records from when he reported on St. Joseph’s Orphanage for the Burlington Free Press.*

## **DAMILOLA BANJO (NIGERIA)**

# **INVESTIGATION: HOW FORGERY, BRIBERY, EXAM MALPRACTICE BOOMS AT LAGOS PRIMARY SCHOOLS**



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# INVESTIGATION: HOW FORGERY, BRIBERY, EXAM MALPRACTICE BOOMS AT LAGOS PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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The sun was intense. It was a Saturday, a day when many people were either relaxing at home or attending functions. However, parents clustered under a shade beside the gate of Government College Victoria Island (GoCoVi) in Lagos — their faces, a mix of excitement and exhaustion as they received their children who had just concluded the National Common Entrance Examination.

As the kids filed out — into the warm embrace of mommies and daddies — one could tell from the dissimilar expressions on their tired faces that even though they might have all written the same examination, answered the same questions, their experiences were, definitely, not the same.

“They paid money so that they will teach that girl...” were the words that caught my ears from the conversation among Air Force Primary School pupils, who had formed a small circle away from the other pupils.

The pupils, four girls and three boys, could not hide their irritation.

“Uncle was telling them answers, especially Latifa. Uncle said A, C, D, D... and later they will be saying don’t cheat during exams,” one of the angry pupils said.

I stood seemingly aloof, but close enough to capture their conversation. As I listened to the children recall how their teachers and parents — their first role models — colluded to compromise the examination they had just concluded, it became a surreal realisation that the act is, indeed, a common experience for many primary school pupils, and not just a wild journalistic conjecture.

The Common Entrance Examination is a capacity test written by final year pupils of primary schools for admission into Junior Secondary Schools. On one hand, there is the National Common Entrance Examination also known as ‘Federal Common Entrance’ organised by the National Examination Council (NECO) to screen pupils seeking admission into Federal Government Unity Colleges.

On the other hand is the ‘State Common Entrance’ organised by the education board of the states, for entrance into state-owned junior secondary schools. In Lagos State, where this investigation was carried out, the examination is called ‘placement test’.

### ***Lagos: Where Anything Is Possible***

I had walked into Honeyville Schools as an aunt seeking to enroll her nephew into the school. Honeyville Schools is hidden amidst a line of closely-built houses on Tokunbo Street, Lagos Island. The school itself is a stretch of parallel rooms; what is commonly described as ‘face-me-I-face-you’ in local parlance.

The pupils screamed out different recitals from the opposite rooms used as classrooms. The sound from the classrooms created a cacophony capable of inhibiting learning. I peeped into the rooms, trying to find an adult standing in front of the screaming children.

“Good morning. I am here to make enquiries about enrollment,” I said to a stocky man, with low afro hair seated behind a table in the cubic-like room that served as the administration office.

Uncle Dayo — I later discovered was the man’s appellation — offered me a chair.

“What class is the child?” he asked.

“Primary four,” I said and quickly added that my main concern was to have the boy enroll for the common entrance examination.

Uncle Dayo did not ask further questions. He called in the proprietor, Segun Olatunji, a tall, fair man who carried himself with the poise of one fully aware of his position. Mr Olatunji is the typical ‘Lagos sharp guy’; his mannerism and seeming impatience easily gave him away.

Lagos Island is that notorious city where almost anything — legal or illegal — can be done if one knows the ‘right’ people and has the right amount of money. It is not by happenstance that the city houses the ‘world-famous’ Oluwole Market where any kind of document — including currencies — can be forged, duplicated and curated.

Mr Olatunji appeared to be that type of ‘right person’ that gets things done within his field — education. He would later say that he has been in the business of education for over 30 years; growing from being a classroom teacher to becoming a principal and now the proprietor of a school.

He entered the small office that could barely accommodate the three of us, took a chair at a corner as Dayo retold what I had said to him.

“But why do you want him in Primary 6? Is he too old for primary school already?” Mr Olatunji asked, staring hard at me, as if trying to probe my body for answers to whatever was on his mind.

I knew that was the right opening to pitch in my full cover story.

“The case is complicated,” I started, wearing a subtle frown on my face to depict worry.

I explained to Mr Olatunji that the child in question is my nephew. His mother — my own sister — was dead and his father was a no-good-fellow who had abandoned him. The boy stayed with his grandmother and it so happened that my other elder sister who lived outside the country wanted our mother to come join her abroad. Our mother — the boy’s grandmother — insisted she was not leaving the country without the boy.

Hence, I had been instructed to get the boy’s travel documents; and one of the things he would need was his record of schooling at least at primary level. Unfortunately, his current school was not government approved, hence the reason to enroll him in another school.

“Where does the boy live?” he asked, abruptly putting an end to my narration.

“He lives with his grandmother in Ijora,” I replied, not sure why he had asked.

“Okay. I can’t say anything now until I see the boy. Bring the boy tomorrow, because I am not sure a boy in Primary 4 now can write common entrance. When you bring the boy tomorrow, I will test him by myself to see if he would be able to pass the exams on his own,” he responded.

As I made to leave, I asked if his school was government approved, and he answered in the affirmative. I knew there was no way the school — with its chaotic environment — could have been approved by the Lagos State government but that lie was a clue that I had found my first subject. I knew there and then, that if Mr Olatunji was offered the right amount of money, he would compromise any process.

### ***Six Years Education in One Week for Just N120,000***

A week later, I took a boy — my supposed nephew — to Mr Olatunji. He asked him random questions about his age, class and school and then concluded the boy would not pass the examination. Although, I had carefully selected a boy who was not very bright academically, but it was baffling how Mr Olatunji easily concluded — without any written test — that the boy would perform woefully in the exam.

“I thought so too,” I said in agreement with his verdict on the boy’s performance. “So, what can I do? How can you help me out?” I asked feigning dejection and frustration all in one stare.

Mr Olatunji gave a succinct breakdown on how the 10-year-old boy would be “assisted” to pass the common entrance examination. Not once did he mention any tangible academic assistance for the boy, even when I suggested special tutorial classes. Mr Olatunji was rather dismissive.

“No amount of lessons can help him within the short time,” he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

This school proprietor unabashedly offered to prepare his school’s report for a boy, who in his own assessment is academically poor. He would later suggest to me during

a phone conversation that he would get another child to write the examination for my 'nephew'.

"Let me tell you something," Mr Olatunji said, a dint of arrogance in his voice, "anything you want can be done. The only thing is, once we agree what would be paid, there is no problem.

"Let me be sincere with you," he continued, "I will not allow the boy to go there and write. Another person will sit for him. The person I know is capable will sit for the examination."

To be sure I understood what Mr Olatunji had just offered, I asked if he was sure my nephew would be well documented.

"Once the form is filled, the form will be given to you and it will show the picture of the boy."

After series of bargaining, assurance and reassurances, Mr Olatunji finally agreed to a lump sum of N120,000. This, he said, would cover the cost of issuing term results for the six classes, fixing someone to sit for the examination and a testimonial to certify that the boy, whom Mr Olatunji only saw once, completed primary education.

### ***How Google-generated Pictures Ended Up on Lagos State Common Entrance List***

It is often said that religion has no connection with morality. I can easily attest to that; for if it does, I should have been sent out of Deen Master, a Muslim primary and secondary school, with stern warning never to return. Instead, I was welcomed with assurance that I have come to the right place.

"All we need are two passport photographs of the boy when he was four and his recent picture," 'Dr. Owolabi', the head teacher of Deen Master told me after explaining to him that I wanted to enroll my son, who was overseas, for common entrance examination.

Oluwaseun George Robert, my purported son, was a random picture downloaded from Google but to Mr Owolabi and her assistant, Alimot Yussuf-Bello — a hijab wearing Muslim sister — he was my son.

I had told them Robert lived with my cousin in Canada where he was schooling. I wanted him to apply for a scholarship and part of the requirements was that he needed to have had elementary education in Nigeria. The boy would not be present for the examination, I explained to Mr Owolabi who allayed my 'fears', reassuring me that I had not made a strange request.

"We have helped parents like you before," he said with an air of pride.

Mr Owolabi billed N50,000 for the arrangement, which was paid in three installments only because I decided to keep the engagement alive by "owing them some money".

On Saturday, July 28, 2018 when the Lagos State Common Entrance examination was written, Oluwaseun George Robert was on the list of pupils duly registered to write the exam.

### ***Kid Mercenaries***

Thirteen-year-old Olatunji Samuel had been contracted by his uncle, the proprietor of Honeyville, to impersonate my supposed nephew. It was part of the 'N120,000 deal' with the senior Olatunji; he had promised to get a 'capable' boy to sit in for the examination.

Being a psychologist as Mr Owolabi claimed to be, one would expect him to know the effect of exposing children to such fraudulent practice, but he did not seem bothered.

Just as the Honeyville proprietor had contracted his own nephew, Fisayo Bello, a boy in Junior Secondary School of Deen Master, was also contracted by the school to write the entrance examination for my 'son.'

These boys understood what they were asked to do; they had been taught to lie about their names if asked. They seemed to understand the rudiments of the 'trade'; it is obviously not their first time or so it seemed.

The younger Olatunji, who was still in character when I spoke with him briefly after the exam gave my nephew's name when asked his name.

"No, I mean your real name," I said before he eventually let down his guard.

## ***Certificates for Sale***

The Mission Statement of Araromi Baptist Children School is a sad irony when mirrored against the actions of the school's head teacher, Adebisi Oluwaremi. The airiness with which she received the request of a certificate for a child she had never seen — let alone taught — showed a lack of “godly moral and right values” — the hallmark of the school's mission.

She immediately demanded N68,000 in exchange for Araromi Baptist School certificate.

“Can I pay N50,000?” I haggled like it was a piece of meat on the slab of a butcher.

“It's a fixed price. In fact, if you want me to issue you teller for the payment, I am ready to do that,” Mrs Oluwaremi insisted on her price.

“We have been warned not to issue certificate for a child who has not attended this school. Also, we have been warned never to issue the certificate for any child who did not graduate from this school,” she claimed.

Sadly, the child she did issue Araromi Baptist Children School certificate to, she never even saw. It was the same picture — Google-generated — I had shown at Deen Master.

I went to Araromi Baptist School for two reasons — first, I had gone to a Muslim school and needed to balance the report; secondly, Araromi Baptist Church is a big church in Lagos State and I was hoping to be shown the door once I tabled my request. I had wrongly thought that a school owned by a popular Christian denomination like the Baptist would be different.

## ***Tedious Verification Process Managed by Cantankerous Civil Servants***

It is rather ironic that it is easier to fraudulently obtain a First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) from the Lagos State Ministry of Education than it is to verify one. The process becomes even more tiresome with the attitude of some of the civil servants designated to manage the process.

After about six weeks of back and forth between the Lagos State Ministry of Education and the State Examination Board, I was told to make a payment of N5,000 into the Lagos State Government's purse for the verification. I did.

I brought back the teller, then I was directed to make a photocopy of the teller.

“Go and make photocopy for us,” a tall slender staffer said with an air of arrogance.

The Lagos State Examination Board’s accounts department does not have a photocopying machine and I had to make the copy for the department, despite paying N5,000 into the government’s purse.

When I came back with the copy, the woman who had generated the payment slip for me did not allow me say a word.

“Go inside there and wait for me. I am coming, I am coming,” she said dismissing me while she continued chatting with the head of the department.

I sat for some minutes when the staffer who had ordered me to go make the photocopy beckoned that I bring the copied bank teller. I stood across the table from him with my hand outstretched to give him the teller I had photocopied, but he did not look up. His head was bent and eyes fixed on his phone. I stood, purposely not calling his attention; I wanted him to satisfy himself.

The woman, who had been chit-chatting with her boss in the opposite office all the while her colleague kept me standing as he browsed through his phone, then came and began to yell.

“I told you to sit down there. Sit down there,” she yelled repeatedly.

“Don’t yell at me. It was your colleague who asked me to bring the teller,” was the statement that seemed to agitate the workers.

In the twinkling of an eye, the offices had become an orgy of angry civil servants. The director vowed I would not get the verification done. He raced down to the verification department threatening fire and brimstone. Before long, the staffers at the verification department had gathered, abandoning their offices to form a solidarity caucus at the reception.

One of the staffers pulled me off the chair and dragged me out, kicking off my bag from the table. This went on in what felt like eternity. Eventually, I was told the verification was not ready and that I would be contacted when the director’s response is ready.



For six weeks — interfacing with nonchalant and rude civil servants who treated me like they were doing me a favour — the Lagos State Government could not determine the authenticity of the certificate.

This was the same certificate I got without breaking a sweat.

Ajenifuja Kazeem, a staffer of the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), offered it to me without as much as verifying the information I gave to him. Mr Kazeem was at the reception having a chit-chat with his colleagues during the peak of work hours.

“What do you want?” he asked, barely regarding my presence. I explained I wanted to make enquiry on how to get my First School Leaving Certificate.

“Go to your primary school,” he told me.

“My primary school is no longer there,” I explained to him.

“It will cost you money then,” he said, continuing with “why didn’t you get it since you left primary school?” By this time, he had suspended the conversation with the others.

“When I got my own some years ago, I paid N7,000.”

“That’s fine. I don’t mind...,” I said, making a gesture to say money is not the problem.

While all of this went on, I did not sign the visitor’s register, neither did Mr Kazeem direct me to any office. He brought out his phone and put a call through to a colleague, who according to him, helped him secure his own FSLC when he needed it.

Mr Kazeem gave me the phone to speak with this friend. “The certificate will cost you N15,000,” he told me, cutting straight to business. That was “the last and final price” as Mr Kazeem’s go-to-man refused to lower his price.

I made an initial deposit of N8000 which was given to Mr Kazeem with the promise that the certificate would be ready in one week. Interestingly, I received a call from Kazeem three days later, informing me to come and pick up the certificate — same certificate that I could not verify in 6 weeks.

## ***Struggle Between Right and Wrong***

The Great Sharon School proprietor, who simply gave her name as Mrs. Alayaki, is a pastor, or so she claimed. I told her the same cover story I had pitched at Honeyville and she bought it, or so I thought.

She gave the boy I took this time around for an assessment test and concluded the boy would need intensive lessons if he would pass the Common Entrance examination.

“If you enroll the boy with us, I am sure we can groom him well before the examination,” she told me in March 2018, when I first met her.

The Great Sharon is a low cost school in Agege area of Lagos State. Unlike some of the low cost schools I had visited on the Island, the school environment was serene and safe for children.

I knew it would be impossible to uproot my ‘undercover nephew’ from his school, to enroll him at The Great Sharon, so I told her the boy was the only help his grandmother had, hence, it would be impossible to enroll him in her school.

The boy was eventually enrolled for just the common entrance examination. This meant he was an ‘external’ pupil enrolled only for the purpose of writing the examination in the school.

“The uniform and the common entrance registration is N25,000,” Mrs Alayaki said.

Two days before the state common entrance test, I called Mrs Alayaki to negotiate for ‘assistance’ for the boy in the examination hall.

“It is not possible,” she retorted.

“I told you from the beginning that it is only God if he should write the exam and pass. It is objective. If he is able to shade the correct one, fine. And if he is unable...” she did not finish the last sentence.

“They don’t allow us stay close to the children. If it is something that is possible, I would let you know.”

Mrs Alayaki insisted there was no way the boy could be helped to cheat during the examination, but after what seemed like a long pause that turned out to have lasted only a few seconds, she asked that I call her back in the evening.

“Call me around 7 o’clock; there is something I want to tell you.”

“What did she want to tell me?” I thought to myself, feeling a tinge of disappointment in my gut. *“There must be good people who would not betray the system, for the sake of Nigeria, and the future of the nation... and I need to find at least one of them.”*

7 p.m., Wednesday, July 25, I called back.

She did not buy the story I had told, but her religious antenna was pointing her in the wrong direction.

“I don’t know why you are so insistent about the boy writing common entrance. He is not the first person I will process things like that for, I told you.

“The embassy has nothing to do with the class a child is in. What they are interested in is the result that the boy is in school — the receipt — not the Primary Six certificate. That one is none of their business.

“So I was bothered. I said Lord what is happening? Why must this boy go with Primary Six certificates? Something must be wrong. If you want to be sincere with me; it is like you are covering up something. Something is fishy; remember I told you I am a pastor.

“If there is any restitution you need to make, go and do it. If there is anything you need to retribute from, do it. If there is anything you need to confess to whomever, do it.”

As she reeled out the advice, I was befuddled and unsure what she was trying to say.

*“What restitution? Does she want me to confess that I had kidnapped the boy and wanted to smuggle him abroad? Or is she thinking that the boy had committed a grave offence in his school and I was trying to cover him up?”* The questions continued to pile in my mind as I tried to understand her thought process.

Since I could not pin any of my thoughts down to her advice, I decided to redirect the conversation back to how she could get assistance for my nephew and again she insisted it was impossible to do.

I dropped the call, feeling I finally found the much elusive good aspect of the sordid story: an educationist who would not compromise the system for anything.

I was however slightly disappointed when I received her call after the examination informing me that my nephew was ‘assisted’ in the examination hall. However, she did not ask for any gratification for the ‘kindly gesture’.

### *Mega Delight*

Delight Mega School is in a residential apartment reconstructed with plywood into classrooms, where — I have no doubt — right values are being inculcated into the tots put in the care of Anu Mercy, the head teacher of the school.

The single storey building in cream and dark brown colours is located at Glover Street, Ebute Meta area of Lagos State.

I knew Mrs Anu was a different stock, when she firmly refused to fabricate continuous assessment result. I had met school owners, who did not bat an eyelid before issuing results and certificates for children they had not seen, but here was I, in front of this woman who could not conceive the idea of fabricating ‘ordinary’ continuous assessment result.

Like I had done in other schools, I had a cover story for her. The boy was my son; he had been home-schooled and needed to write the entrance examination so he would have the First School Leaving Certificate.

She was fascinated by the idea of a home-schooled child.

“I did not know that is possible in Nigeria,” she told me, but that was as far as Mrs. Anu would allow herself be thrilled. “But what about his continuous assessment? We will need to compile his previous results; it is part of what we will use for the registration.”

“He does not have previous results. I told you he is home-schooled,” I said in response.

“Ah! That will be hard ooo because me I cannot lie,” she blurted out. “What I can do to help you will be to have him write the exams for previous classes and we will compile that as his CA.”

For two days, Mrs. Anu would administer examination questions from Primary 1 to Primary 6 to the boy.

Mrs Anu maintained a jovial aura despite her strict and rather religious outward. Her hair was plaited into cornrows; she had no make-up on and wore a striped shirt with a long black skirt that was many inches below her knees.

A few days before the state entrance examination, I called her — the same day I called Mrs Alayaki — head teacher of Great Sharon.

“Assistance like what?” I could imagine the skin on her forehead squeezing into a frown. She would not be persuaded as she vehemently refused to aid any form of cheating.

Mrs Anu rejected the request. She insisted the boy would write the exams unaided. Of all the schools that I had gone; she was the only person who never agreed — at any point — to compromise.

### ***Cheating Spree***

One of the obvious realities during the Lagos State Common Entrance examination in the centres monitored by my team of undercover reporters was the apparent disorganisation in the whole process.

In Government Girls High School centre at Iyana Ipaja, where my supposed nephew enrolled at Great Sharon School was posted, some of the pupils were seen moving from one class to the other with their question papers in hand.

An invigilator at Tulabville Private School at No. 53 Omidindun Street, Lagos Island, went in search of a ‘business centre’ to print more copies of the question papers.

However, apart from this shoddy organisation, the examination itself betrayed the usual decorum expected of any examination, unsurprisingly.

The invigilators were lax or at best perfunctory in their duties. Again, this is unsurprising; some of the invigilators had been reportedly compromised by some school owners — including parents — who paid them to ‘help’ some of the pupils

Toye Lukmon, one of the invigilators at Tulabville Private School, the centre where Honeyville pupils wrote their examination, reeled out answers to all the questions. Further investigation revealed that Mr Lukmon is also a teacher at Yusfaith Private School, one of the mushroom primary schools at Isale Eko area of Lagos Island.

At Wesley Girls Senior Secondary School, Yaba, one of the invigilators — suspected to be a teacher in the school — freely gave answers to the pupils. The invigilator, a dark-skinned, average-height woman had struck a deal of N5,000 with an undercover reporter who was at the centre as a guardian.

The kid registered at Delight Mega School and was posted to Wesley Girls Senior Secondary School. He — like the two registered in other schools — had only one assignment; to capture whatever happened in his examination hall.

The pupils at Wesley Girls Senior Secondary School centre, boys and girls under the age of 13, were seen passing ‘chips’ — a booklet with solved questions — around. This they did under the supervision of the female invigilator who struck the N5,000 deal to ‘help’ the undercover pupil.

“This woman came to teach me, but battery had ran out of my camera so I could not capture her,” the undercover pupil told the team as we all watched Nigeria’s future generation in full act of examination malpractice.

The woman was introduced to the reporter by the school security guard — a, tall, dark man with full lips. The reporter was unable to get her name; perhaps out of suspicion, she refused to have direct contact with the reporter. After the exam, when the reporter asked to greet her for the ‘favour’, the gateman informed that she said there was “no need”.

### ***Examination Malpractice, An Organised Crime***

This investigation revealed among many other things, that this malfeasance is an organised crime as it involves the collaboration of not just the teachers, but the school owners and government employees appointed to protect the integrity of the whole education process.

Ike Onyenchere, the Chairman of Exams Ethics Marshal Board International, corroborated this as he revealed the sordid details of various examination frauds his organisation had unearthed during the course of their supervisory roles.

“Malpractice is no longer the indiscretion of pupils of students. It has become a money-making thing. It has become a syndicated affair, whereby the pupils and the students are mere instruments making money.

“There is also the situation where schools organise malpractice for their students. We have found that the unique proposition of many schools today is that ‘if you come to my school, I will give you 100 per cent pass. You cannot fail. Whether it is common entrance or WAEC or NECO, you will get 100 per cent.’”

And in order to maintain this high education reputation, Mr Onyenchere said many schools engage in all sort of “scams”.

“As such,” he continued, “you now see the total involvement of people who should defend the education — the teachers, the head teachers, principal, proprietors and so on. Unfortunately, these are the kinds of schools parents look out for; where the children will be allowed to cheat. They look for situations where the proprietors, teachers and so on will form themselves into a syndicate of criminals and parents pay money for this.

“You also find the connivance of people who are supposed to be supervisory and regulatory authorities; the government, the ministry authorities, the regulatory agencies, the inspectors... these are the very people who form part of the racket. We have found situations where commissioners of educations who own private schools promote education fraud.”

Mr Onyenchere explained that education malpractices cut across every stage of assessment, including the admission process, training, examination, certification, registration and regulation.

“It is not just restricted to sitting down in the hall and having examinations,” he explained.

## ***What the Law Says***

The Examination Malpractice Act (1999) considers a person to have cheated, if such person “by any fraudulent trick or device or in abuse of his office or with intent to unjustly enrich himself or any other person procures any question paper produced or intended for use at any examination of persons, whether or not the question paper concerned is proved to be false, not genuine or not related to the examination in question; or

“By any false pretence or with intent to cheat or secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person, procures from or induces any other person to deliver to himself or another person any question paper intended for use at any examination; or

“By any false pretence or with intent to cheat or unjustly enrich himself or any other person buys, sells, procures or otherwise deals with any question paper intended for use or represented as a genuine question paper in respect of any particular examination; or

“Fraudulently or with intent to cheat or secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person or in abuse of his office, procures, sells, buys or otherwise deals with any question paper intended for the examination of persons at any examination, commits an offence.”

Thus, Section 1(2) holds that if such offender is “a principal, a teacher an invigilator, a supervisor, an examiner...”, he is liable on conviction to four years imprisonment without the option of a fine.

Similarly, the law recommends five years jail term without an option of fine for teachers or school owners guilty of forgery.

In addition, Section 322 (1) (d) of the Criminal Law of Lagos State regards examination malpractice as a felony and punishable with ten years imprisonment.

## ***‘Mercenary Kids’ Could Go to Jail***

According to Section 3 of the Examination Malpractice Law, the children contracted by head teachers of Deen Masters School and Honeyville Private School, if prosecuted, could each earn three years in jail.



“A person who writes or attempts to write a paper in the name of some other person whether that name is the name of a person living or dead, commits an offence,” the Act states in Section 3 (1) (b).

Subsection (2) (a) adds that “in the case of a person under the age of 18 years, a fine of N100,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or to both such fine and imprisonment.”

However, children charged with offences under the act must be tried under the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act.

A person is considered a child under the Nigerian law if such person is 18 years or below. Section 2 of the Children and Young Persons Act describes a child to be a person under the age of 14 and ‘young persons’ between 14 and 17 are subject to special procedures.

Sections 26 (1), 27 and 28 of the same Act provide that if a child under the age of 7 commits an offence, he/she will be brought before the Juvenile Court.

### ***Breeding a Lawless Generation***

Exposing children to examination malpractice portends greater consequences for society, experts say.

Olufunmilayo Bammeke, a professor of Sociology, who x-rayed the effects of such examination fraud among children, said the consequences transcend the education sector.

“It affects the society economically. You cannot have any form of development because you cannot build on anything. It affects all sectors. Imagine a trained medical doctor, who had gone through medical school using malpractice; he becomes a danger to the society,” Ms Bammeke said.

She opined that examination malpractice builds doubt in the system and frustrates the diligent ones who abide by the rules.

“It questions the principle of meritocracy; that is the ideal on which education is supposed to be built,” she said.

Similarly, a professor of Psychology, Babatunde Makanju, said examination malpractice “undermines the total moral fabric of a child.”

He argued that the psychology of the child is determined by the standards of the society and once the standard is faulty, the child grows to become lawless.

According to Mr Makanju, “The society is meant to inculcate in a child that certain things are not meant to be done. That is what will determine whatever they do in future. The child knows that he probably came first (in class), but the child also knows that he or she got that by cheating and that the cheating was condoned.”

### ***Government Reaction***

When presented with the findings of the investigation, the Executive Chairman of Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Sopeyin Oluremi, was surprised that impersonation is possible during the state organised Common Entrance Examination.

He said the state now has the pictures of candidates on their answer booklets in the bid to forestall cases of impersonation during the examination.

The undercover children who sat in for the examination at different centers also confirmed that there are pictures on the booklets. Unfortunately, despite this precaution, school owners induce government invigilators who aid and abet the act.

Mr. Oluremi, however, refrained from commenting on other findings presented to him. Instead, he requested for a proper interview when more evidence would be presented to him.

However, all attempts to secure another date to show the official the collage of pictures and videos captured during the course of investigation were unsuccessful. He did not respond to subsequent calls and text messages to his telephone number.

Also, Seyi Akitoye, the board’s Public Affairs Officers, who promised to notify this reporter on suitable date for the interview, never did.

Similarly, the Minister of State for Education, Anthony Anwukah, when contacted said he could not comment on the findings as he was out of the country at the time.

## *The Way Forward*

Ms Bammeke, the sociology professor, believes that children need be carried along in advocacy against examination malpractice. She said this is necessary so that children can serve as a checkmate for parents who are likely to encourage such.

Another way to curtail examination fraud, the professor said, is for the media to continuously report the matter.

“The media can organise studies without declaring what they are doing. Observe an exam setting, record an examination setting and come up with findings and publicise it. The media has a role to play. The media must not compromise,” she says.

She also urged the government to put in place policies that would check corruption within the education system.

“There is a malpractice law. But it is not just the law; the law must be applied. We hear reports of examination malpractice, but we rarely hear of people who were imprisoned for malpractice. The law must be applied and we must make examples of people.


“It is sad that the way people feel shame now is disappearing. People flaunt negative behaviors and they get applauded because they do not question the means through which they have achieved their success. However, there will be change if we involve local communities and begin to shame people and stigmatise them.”

Similarly, Mr Mekanju, the psychology professor, puts the onus of ensuring the integrity of the education system on the “grown-ups” who are expected to know better.

“We have to intentionally realise that we have done a lot of damage in the past to those immediately around us and to the larger society, because we fail to uphold the straight and narrow path and inculcate it in our children,” he said.

He added that for corruption in the education sector to be mitigated; the government must pay attention to education at all levels.

“There must be severe punishment for those who engage in malpractice. Anything that impinges on the moral upbringing of the younger generation, in such a way that



the society pays a heavier burden in the future, should not be condoned at all,” Mr Mekanju said.

Mr Onyenchere of the Exams Ethics Marshal Board warned that for any changes to be effective in the education sector, the government must not politicise appointments into the sector. He argued that the education sector is the foundation for all other sectors, hence the need to recruit the best hands.

”We need to clean the education sector for us to get a proper result, before we are able to make progress in the general fight against corruption,” he said.

**IAN COBAIN (UNITED KINGDOM)**

**'CONTROLLED SPONTANEITY':  
THE SECRET UK GOVERNMENT  
BLUEPRINTS SHAPING  
POST-TERROR PLANNING**



Ian Cobain is an award-winning investigative reporter whose work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Irish Times* and *Middle East Eye*. For his journalism he has won the Martha Gellhorn Prize and the Paul Foot Award, along with two Amnesty International media awards. His first book, *Cruel Britannia: A Secret history of Torture* won the Paddy Power Total Politics Award for Debut Political Book of the Year. His second book was *The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation*.

# 'CONTROLLED SPONTANEITY': THE SECRET UK GOVERNMENT BLUEPRINTS SHAPING POST-TERROR PLANNING

*By Ian Cobain  
Middle East Eye - 22 May 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/mind-control-secret-british-government-blueprints-shaping-post-terror-planning>*

*After the 2017 London Bridge attack, local officials were told: 'We're sending you a hundred imams.'*

The British government has prepared for terrorist incidents by pre-planning social media campaigns which are designed to appear to be a spontaneous public response to attacks, Middle East Eye has learned.

Hashtags are carefully tested before attacks happen, Instagram images selected, and "impromptu" street posters are printed.

In operations that contingency planners term "controlled spontaneity", politicians' statements, vigils and inter-faith events are also negotiated and planned in readiness for any terrorist attack.

The campaigns have been deployed during every UK terrorist incident in recent years, including the London Bridge attack in June 2017 and the Finsbury Park mosque attack that took place two weeks later.

Within hours of an incident, campaigns are swiftly organised, with I "heart" posters designed and distributed according to the location of the attack. Plans are also drawn

up for people to hand out flowers at the scene of the crime, in apparently unprompted gestures of love and support.

The purpose of the operations, according to a number of people involved in their creation who spoke to MEE, is to shape public responses, encouraging individuals to focus on empathy for the victims and a sense of unity with strangers, rather than reacting with violence and anger.

Many of the operations are said to be modelled on extensive plans that were drawn up to channel public anger in the event of any attack at the 2012 London Olympics.

Some strategies had been devised in 2011, when social media platforms were aiding communication between protesters during the Arab Spring – and when a series of riots were erupting across English towns and cities that summer.

One senior figure involved in that contingency planning told MEE that the riots “absolutely terrified” the British government, and that Theresa May, who was then home secretary and is now prime minister, had been particularly shaken.

The measures drawn up in advance of the Olympics were intended to “corral the Princess Dianaesque grief” that was expected to emerge after any mass-casualty attack – a reference to the public mourning that followed the death of the royal in a car crash in 1997. This person describes those measures candidly as an attempt at “mind control”.

Although there was no terrorist incident at the 2012 Olympics, variants of the plan are said to have been deployed in the wake of every attack in the UK since then.

“The point I noticed change was the Olympics,” said one veteran contingency planner in the UK. “The management of the secret, hidden emergency planning work behind the Olympics became the social control that we would fall back on if we had any terrorist attack, or if we had any disruption. It’s: ‘This is the hashtag we go to’. And we’ve never come back from those days.

“This job has changed significantly from planning for organic, people responses to tragedy, to being told: ‘We would like the people to do that, how do you get them there?’”

“A lot of the public’s responses are spontaneous, of course. But a lot are shaped. The [British] government doesn’t want spontaneity: it wants controlled spontaneity.”

## ***‘That’s What We Want’***

Officials at the Home Office in particular are said to have been impressed by fans’ support for Premier League footballer Fabrice Muamba, who suffered a cardiac arrest and collapsed on the pitch in March 2012, four months before the start of the London Olympics.

At subsequent matches, fans of many different clubs held up placards and banners bearing messages of support for the player.

MEE understands that during subsequent contingency planning meetings, Home Officials suggested that replicating such a response at the Olympics could assist the recovery process after any terrorist attack - and allow the Games to continue.

“They were saying: ‘That’s what we want. If something happens at the Olympics, we want you to make people respond like that,” the planner said. “And then the people will want the Olympics to carry on.”

A number of Western governments are understood to have exchanged information about how they use social media to shape public responses following terrorist attacks.

Examples of “controlled spontaneity” within the UK that MEE has identified include:

- a media campaign that was swiftly deployed after British and American aid workers were beheaded by Islamic State militants in 2014.
- the use of hashtags, posters and vigils after the London Bridge attacks of June 2017, in which eight people were murdered and almost 50 injured.
- a Twitter, Facebook and mainstream media campaign that was employed later that month, shortly after a man drove his van into a group of people outside a mosque in north London, killing one person and injuring 10 others.

## ***Union Jack Hijab***

After Alan Henning, a British aid worker, was murdered by Islamic State in October 2014, the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) – a controversial propaganda unit that is part of the Office of Security and Counterterrorism at the UK Home Office – turned to a striking image that had already been developed by one of its private sector contractors.



The image, designed by Breakthrough Media, a London-based communications company, showed a woman wearing a Union Jack hijab.

It had been developed, according to an internal Breakthrough document seen by MEE, because “the UK authorities wanted to challenge ultraconservative and misogynistic interpretations of Islam – particularly those around women – in order to promote the true face of Islam among vulnerable UK communities”.

The document explains that RICU’s objective was to “establish a platform for British Muslim women to set out an alternative interpretation of Islam and to take a lead in countering extremism in their communities”.

The result, the document continues, was Making A Stand, “a new British Muslim women’s campaigning organisation and network active within British Muslim communities and with an increasingly high-profile in the national media”.

A few days after the murder of Henning, Making A Stand approached The Sun, a tabloid newspaper, which agreed to dedicate all its front page to the Union Jack hijab photograph.

Inside, the newspaper devoted a further six pages to coverage of political leaders and members of the public who said that they were making a stand against Islamic State terror.

Emails disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act show that RICU monitored online reaction to the Sun’s front page, which its staff acknowledged as “our product”.

Staff at Breakthrough were delighted with the way their work had been passed on to The Sun: a framed copy of the front page was hung in the company’s central London offices.

The Union Jack hijab is one of hundreds of media projects that Breakthrough designed on behalf of RICU as part of Prevent, the UK’s controversial counter-radicalisation programme.

Recently rebranded as Zinc Network, the company continues to bid for, and win, RICU contracts. Zinc Network had not responded to requests for comment at the time of publication.

Internal RICU documents seen by MEE say that the unit is working “at an industrial scale and pace” to develop messages that aim to “effect attitudinal and behavioural change” – particularly among Muslims. The involvement of the UK government is rarely acknowledged.

### ***‘We’re Sending You a Hundred Imams’***

Although covert messaging developed as part of the Prevent programme is aimed at Muslims, particularly young men, plans for “controlled spontaneity” following a terrorist attack are targeted at the wider population.

The day after the London Bridge attack, a team of men arrived at the scene of the murders in an unmarked van.

They were admitted behind the police cordon, before plastering walls with posters bearing images of London and hashtags that were already circulating on Twitter, including #TurnToLove, #ForLondon and #LoveWillWin.

This practice, known in the UK as fly-posting, is a minor criminal offence, but police allowed the members of the fly-posting team behind their cordon and took no action. The men doing this work declined to tell journalists who they were, or where they were from.

When the cordon was eventually lifted and the public were able to return to the scene of the attacks, they found themselves surrounded by apparently impromptu signs of public defiance and unity.

The following day, a government official telephoned Southwark Council, the local authority for the area where the murders happened, a council official recalled. “He said: ‘We’re sending you a hundred imams.’”

Two days after that, about 100 imams and Muslim community leaders from across the UK duly appeared on the bridge. One read out a statement, condemning the attack.

The following weekend, a group of Muslims arrived at the bridge and handed out thousands of red roses. One of the organisers described it as “a symbolic gesture of love” for people affected by the attack.

What the event's organiser did not say is that she worked in law enforcement at the Home Office.

She told MEE that it was entirely a “grassroots” initiative with no government assistance: “I was acting as a member of the community and sought assistance from my personal networks.”

### *The ‘Hero’ of Finsbury Park*

A week later, in the early hours of Monday 19 June, Darren Osborne, a lone Islamophobic attacker, drove his van into a group of men near a mosque in Finsbury Park, north London.

Several young men restrained Osborne and protected him from being attacked by others. Shortly later they were joined by Mohammed Mahmoud, the mosque's imam.

By the following morning, the hashtag #WeStandTogether was running across Twitter, after initially being promoted by police and police commanders.

As journalists gathered at the police cordon, a number were approached by a woman who called herself Gabbie, and explained that she worked for a company called Horizon PR.

What “Gabbie” did not say is that “Horizon PR” had been created by Breakthrough Media and another communications company, M&C Saatchi PR UK. Breakthrough has used it to promote the messaging it creates – and disseminates through co-operating civil society groups – under the terms of its contract with RICU.

A number of journalists have told MEE that “Gabbie” offered to introduce them to a man standing nearby. This man explained that his name was Shaukat Warraich and that he was from an organisation called Faith Associates.

Warraich stressed to the journalists the role that the mosque's imam had played in protecting Osborne until he could be handed over to police. This angle came to dominate news reports in the following days.

Warraich did not say anything about his organisation's relationships with both Breakthrough and with RICU, the British government's propaganda unit.

Faith Associates, a limited company, has for several years been funded in part by government contracts. Internal Breakthrough and RICU documents, seen by MEE, indicate that it works to disseminate government messages.

MEE understands that subsequent media reports caused ill-feeling in the Finsbury Park area. The young men who restrained and protected the killer before the imam arrived at the scene believe their role had been overlooked.

“They were proud that they had done the right thing, but believe that they were then portrayed as a lynch mob,” said one person who prays regularly at the mosque. The young men are now rarely seen at the mosque, he added.

Asked about the role that he and Horizon PR had played in amplifying Mahmoud’s role in conversations with journalists, Warraich replied that he had been working to promote mosque security for some years. Mohammed Mahmoud declined to comment.

### ***‘Flowers, Not Riots’***

The blending of traditional emergency planning – the police, paramedical and hospital responses - with post-attack propaganda has gathered pace in the UK in recent years.

It has happened at a time when covert government messaging has been developed as part of the Prevent programme. Growing use of social media has also offered new opportunities for the creation of “controlled spontaneity”.

By 2016, Facebook had recognised that its reach would be extended still further if it operated as an emergency response institution in the aftermath of disasters.

Some governments have become increasingly nervous about the power of social media, however, and will attempt to shut it down rather than make use of it, as happened in Sri Lanka in April 2019, after more than 250 people were killed in suicide bombings.

In the UK, central and local governments are obliged to prepare for the aftermath of any disaster under the terms of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, a piece of legislation that arose out of the vulnerability that Tony Blair’s government felt during a series of

crises early in his premiership.

In September 2000, countrywide protests against fuel prices culminated in petrol shortages, panic buying and the prospect of economic collapse. The following year, an outbreak of foot and mouth disease cost the country an estimated £8bn (\$10.25bn) as livestock was slaughtered and many rural areas sealed off.

Once the Civil Contingencies Act was passed, a National Recovery Working Group was established within the Cabinet Office, the UK government's central department. It established protocols and guidance documents that would be used to aid "recovery", which was defined as a distinct phase after a terrorist attack or a natural disaster.

"Recovery," the Cabinet Office stated, "is the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community following an emergency."

Lucy Easthope, a leading figure at the Cabinet Office emergency planning college, wrote in her book *The Recovery Myth* that "recovery" has since come to be regarded as "a specific phase of the disaster that emergency planners attempt to order and something that can be planned for in advance before the specificities of the emergency are known. (The implication being that that these details are a minor issue, capable of being filled in later.)"

In order to keep the recovery process under control, hashtags and Facebook posts are said to be examined exhaustively in advance of their use, to establish that they can be used without provoking an unintended reaction, MEE has been told.

After a terrorist attack – or any other disaster – Cabinet Office teams will work very quickly with the Red Cross and with local contingency planners, who usually send out the first social media messages.

Emergency planners will also advise on the form of words that political leaders should use after such an attack, and enact the pre-planned vigils and inter-faith events.

"What is wanted is flowers being handed out outside mosques," one emergency planner emphasised, "and not riots".

### ***'Get the Novichok Cleared Up'***

But the plans are not always implemented. One place where the local team rejected

some central government planners' suggestions was Salisbury, the town in central England where Russian agents used the nerve agent Novichok to poison Sergei Skripal, a double agent, and his daughter Yulia in March 2018.

"In Salisbury, people were telling us: 'We're not going to wear T-shirts saying I heart Salisbury – we just want you to get the Novichok cleared up.'"

The source said that "we can play the hashtag game in Manchester, where there's a lot of young people, and they like it" - a reference to the aftermath of the attack at the Manchester Arena in May 2017, which killed 22 people.

"In Salisbury there's a lot of ex-military, and people just seemed to have good sense. So we didn't use the usual recovery stuff there."

But a number of the people involved in the advance planning of "controlled spontaneity" clearly have some misgivings about how emergency planning for the immediate aftermath of terrorist attacks is being combined with propaganda techniques that are intended to influence public responses.

Easthope – who wrote British government recovery management plans for more than a decade – has disclosed her concern that the multi-faith displays of solidarity that are negotiated in advance of terrorist attacks, and the pre-planned messages of resilience on social media, may not always be the best way to respond.

Perhaps, she wrote in 2017, "the fight rhetoric has gone too far" and it is a mistake "to insist that the first message should be 'we shall overcome' as if the enemy was on the beaches."

### ***'Anaesthetic for the Community'***

Some emergency planners are also concerned that the needs of bereaved families are rarely paramount when plans to create "controlled spontaneity" are being developed.

"The hashtag can start to feel very empty very early on, and I don't think this ever really puts bereaved families at the heart of what you're doing," said one. "It's an anaesthetic for the wider community, but it's no replacement for really good humanitarian care for the people most badly affected."

Nor, some say, is the public being encouraged to engage in debate about the causes of the hatred that underpin terrorist attacks.

“The government wants the Twitter storm or the Facebook storm to be in its gift, and of course it can’t be - but you can distract people by putting up a photograph of a French flag or whatever.

“We are not having these debates because we are saying ‘I heart so-and-so’, and ‘I’m going to change my profile picture to a New Zealand flag’, and ‘I’m going to do the haka in the school assembly’.

“When there’s nothing people can actually do, they can change the photo on their Facebook page. Then they can feel they’ve done something about it, they can go to work, and they’re not agitating the government.

“But we’re not going to get to the bottom of terrorism by socially engineering a response. We’re not doing the difficult debate. And what that stops, is true learning.”

The Cabinet Office told MEE that some information about its emergency planning was publicly available, but that some remained for internal use only. It did not comment on criticisms of its current operations.

*This article is available in French on [Middle East Eye French edition](#).*

# **KHADIJA SHARIFE, MARK ANDERSON** **(SOUTH AFRICA)**

## **THE GREAT GAMBIA HEIST**



Based in South Africa, Khadija Sharife (LLM) is an award-winning investigative journalist and senior editor for Africa at OCCRP. Her focus is illicit financial flows, natural resources, and political economy.

She is the former director of Plateforme de Protection des Lanceurs d'Alerte en Afrique, and is a board member of Finance Uncovered. She has worked with forums including Pan-African Parliament, African Union, OECD, and UNEP. She is the author of "Tax Us If You Can: Africa."



Mark Anderson joined OCCRP in 2018 as an Africa editor. He oversees investigative output from the continent. Previously, he was the Nairobi bureau chief of The Africa Report magazine, and before that, a staff reporter at The Guardian covering global development.

Mark's work has also appeared in Africa Confidential, Bloomberg Businessweek, and Reuters. He has covered Kenyan elections, Eritrea's nascent mining industry, and cocoa smuggling in Ghana. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from SOAS University of London, and a master's degree in journalism from UC Berkeley.



# THE GREAT GAMBIA HEIST

*By Khadija Sharife and Mark Anderson  
OCCRP - March 27, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/>*

## HOW YAHYA JAMMEH STOLE A COUNTRY

*OCCRP - 27 March 2019  
[https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/  
how-yahya-jammeh-stole-a-country](https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/how-yahya-jammeh-stole-a-country)*

## THE INNER CIRCLE THAT HELPED JAMMEH STEAL A BILLION DOLLARS

*OCCRP - March 27, 2019  
[https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/the-inner-circle-that-helped-  
jammeh-steal-a-billion-dollars](https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/the-inner-circle-that-helped-jammeh-steal-a-billion-dollars)*

# JAMMEH'S TAIWANESE ALLIANCE AND THE HEZBOLLAH LAUNDROMAT

OCCRP - March 27, 2019

[https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/  
the-alliance-and-the-laundromat](https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/the-alliance-and-the-laundromat)

# THE STATE COMPANY THAT FELL PREY TO THE PRESIDENT

OCCRP - March 27, 2019

[https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/  
the-state-company-that-fell-prey-to-the-president](https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/the-state-company-that-fell-prey-to-the-president)

# GAMBIA'S STOLEN FUTURE: A PLANE INSTEAD OF PENSIONS

OCCRP - March 27, 2019

[https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/  
plane-instead-of-pensions-a-stolen-future](https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/plane-instead-of-pensions-a-stolen-future)

# MARIELA CASTAÑÓN (GUATEMALA)

## PEOPLE TRAFFICKING, A DENUNCIATED CRIME IN THE VIRGEN DE LA ASUNCIÓN SAFE HOME



Mariela Castañón, Guatemalan journalist, graduated in 2010 as bachelor's in mass communication from University Mariano Galvez of Guatemala.

During the last 11 years, has been working as journalist for La Hora Newspaper, giving coverage to the events related with children, youth, women, crime and violence.

Has been awarded with different recognitions among which stand out: 2017 Journalist of the Year, and Recognition for humane coverage in dramatic events, 2009 Recognition due Journalism report against Human Traffic granted by Save the Children Organization. Has begun as professor of Communication ethic teaching Students of Pre-grade at University Rafael Landívar of Guatemala.

# PEOPLE TRAFFICKING, A DENUNCIATED CRIME IN THE VIRGEN DE LA ASUNCIÓN SAFE HOME

*By Mariela Castañón  
La Hora - August 4th, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*

*<https://lahora.gt/trata-sexual-un-delito-denunciado-en-el-hogar-seguro-virgen-de-la-asuncion/>*

Surviving girls of the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home and their families have denounced the crime of sex trafficking in two ways: entrance of outsiders to the Home and transferring the teenagers to prostitution houses. To this date, there are still 162 open Alba-Keneth alerts of teenagers that evade the process (escaped or disappeared) from the Home. According to the Public Prosecutor's office, the information that could be provided by the girls that have not yet been located will determine what happened before March 8.

## *In the Clinics of the Safe Home*

\*Renata is 19 years old and stayed in the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home during three months. She is one of the teenagers that denounced to be a victim of the sex trafficking within the Home, before the fire that ended the life of 41 minor girls.

Renata was institutionalized in the year 2016, as the gang threatening the whereabouts of her residence wanted to "recruit" her and force her to be partner of one of the gang members.

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\* Fictitious name to protect the interviewed person.

She was scared and, before being partner of a gang member, she preferred to escape her home. Her mother activated the Alba-Keneth alert to find her. The young woman was located and her case was filed before a judge, who considered that she needed to be in a home of protection and shelter. She was then remitted to the Save Home Virgen de la Asunción in August of that year.

Renata sits in plastic bench and, with attentive eyes and a low tone of voice starts talking. She looks like a scared girl.

“When I entered there I thought it was going to be different, one cannot imagine what happens in there. I entered the phycology area, two men asked me questions I believe they were psychologists. The asked several things, one of them was if I was virgin, and I said yes”.

According to Renata's story, after that interview she was transferred to the module 8, where she stayed during 25 days. Then she was transferred to the module 7, where she escaped after two months.

Renata complaints that foreign men entered the Safe Home. The girls were taken to the clinics: medical and dental, where they were put an injection that she and the other two interviewed teenagers described as: “la vacuna, la vacuna de vaca y la dormilona” “the vaccine, the cow vaccine and the sleepy vaccine” as its effect was to fall in a deep sleep and lose consciousness.

“I was raped in there. I was told they will take me to the dentist for a general check and that they have to put me to sleep. I did not allow them to put me to sleep, but they forced me, injected me in the arm. I only remember two men entered”, explains.

The interviewed girl says that in other of the rapes she remembers the aggressor was a foreign man (due to the color of the skin, eyes and hair). She describes what she felt when she was sexually abused.

“When I woke up my intimate part was hurting, I was bleeding and started crying. Another girl asked me if I was raped, I told her I did not know, as the only thing I remember was the appointment with the dentist. The girl told me she was raped too and that I was going to get used to it”, she refers.

Renata tells that it was the workers of the Home the ones facilitating the entrance of unknown men to the clinic, and had the support of one of the internee girls. She believes that the people who entered to use the girls as sexual objects, paid for it.

Renata's story on the entrance of foreign people, the sexual abuse against her in several occasions, a possible economic benefit to third parties, the deceive and the threaten that could constitute the crime of people trafficking for sexual exploitations, matches with other minor girls who previous and after the fire had denounced these practices. Up to this date, the Public Ministry has not found evidences proofing the testimony of the young women.

One former employee of the General Prosecutor Office of the Nation [Procuraduría General de la Nación PNG per its initials in Spanish], indicates that in some of the testimonies of teenagers, it was documented that they were taken to "Nimajuyú", but it is unknown if this refers to the residential in zone 21, or the name identified by the ones participating in these acts.

Other teenager that needed protection measures explains that she witnessed in 2016 when one of her mates "more pretty and with more body" was taken out. The workers of the Home said they were taking the girls to the hearings, but when returning, some of the girls told they were taken to prostitution houses.

The recruited young women were between 12 to 17 years, and were pulled from the Home after lunch, around 2:30 in the afternoon. They would be returned until late at night. The girls were not registered with their names but as "entrances", said the teenager.

One mother that lost her daughter in the fire assures that, she heard from a former internee girl that since 2010 "men in suits" arrived to pick up the teenager they would want to use as sex object or to take her to other men.

The interviewed mother fears that her daughter could have been object of sex trafficking because the report delivered by the National Institute of Forensic Sciences [Inacif, per its initials in Spanish] after the fire of March 8th, pointed "possible recent coitus" (introduction of penis into the vagina).

She was not aware of the meaning of the term “coitus” so she looked it up in the internet to understand what it was and suspect that could have happened to her daughter, institutionalized in 2017, as a gang member kidnapped her and she activated an Alba-Keneth alert. The police located her in an invasion in zone 18. Remitted her to a court for minors, and the judge considered that the girl needed to be in a Safe Home.

Families of the girls in the Safe Home, other survivors, activists and complainant lawyers of the fire case agree that there is fear in the girls that were institutionalized in the Home, to talk about how things happened. A lawyer of one complainant organizations due to the fire, who requests not to be quoted, tells that when the survivors get together to talk about the subject they say they will not formally complaint what happened due to fear to die “dismembered”.

He adds that terror and torture were common denominators in the Safe Home since it was opened in June 2010 until the closure ordered by the Appeals Courthouse for Childhood and Teenagers on April 30, 2017.

To this date there are still 162 active alerts of girls and 172 of boys that evaded the process (escaped or disappeared from the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home), according to the Operative Unit of the Alba-Keneth Alert System. Since January 2011 (when the electronic record initiated) to March 8, 2017, they received 692 disappearance alerts of minors from the Home.

### ***Safety of the SBS (Social Welfare Secretariat) and Private Safety***

Some of the stories point the “Deltas” as the ones involved in taking the teenager girls out of the Home and transfer them to prostitution houses.

The Deltas was the name given in the Home to the chiefs of security according to former workers and former internees interviewed by La Hora.

The security of the Safe Home was in charge of people hired by the Social Welfare Secretariat (SBS, after the initials in Spanish), that coordinated the actions with private security companies. Since the year 2010 to 2017, several private security providers were hired to safeguard the facilities of the Home and to coordinate the security schemes.

“The private security Company hired was in charge of planning the scheme, which was agreed and approved by the security manager of the Home for its execution,” explains the SBS.

According to the Communication area of the SBS the Company Visegua (Vigilancia Empresarial de Guatemala, S.A.) was hired to provide private security service in two occasions: from January 1 to February 29, and to November 1, to December 31, of 2016.

According to the governmental portal Guatecompras, the SBS paid from April 2015 to December 2016 Q461,100 to Visegua for hiring private security guards for the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home, and for other centers and facilities of the SBS.

Denis Humberto Paredes Escobar and Denis Paredes Madrid constituted Visegua in 2012.

In January and February 2017, the security Company hired by SBS was Seguridad Dignataria Corporativa Provesional, Sociedad Anónima, who provided that service to the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home and charges Q88,000.

Before that date, there were other security companies but at the closing of this story, records were not located as they were hired by different administrations. The SBS said they would share the historic data of all the security providers, but to the closure date of this publication, it was not possible to obtain the data.

The prosecutor, Alexander Colop explains that from the story of one of the teenagers, former internee of the Safe Home in 2016, and complaints that they were taken out of the Home by the “Deltas”; they started investigating Visegua; but not the other companies, as they took as reference the complaint of this young woman that was in 2016. Before that there were no other cases known by the Prosecutor Office.

On the other side, one of the young women that were in the Home tells: “The Delta pulled a group of girls for prostitution. In the home, there were two deltas: one good and one bad. The good delta hit the girls if they answered. He would beat them up until he was tired; he beat them really hard, kicked them, pulled the hair, he really destroyed the girls”, explains the teenager.



One former worker of the Home, who worked as security guard hired by the SBS as interim in 2016 for 4 months, says he was just for a short period of time and did not observe or participated in any of these actions, however he cannot talk about the shift of the other colleagues that coordinated the security with the private companies.

“When I worked as security manager I worked 8 days and rested 8 days. In my shift I did not see any movement like this, after that I learned about the prostitution of teenagers in the news, but I cannot give faith of that”, he tells.

According to the interviewed, since he arrived they called him delta and that was the way of being identified internally, his functions were to oversee the security of the teenagers, verify that the guards of Visegua hired by SBS in 2016 were in the corresponding positions, and identify risks or suspicious people surrounding the place.

The former worker said there were several controls in place to take teenagers out of the facilities, which initiated one day before they were transferred to hearings, hospitals, PGN or other commissions.

“One day before we were given a sheet, also to each module of men and women, and there we verified if there were teenagers of its population. We verified the time and place to were the person would be taken”, explains.

Boys and girls were transferred in different vehicles from the Home, of the SBS or in ambulances, they were accompanied by an educator and a procurator, if they were women they were accompanied by their same gender, he refers.

As part of the investigation process, the Prosecutor Office against the Sex Trafficking interviewed the security personnel hired by SBS and the Company Visegua, from the story of the teenager institutionalized in the Safe Home in 2016, who described the deltas as people who took them to prostitution houses.

### ***MP: Until This Moment Nothing on the Deltas***

Carlos Figueroa, deputy prosecutor against Sex Trafficking, explains that in the investigation they held until this moment, they have not found any background of

participation of the deltas in the crime of sex trafficking in the Home. In the diligences performed, they requested the procedures of entrances and exits of the girls, boys and teenagers (NNA, per it is initials in Spanish) but did not find any link to them.

“We addressed two aspects: the security of SBS as private, we requested the roles of the shift in order to determine which guards were in which days. We took declarations of all the guards and we requested de security protocols, we did not find any background of people trafficking or that would have participation to lead to any exploitation issue,” advises.

Figuerola adds that the security in charge of the Safe Home was in hands of the security guards. The Prosecutor found they were people with police profile and that the term delta could have come up as the legal representative of the company Visegua had a military rank, but did not find any proof linking this company with the story of the teenager telling about the transfer to the prostitution houses.

La Hora looked in the offices of Visegua located in zone 13 for representatives of the entity, with the objective of knowing the security scheme provided to the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home, the stories of the teenagers, among other subjects.

In the visit to Visegua it was not possible to get the interview, representatives of the company asked to send an email with the questions, it was done, but at closure of this story, it was not possible to obtain an answer.

### ***The Investigation Continues, but...***

The Prosecutor office against People Trafficking investigates four complaints filed for disappearance and people trafficking, one of them in the modality of sexual exploitation. This was filed by the Group of Mutual Support [GAM, per initials in Spanish], which in November of 2016 was extended due to suspicions of trafficking in the modality of sexual exploitation; a first complaint for trafficking – without specifying the modality-, was filed in October of that year.

Mario Polanco, director of GAM, says that they filed a complaint before MP, as the young woman denounced that the girls were taken to private houses and there were returned. The suspicion was there was prostitution, however they believe there was no

follow up to the case and the Prosecution office was too passive.

According to Polanco, the MP must investigate since the Home was opened, in order to clarify the facts that could be related to people trafficking.

On the other hand, Alexander Colop, chief of the Prosecutor office against People Trafficking, says that GAM and PDH filed a complaint for three teenager that escaped and later on were found due to the Alba-Keneth. The interviewed functionary adds that one of the found young women said that she was victim of sexual exploitation and that as a result she got pregnant and lost the baby. However, according to Colop, the scientific proof and the technical assessments performed discarded the story of the minor.

The young woman interviewed by the MP which testimony on pregnancy was discarded is not the only one denouncing that. The day of the fire, a young woman talked to several communication media and said he was pregnant but was forced to abort.

In addition, the Prosecutor office against People Trafficking investigates other three complaints, one filed by the PGN for the evasion of 40 teenagers, the other one also by the PDH for another disappearance case, and one by the Social Welfare Secretariat for the evasion of teenagers, as it was suspected that one of them was in charge of recruiting others.

“Our analyst conclude that it is not a planned escape for capture, but an event that happens as evasion. The teenagers had –mechanisms- to evade the protection process. Logically they were not coerced to stay in a gang and it was optional if they wanted to stay or not in the facilities”, explains Colop.

They also have the complaint of the Judicial Organism (OJ, per its initials in Spanish), due to the suspicion that a teenager was victim of the trafficking in modality of forced recruitment from the gangs. The suspicion was discarded because she denied having been recruited by a gang; also, she had a legal open process that gave some leads that she was not victim of such crime.

All of the above-mentioned complaints were centralized in an investigation process that is still in progress, as it is necessary to have the declaration of three teenagers that

escaped just before the fire and that still have not been located.

“We still have not been able to locate the three teenagers, we do not have their declaration; we consider to keep the case opened until we have their declaration, as the investigation is what has been denounced, which possible victims can inform and be strengthened with general investigation. Their declarations are key in order to know if we are or not dealing with a crime of people trafficking,” says the chief of the Prosecutors office.

According to Colop the missing teenagers can provide more information with which the investigation process will be concluded, these girls are now being tracked by the Coordination of the Operative Unit of the Alba-Keneth Alert System. Even when MP already surveyed the family surroundings, they have not been able to obtain much information; they expect to find them.

Through the Unit of Access to Public information of Inacif, we required information of the amount of girls reflecting pregnancy after performing the necropsy for the fire of March 8; however, the entity considered the request “not admissible” as those expert opinions constitute investigation actions that are remitted to the MP.

“It is not possible accept the request as, such information is part of the experts opinion. Inacif provides their services upon request of the competent authority, as established in the article 29 of the Organic law of Inacif; the opinions issued by Inacif constitute investigation actions and such are remitted to the MP, entity to which the parties of judicial proceedings will be able to request information”.

## ***The Cows Vaccine***

Other of the practices, denounced as part of the sexual abuse to which they were submitted, are the testimonies of a tranquilizer they called “the vaccine”, “the cows vaccine” and the “sleepy vaccine”. According to stories of three interviewed girls and two former workers of the SBS, these medicaments were injected to the teenagers so they would fall asleep or be tranquilized before a situation that would alter them.

The five consulted people coincide in that the application of this medicament was in two clinics: dental and the one for teenagers (men and women). There was four clinics

within the Home; there was also the pediatric for attention to NNAs with intellectual disabilities. Directorship of Human Resources of the SBS hired the people working there.

About the suspicions of the application of the medicaments described by the teenagers, Colop indicates they verified all the medicines in the clinics, as it was known that teenagers were drugged there, besides they revised the last bids; which were sent to Inacif to establish if they caused “sleepy effects, loss of consciousness or memory”, but none of them had those functions. The analysis of such meds were performed between 2016 and 2017.

In other diligences related to the case in that period, notebooks from the rooms of the girls were subtracted to determine if the friendship links of the young women that had disappeared, even though they were not in the same module. Psychological analysis performed by PGN for all the teenagers were documented and it was read within the stories that if the young women were victims of exploitation and trafficking, but there were not major evidence.

In addition, they collected 40 testimonial declarations of NNA, monitors and psychologies in the period from October 2016 to May 2017.

### ***Little Supervision***

On other side, the National Adoption Council (CNA per its initials in Spanish), which is in charge of verifying the conditions of the public and private homes, performed 21 supervisions from 2010 to 2017. In 2012, they verified the Home for a complaint on medication application (Risperdal) to NNA.

Risperdal is a medication within the family of the antipsychotic, which control or modulate the conduct in people. In the case of childhood, it is used when they are hyperactive or aggressive behavior, and should be applied under medical prescription. Its effect is excess of sleep and tranquility.

“According to the supervision in the home, interviews and documents provided by Dr. Byron Recinos from the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home, it was determined that the reason why kids were medicated with antipsychotics as Risperidone (Risperdal),

was because in the home there were NNA with background of mental disability, development disorder, aggressive conduct, self-aggression or obsessive disorders. Being these patients with changes in behavior in occasions due to agitation (patients who do self-infringed harm, that harm people surrounding them or that present aggressive conducts)”, argues CNA.

CNA adds, “Therefore each one of them was evaluated by a psychologist and was provided follow up according to their needs”.

The recommendation of the CNA was to implement group meetings with all personnel in charge of the NNA care to optimize time and provide better follow up according to the medicine administrated, to reinforce the protocols every six months, and to continue the assessment of antipsychotic medication. Follow up to the patient to continue, reduce or suspend such medicines if it was the case in each NNA treated by the psychiatrist of the Virgen de la Asunción Home.

### ***Safe Home, No Man’s Land***

Leonel Dubón, director of the Childhood Shelter, organization that has given shelter to several girls former internees of the Safe Home advise that girls have told they were pulled out from the Home to have sex, however, their testimonies were never formally denounced before MP, as they were afraid.

“Since many years back, there were always rumors and manifestations, almost since the opening of the Safe Home (June 2010)”.

Dubón states that the Safe Home was no man’s land where there was really probability of these stories to be true.

“I can confirm that the Safe Home was no man’s land and that any of the things denounced by the girl could have certainly happened. People making things against the girls and boys, did it well prepared to any further complaint”.

Marwin Bautista, sub secretary of the Protection and Fostering of the SBS, was consulted for the stories of the survivors of the Safe Home and their families, regarding the application of medicines and the stories regarding people trafficking in the



modality of sexual exploitation, he limited his response indicating that it is the MP the one investigating those cases.

“This is a case that must be investigated by MP, we had some of the processes of investigation about it, however the complaints were file in a determined moment and now those cases do not correspond to the SBS”.

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## **SOLOMON TEMBANG MFORGHAM (CAMEROON)**

# **HOW ILLEGAL CHINESE MINING DESTROYS LIVELIHOODS, FUELS CONFLICTS IN CAMEROON**



Solomon Tembang is a Cameroonian investigative and development journalist with several years experience.

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# HOW ILLEGAL CHINESE MINING DESTROYS LIVELIHOODS, FUELS CONFLICTS IN CAMEROON

*By Solomon Tembang*

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<http://tuckmagazine.com/2019/01/28/illegal-chinese-mining-destroys-livelihoods-cameroon/>

Nagbayanga Valentin, a widow in her late thirties, sits on the earth floor of her thatched two-roomed house she shares with her four young children in Haya Haya, a mining encampment with about 2,000 inhabitants in Longa Mali village of Betare Oya sub division, some 200 kilometres from Bertoua, headquarters of Cameroon's East region.

Dirty pots, pans and other old household paraphernalia are strewn all over the tiny house. Outside, the laughter and chatter of her children and those of other neighbours is audible enough as they play a local game, virtually ignorant of the weighty problems their mother, and the community, are going through.

Poverty is discernible in the community whose inhabitants live in thatch houses, but just metres away, Chinese machines are rumbling as they mine away millions of francs CFA in gold.

Conflicts had, over the years, been brewing between the local population and Chinese miners until it boiled over on November 15, 2017 when there was a confrontation and a Chinese pulled out a gun, shot and killed a local. The population rose up in anger and beat the Chinese to death. Since then, relations between the local community and the Chinese miners have been frosty as tension continues to simmer.

“My husband was shot and killed by a Chinese and now I am left with four children to fend for”, Nagbayanga Valentin says. “Things are not easy as life is becoming very difficult in this community. The little money my husband made from artisanal mining is no longer there and so I wonder how I am going to feed these children or even send them to school”.

Her husband, Issa Paul, was shot dead by a Chinese whom the locals simply knew as Bouboul.

Beleke Andre, brother to Issa Paul, was there when it all happened.

“We were seven of us digging in our hole. The Chinese also had their hole not far from ours. But later, the Chinese, maybe realising that our hole was producing more gold, insisted that they must dig where we were already working. As they continued to insist, we said they should wait since we had our ‘stones’ in the hole and when we take them out, they can go ahead,” Beleke Andre says.

“They wanted to pay us money to take over where we had been digging. But we said since we were seven of us, they should wait until we agree among ourselves before we can strike any deal with them. That is how we continued digging to take out our ‘stone’. But the Chinese, whom many villagers simply called Bouboul, we don’t even know his real name, was insisting on closing the hole. When we did not allow him close the hole, he called the Chinese camp, which is close by, on the telephone”.

“Three Chinese then arrived at the scene. At this moment, Bouboul went to one of their vehicles, took a gun and shot three times in the air. When he came close, I am the person he wanted to shot. As my pregnant wife was also at the scene, I went and stood behind her”.

“Bouboul then fired another shot in the air and then shot at my elder brother, Issa Paul. As my brother died, we overpowered the Chinese and took the gun. All I remember is the population coming out in anger and beating the Chinese who later died”.

The case has been dragging at the judiciary and the chances for them to find justice over the death of their loved one, Beleke says, are very slim. He says at the court, the Chinese maintain that if they have to pay for the death of the Issa Paul, the locals also have to pay for the death of the Chinese.

“But we are not the ones who started the conflict. He was the one who first shot and killed our brother,” Beleke laments.

### ***‘This Land Is Our Livelihood’***

Some of the locals have been mining in this area for decades after inheriting the land from their forefathers in accord with local traditional law (*droit coutumier*), only for them to get up one day and see Chinese brandishing a mining concession on their land.

This was the case with Doko Habraham in Colomine, some 100 kilometres from Betare Oya.

“This land is our livelihood. If taken away from us and given to the Chinese we won’t have any other means of earning a living. My ancestors have been on this land for several decades. I went to where my mine was one day, and it was like I wasn’t even on my own land anymore,” Doko says.

“No one came to tell me that my land was going to be taken over by Chinese miners and if I was going to be compensated for the said land,” he adds.

Doko Habraham says he later found out that the Chinese miners who were working with machines on his land had bought a concession from a Cameroonian who had secured exploration rights in the area. Doko has no land title and so he is no match to the Chinese miners, whom, he claims, “could easily buy their way around”.

## *How the Chinese Miners Came Here*

For years, the local people had been mining for gold on their ancestral lands, through artisanal means using spades, buckets and hard work until the Chinese companies arrived with excavators and powerful pumps and are now practicing semi-mechanised mining. The Chinese have been devastating the environment and the locals say they've received no compensation.

The Chinese are in brisk business, mining away hundreds of millions of francs CFA in gold. But those bearing the brunt of the mining bonanza are the native communities who continue to live on the edge of the precipice.

But how did the Chinese come about carrying out semi-mechanised mining in this area? Justin Chekoua of Non Governmental Organisation, *Forêt et Développement Rurale*, FODER, working in the area, explains that semi-mechanised mining came to the East region of Cameroon in early 2000 when the Cameroon government was planning to build the Lom Panga hydroelectric dam. He says when the government realised that a lot of gold would be lost in the area that was going to be flooded by the dam, it set up what was christened "Programme to Save Gold in Lom Panga Dam Area".

Cameroon's mining code does not allow non-nationals to acquire mining authorisation for concession areas. Chekoua explains that because the artisanal miners would have been slow and not be able to save all the gold before the dam floods the area, the government allowed semi-mechanised mining to be carried out.

"But since the nationals carrying out artisanal mining did not have the expertise and finance to save the gold speedily through semi-mechanised mining, the government said Cameroonians could enter into technico-financial partnership with expatriates. That is how many Cameroonians brought in expatriates, majority of who are Chinese, to come into partnership," Chekoua discloses.

The authorities conceded the move would violate mining laws but said the situation was an emergency.

“However, instead of going into technico-financial partnership with expatriates for the semi-mechanised mining, Cameroonians are now instead getting the authorisation and selling to the Chinese. They are now selling mining space to Chinese,” Chekoua regrets.

He elucidates that because the area around the Lom Panga Dam was going to be flooded, the semi-mechanised miners were not compelled to carry out any environmental impact assessment. They were also not forced to fill the holes their activities left behind.

“The mining code specified that each individual could have a maximum of four hectares to mine in...and instead of staying within the area where gold was to be saved, those who are acquiring authorisation and their Chinese ‘partners’ have gone beyond this zone,” Chekoua adds.

### ***Environmental Hazards***

Since the Chinese miners went beyond the area to save the Lom Panga gold, the environment and local communities have continued to suffer.

“Previously when the locals were carrying out artisanal mining, there was little or no impact on the environment. But since the Chinese came in with semi-mechanised mining, the environment has been devastated,” Chekoua says.

Many waterways have been disrupted and streams silted.

“Because the Chinese need a lot of water to carry out the semi-mechanised mining, they have deviated almost all the streams or rivers into their mining camps and local communities downstream have no water for household and other uses,” Justin Chekoua notes, adding: “In some areas such as Longa Mali and Ngoue Ngoue, mud from the activities of the Chinese miners has silted streams and rivers. The use of mercury by the Chinese miners has also polluted streams and rivers. Fish and other aquatic animals are dying. Oil and petrol from the Chinese machines are also polluting streams”.

Pristine forest is also being cut down to make way for the Chinese mining activities.

Loud, vibrating sounds of excavators accompany the back-breaking work of the mine workers, just a kilometre outside of Colomine. Covered in mud, they sway around in the mining pits as they pan for gold, dig more holes, or use the noisy machines on the edges of the mining pit to fill trucks with quantities of the gold-containing mud that will later be processed with mercury. At this exact spot, there used to be a forest, but many layers of vegetation have already been removed by miners.

There is no possible coexistence between mining and forests, says Justin Chekoua. “All lands dedicated to mining, and in particular to surface mining, will be a terrain where forests are sacrificed because it requires the removal of large amounts of land. This sacrifice of the forests represents an irreparable loss of natural capital.”

### ***‘Misery Is Our Potion’***

Despite all the millions of francs CFA being mined away in gold, the inhabitants of these localities are living in abject poverty and lack the most basic of social amenities.

Hamadgoulde Bouba, the traditional head of the Haya Haya settlement, is not a happy man.

“We don’t have water. Where they throw their sand was where we used to fetch water. Now they have blocked it. Other places we have created to get water they have also destroyed them. Even the road is deplorable. Their trucks have completely destroyed the roads. In fact, all we know here is misery,” he laments.

“They do very little for the population. And to worsen things sometimes, we go to our farm only to discover that the farms have disappeared, with the soil having been dug by the Chinese and taken away to their camp to wash and get gold. How do we live if our farms are being destroyed?”

Many inhabitants of Haya Haya refused to talk on record, saying they were afraid of being victimised by the Chinese. The Chinese have instilled fear in the inhabitants of Haya Haya. One simply said “the fear of the Chinese here is the beginning of wisdom”.

## ***Deadly Open Tombs***

The semi-mechanised mining activities of the Chinese have left behind deep holes which have been filled with water. The localities of Longa Mali, Colomine, Ngoe Ngoe, Ngoura, Ngoyla, Batouri, Yokadouma are littered with such holes, some as deep as 50 metres, many of which have been filled with water.

People are said to have lost their lives in these deadly tombs. According to statistics from FODER, at least 47 persons died in 2017 on the former mining sites. About 250 mining sites opened between 2012 and 2014 have not been filled, the NGO added.

Cattle and other livestock have also been falling into these holes, locals say.

“We cannot even rear livestock because they will all fall into the holes Chinese miners have dug everywhere. The situation is very pathetic”, Hamadgoulde Bouba says.

## ***No Compensation***

According to Cameroonian law, the mining companies are supposed to pay compensation to local people who owned or were making a living on the land.

But Pilo Michel, traditional ruler of Longa Mali, says there is nothing to write home about the activities of Chinese miners in the area.

“They have not done anything good for my village that they are exploiting. The state of the road to the village is bad. I don’t know of what use the Chinese are here,” he says.

“Since the days of my parents before I took over as chief, the Chinese have done nothing here in terms of corporate social responsibility; not a school, not a health centre, not water supply, not even to repair the road they use to evacuate what they mine here. They have instead continued to destroy sources of livelihood in our village. They continue to exploit us. Longa Mali village is rich in minerals but has nothing to show for it,” Pilo regrets.

“Even the holes they dug, they have not refilled. Water has filled these holes and they are posing real danger to the community. People have been dying in those holes”.

Pilo says the government of Cameroon must force the Chinese miners to construct schools, health centres, repair the road and provide potable water to the community and even build a market.

As for the open tombs they have left, Pilo says: “they should fill them. We insist on the Chinese closing these holes they have dug, if not, humans and livestock will continue falling into them”.

### ***‘We May Be Rendered Homeless’***

Rajahu Alahji Oumarou, a 21-year-old mother of two children stands at the doorway of her three-room thatched house in the Zirgene neighbourhood of Colomine, lost in thought. Just 10 metres away, bulldozers belonging to Chinese miners are working in a huge hole. While the excavators continue to dig the over 70 metres deep hole, trucks stand by ready to be loaded with the soil which is carted away to the Chinese miners’ camp to be washed for gold.

Like others who make up the 71 households in Zirgene, Rajahu’s forefathers lived in the area for decades. But now she says they, mostly of the Mbororo minority ethnic group, are about to be rendered homeless. Their thatched houses, which now perch on the edge of the large hole, may end up falling in. To add to this, children and even adults run the risk of falling into the hole which may end up being filled with water.

“I am not happy seeing this. My child almost fell into the hole the other day. If I was not vigilant to rush and hold him from behind, it would have been a different story,” Rajahu recounts.

Oumoul Abdou, a 27-year-old mother of four laments; “we are living in fear as we stare death in the face on a daily bases. There are several of these holes surrounding where we live. We can no longer use our latrine because a hole dug by the Chinese miners has ‘cut it off’. They destroyed our groundnut farm when they dug one of the holes”.



## ***‘This Hole Belongs to Us’***

As I talked to Rajahu and Oumoul, I hear loud arguments coming from where the bulldozers were digging. When I got there, I found out that the machines have stopped working. A group of local youths have gathered around and are in a heated argument with the workers of the Chinese miners. Some of the youth had used logs of wood to block the loaded trucks from leaving and others from coming in.

Some of the youth were claiming that they have been carrying out artisanal mining here to earn a living and now, the Chinese have come with machines and want to take over the place.

“If they want to continue their activity here, they must compensate us financially. This area belongs to us,” some of the youths shouted.

The situation, which almost led to a brawl, was only brought under control when an elderly man from the Colomine community, after negotiation with the Chinese through their interpreter, assured the youth that they will be compensated the next day. But one of the youngsters told me such promises have been made severally but never kept.

Such clashes between the Chinese and the locals, Honore Sirgho, a local vigilante leader says, are the order of the day.

On the opposite end of the town, some pupils of Government Primary School Colomine are playing football behind one of the classrooms. But less than 60 metres away is a hole, about 30 metres deep, that has been dug by miners. Some of the pupils say they are aware of the danger the hole poses, but have learned to live with it.

Officials of the school, which counts some 1,400 pupils, were not available for comment.

## ***Deathtraps***

The mining activities have also left behind deathtraps in some areas like Ngoue Ngoue, a village in East Cameroon with about 2,600 inhabitants. In the night of January 1, 2017, nine people were killed in an abandoned mining site when they went in search of gold. The site collapsed and buried them in 33 feet of earth in the mine excavated

by Lu and Lang, a Chinese mining company banned from operating in Cameroon in April because it lacked a license.

Yaya Moussa, head of Ngoe Ngoe village, recounts the tragedy.

“The Chinese arrived with [Cameroonian] law enforcement to drive the villagers out of the mine sites to better exploit our resources,” he explained. “So the villagers were forced to come in the night, in the absence of the Chinese, to extract gold and find food for their families. It was during one of these nocturnal outings that the earth fell on them.”

However, the deaths in this particular gold mine in Ngoe Ngoe have not deterred locals from venturing into it. When I visited the area in October 2018, some young men could still be seen digging in the ill-fated pit in search of the precious stone.

Oumarou Haman, president of the Ngoe Ngoe vigilante group, says the lure for gold still attracts people to the mine site, which is yet to be rehabilitated.

“If nothing is done to refill this site, I fear that many will still die there,” he says.

### ***Students Drop School to Chase Gold***

The lure of the gold is also having a toll on school attendance in the East region of Cameroon. Justin Chekoua says many students are dropping out of school to go to the sites that have not been refilled or closed by the Chinese miners to dig for gold. Women, some pregnant and others with babies on their backs, are also attracted to the mining sites.

Government authorities have told locals to stop digging in the abandoned sites. But the need for income is so high that many ignore the order, including kids who should be in school.

Yves Bertrand Awounfack, Senior Divisional Officer of the Lom and Djerem Division, sometime ago, launched a drive during which he went from village-to-village asking locals to leave gold mines alone and for parents to return their child miners to school.

Vincent Atangana, a Cameroonian official at Chinese mining firm EXXIL, blames parents for allowing their kids to work in the mines. He argues Chinese mining has helped develop the area.

He says many houses are being constructed with modern materials. Several years ago, fuel was sold in cans but today, says Atangana, there are fuel stations. He says these developments are coming when gold mining is still at a working stage – they will do even more when it reaches the industrial level.

### ***Billions of Francs CFA in Gold Lost***

Under Cameroonian law, minerals in the ground belong to the state. The state grants concessions to mining companies in return for 15 percent of the gold they extract.

This 15 percent is supposed to be paid to a state-owned institution known as Artisan Mining Support and Promotion Framework with French acronym CAPAM. But Justine Chekoua of FODER says some of the miners declare less than what they mine, causing the Cameroon government losses in billions of francs CFA.

On January 8, 2018, CAPAM declared that in 2017, it channeled a little more than 255 kg of gold to Cameroon's Ministry of Finance.

### ***'Sad Situation'***

Nyassi Tchakounte Lucain, Executive Director of Transparency International Cameroon says they have read several reports from NGOs in the area about the deadly holes left behind by the miners.

"It is a very sad situation. We hope that while undergoing a deep study on the situation especially on the issue of transparency, we would be able to come back with concrete information and results about what is actually going on and what we can propose as a civil society organisation," he says.

As to holes left behind by miners Nyassi says "if verified, I will call on the government of Cameroon to ensure that the laws are applied for these holes to be filled because the government is the guarantor of the security of humans and properties".

### ***‘We Can’t Encourage Destruction of Environment’***

Meanwhile, Ndouop Njikan Ibrahim of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, EITI Cameroon Permanent Secretariat, says: “I have myself been to some of these areas where semi-mechanised mining is being carried out by the Chinese and I discovered that the activities are very harmful to the environment”.

“EITI has the objective to better the lives of the population and we cannot do so by encouraging the destruction of the environment. So we persuade mining enterprises to respect the norms of environmental protection. We regret the fact that the local authorities in these areas, who should be acting like watchdogs, are not doing so,” Ndouop says.

“It is also regrettable that most of the Chinese miners are not acting through formal and identifiable enterprises in a direct relationship with the state. Most of them have got the authorisation to act on the field after having bought the license that an individual happened to have acquired from the administration. Now that the license acquired by an individual has been sold to another person, who is responsible for the environmental destruction? That is the issue that should be handled by the state. EITI Cameroon can only act like a whistleblower to indicate that there is a problem here that should be resolved or it may deteriorate the living condition of the local populations”.

On the losses the government suffers financially Ndouop says: “the only way the government can control quantities of gold mined is to go into commercial relationships with formal, identifiable companies on the field. The government should create and multiply control instances”.

While some of the Chinese miners who were suspended by the government have continued in deviance, Ndouop blames this on “laxity” on the part of administrative authorities.

“The Chinese are doing this in complicity with Cameroonians,” Ndouop states. “Something really has to be done in the semi-mechanised mining sector as it was done with the petroleum sector”.

## ***Need for Strict Regulation***

On her part, Evelynne Tsagué, Africa Co-Director of Natural Resource Governance Institute, says: “from the work that we have been doing, we know that the semi-mechanised mining sector in Cameroon has a lot of problems; the problem of impact, regulation, problem of effectiveness of the rule in place. There is the need to strictly regulate activities in the semi-mechanised mining sector”.

“There is a huge gap between the mining rule and what is practiced. The government should ensure that if a regulation already exists to guide activities of people in the mining sector, this should be respected to the letter. Where there is no rule, the government should pass a law so that there is a kind of policy and regulation in this sector,” Tsagué notes.

## ***Gov’t Moves to Stem the Tides***

However, the government of Cameroon has not been lying on its laurels. It has taken several steps to stem the tides as far as the activities of the Chinese miners are concerned.

In April 2018, the Minister of Mines, Industries and Technological Development suspended the activities of three Chinese mining companies for non-compliance to regulations.

In a statement suspending Hong Kong, Peace Mining and Lu and Lang companies, the minister said they were no longer allowed to perform gold mining activities in the East region of Cameroon, and that their officials have been asked to pack their bags and leave.

It appeared from the statement that Hong Kong Company did not have documents authorising it to carry out mining activities while Peace Mining and Lu and Lang companies’ suspension was linked to a series of conflicts recorded between their employees and local populations which resulted in deaths, in addition to the non-respect of the environment, according to the statement.



Cameroonian government mining officials said they are trying to address the situation by using drones to investigate claims of other illegal mines, according to two officials who asked to remain anonymous because they did not have permission to speak to the press. They also said most of the Chinese mining companies do not have permission to work in the country.

The divisional delegate of mines for Lom and Djerem division, East region of Cameroon, William Djoulde, says artisanal mining contributes significantly to the national economy. He says there are over 20 authorisations and with the measures being put in place, many clandestine miners will be flushed out.

“We want to professionalise this sector and send away clandestine miners who help neither the state nor the local populations. The measures are being implanted in the field,” Djoulde adds.

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# WENDY SELENE PÉREZ BECERRA, PAULA MÓNACO FELIPE, MIGUEL TOVAR (MEXICO)

## THE BONE SEARCHERS: A NEW TRADE IN A COUNTRY OF MASS GRAVES



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# THE BONE SEARCHERS: A NEW TRADE IN A COUNTRY OF MASS GRAVES

*By Wendy Selene Pérez Becerra, Paula Mónaco Felipe and Miguel Tovar  
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Traditional mortuary rites are no longer enough in Mexico, where a new trade has come to exist over the past few years: that of the bone searchers. In Veracruz, one of the deadliest states in Mexico, six men have the job of digging through clandestine graves for the human remains hidden there. For the most part, they are not parents on the trail of their disappeared children, nor are they volunteers. They are day laborers, who dig the land in exchange for a salary paid by relatives of the disappeared, in a country with more than 40,000 disappeared and more than 240,000 murders over the last 12 years.

He speaks to the dead even if he's never met them.

"My friend, if you are there, give me a sign."

Whatever's left of a person is stuffed into a garbage bag, buried under the ground.

"My friend, if you are there, give me a sign. Or when I go to bed, let me know in a dream where I have to look for you tomorrow. Talk to me."

He names them with kindness as he walks over layers of sand blown in by the wind. He stares at plants and weeds. He tries to find a discrepancy on the surface of the land, a



tree that might have been useful as shelter. Where many can only see green or brown, he reads stories.

“I’ve known the fields and the fields tell me many things,” he says.

Gonzalo Gómez García is a man of stern gestures, bushy eyelashes and thick eyebrows. He is 37, but looks like he is in his late forties. It could be his sun-leathered skin: he has worked in the fields since he was eight.

“My childhood was very bitter. I didn’t go to school, I’ve never learned to read. I also took drop-in classes but I couldn’t read. I go, I learn and, at night, I forget it all,” says Gómez García, his mouth turning up into a smile, his sadness forgotten like a piece of paper thrown into the trash.

In Colinas de Santa Fe, on the outskirts of the city of Veracruz, this good-natured, strong armed man began again to listen carefully to the field before him. He identified a tree, detected that the natural harmony of the surface of the land had been interrupted, and pointed at a place to dig. There, many of the largest graves were found. There were 155 graves, to be exact, from which 302 bodies and almost 70,000 bones and bone fragments were recovered.

Gómez García, a farmer who does not read or write, has become part anthropologist, part forensic expert; part archeologist, and part laborer. He became a bone searcher, a new trade that shows the cracks in a country with more than 40,000 disappeared people and over 240,000 murders over the last 12 years.

The first time he found a body, Gómez García felt a chill.

“My friend,” he said to the bones, “I am not here to harm you. Forgive me if I hurt you, I have to dig because I have to find you.”

Almost three years after that first find, his workday is finished. He sits on a plastic chair underneath the shadow of a mango tree. Fresh air blows, birds chirp, at the back of his yard his youngest child splashes in an inflatable pool.

Gómez García and his family live at the end of a dirt road in a town of less than 250 inhabitants, in the municipality of Medellín. Nearby, the grey blocks of unfinished houses lay bare, with palm trees and trees pushing through their courtyards. Every

day when he comes back from work, Gómez García has an afternoon snack with his teenage daughters, plays for a while with his seven-year-old son, and talks to his wife Rosalba by the kitchen stove.

His dog Osa follows him wherever he goes, her tail wagging. His hens immediately surround him when he calls. The owner of the land allows Gonzalo's family to live there, in exchange for looking after the property.

"When I found the first person I was so happy, happy in a good way," Gómez García explains in a charismatic coastal accent. He is visibly touched by the memory. "Happy because it would give peace to a mother, a sister, a wife."

His most recent finding was on December 12, 2018 at 11:30 in the morning. He found a femur —the longest bone in the human body— as well as a fibula and part of a person's foot. From the first to the last, Gómez García spoke to them all.

México's insides are filled with bodies. Some belong to the thousands who have been murdered and disappeared over the last 12 years. Others belong to the slaughtered and disappeared during repression in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

"We walk on a carpet of old and new bones," writer Elena Poniatowska has said. Far from ending criminality, mass violence increased with the so-called war on drugs, the security strategy that started with President Felipe Calderón in December of 2006, and continued until the end of 2018 with Enrique Peña Nieto. The new administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) has shown few signs of wanting to reduce militarization.

There is a connection between the past and the present. Anthropologist Alejandro Vélez Salas talks about how a "pedagogy of terror" has been installed in Mexico, as different types of violence have been passed along and spread around.

"Mexico is a huge grave," said Alejandro Encinas, who is AMLO's new undersecretary of Human Rights. And though a new law forces the government to keep a National Registry of Clandestine Graves and Common Graves, there is still no official database. The information is scattered across the regional offices of prosecutors in 32 states, the office of the Attorney General, the Navy, the Army and the Federal Police.

It is perhaps no surprise that the government appears to be under recording mass graves: Encinas mentioned 1,100 clandestine burials. But according to the information we received through access to information requests, newspaper counts and lists created by family groups of the disappeared, between 2000 and 2017, more than 2,700 such graves were found in Mexico. If we add those found in 2018, the number of graves would rise to over 3,000.

Veracruz is the state with the most clandestine graves in Mexico: as of December 2018, there were 505. And Colinas de Santa Fe area is the place where the most bodies have been found. In the parched *ejido* (communally owned land) of Patrocinio, in the northern state of Coahuila, families of the disappeared sift through the desert to recover tiny bones. There, the largest fragment could measure three centimetres across, so they move the human remains in buckets and count them by weight. In Tijuana, families seek to recover litres of organic matter after a man named Santiago Meza confessed to dissolving 300 people in caustic acid.

This Mexico shakes and silences even the most hardened of experts, like the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (the EAAF, by its Spanish acronym). The EAAF has more than 30 years of experience recovering bodies, they have dug in more than 50 countries and are considered a global authority on exhuming clandestine graves.

But they have never before seen a reality like this.

Their work traditionally takes place following a war, a dictatorship, or an internal conflict. “What’s happening here is that the problem continues,” said Mercedes Doretti, the EAAF director for Central and North America. She always looks serious, like she’s measuring her words. “I don’t like to say that one case is worse than another because all the cases are very serious, massive,” said Doretti, going a little silent, and before her words rumble louder. “But one of the characteristics in Mexico, which makes it different from other places where we have worked, is that the problem continues. It continues and exists under a democracy.”

“Is the real dimension of the situation known?” we ask. “No,” she says. “But its large volume, severity and complexity is.”

There isn't an official national registry of how many human remains have been recovered in México. As of December 2017, according to information acquired through access to information requests, at least 6,400 bodies and 183,000 long and short bones, fragments, and bits of teeth have been recovered.

Identifying these bones is a difficult task for forensic science. Government institutions confirm that as of December 2017, they had identified the bodies of 2,000 people, but only 800 of them, or what was left of them, were returned to their families. There's no certainty about the fate of human remains in the custody of the Mexican government. Many families have refused to accept bone fragments, as they do not trust the government's identification.

Following the trail those who are identified is like trying to put together an impossible puzzle, a puzzle that also has pieces missing.

About fifty groups organize search brigades from the north to the south of Mexico. Most of them are relatives, friends, and volunteers, but in Veracruz, *Colectivo Solecito* (Little Sun Collective) decided to go one step further: they began hiring day laborers as exhumers, as bone searchers.

A group of six men, including Gómez García, works Monday through Friday searching for bones in Colinas de Santa Fe, the largest clandestine mass grave in contemporary Mexican history. Only one of the men has a missing relative. All of them search for bones in exchange for a paycheck.

"They are workers," says the director of Solecito, Lucia de los Ángeles Díaz Genao. "We are generating employment."

Díaz is an elegant woman who can usually be found in earrings and sunglasses. She has a sharp face, short hair and glossed lips. Díaz is a linguist whose son was disappeared on June 28, 2013. His name is Luis Guillermo Lagunes. Armed men took him from his home.

Díaz and other members of Solecito, who are mostly women, decided to hire men to help dig when they realized that the graves were two meters deep.

"We saw that it was very deep and we couldn't do it because some of us have high blood pressure, others are diabetic, and as soon as we get to the grave site it causes such an

intense feeling that some of us get sick,” explained Rosalía Castro Toss. Castro Toss is the second in command at Solecito, and mother of Roberto Carlos Casso Castro, who disappeared on December 24, 2011.

Now, they have a list of workers, and manage contracts and payrolls with differentiated salaries. The anthropologist earns about 10,000 Mexican pesos per month, (around \$506). The rest are paid far less, some half as much.

The group’s costs run about \$500 dollars per week, an impossible sum for families that live on the edge of poverty. A national institution, the Executive Commission of Attention to Victims (CEAV, by its Spanish acronym), provides the families with some resources and lends them a van for travel, but it is far from enough.

And so, the mothers of the disappeared raise money in every way they can think of: they receive cash donations and used clothing, which they then sell in bazaars, they organize bingos and raffles. A pair of shoes were sold at eight times their original value in an auction on a social network. Peso by peso, they have financed almost three years of work in the graves at Colinas de Santa Fe. To date, it has cost them \$1,300,000 Mexican pesos: almost 70,000 dollars.

Shovels, hammers, rods and machetes are the tools of the trade, as are notebooks, pencils and cell phones to take pictures. The searchers mark the land they have already worked on with a code written on paper that they put inside a plastic bottle. There are few resources and a lot of risks: a possum once entered a grave, chewed the bottle and took the paper with him.

We met at the entrance of a Walmart in the port city of Veracruz. Fermín Cabrera called us to the parking lot, which was empty. All white, all grey, a blue logo. Cars pass by, using the parking lot as a shortcut to get around a busy avenue. Cabrera doesn’t want to take a seat outside or inside the car. He stands, focused, looking around. He doesn’t want us to visit him at his house or take pictures of his neighbourhood. He doesn’t want to tell anyone because he feels he is at risk. He tries not to say where he’s working or what he’s looking for.

“Someone can immediately point me out: he is the seeker of the dead.”

A *comadre* asked him to join the brigade to find his son, a boy named Pablo Darío Miguel. Cabrera accepted. Since then he always goes to the graves with the same

clothes, it's like his uniform. He speaks of adrenaline, of a sense of achievement, of finding bones and feeling that his efforts under the heavy sun were not fruitless.

He is sullen but he likes talking, watching the news on television and practicing boxing. He learned to box at school to defend himself because he was a slight boy. "Everyone wanted to hit the dwarf," he said.

"The dwarf," he repeats to himself. He repeats the word with an echo of resentment, but then he smiles again, kindly. He explains that he also works in a factory and that he is a physician, trained at the University of Veracruz. He says that he participates and works easily, that he has learned a lot.

Carlos Fidel Martínez was a boy who played with dinosaurs. In his teens he was passionate about World War II, its crimes and its graves. He studied archeology, but in recent years he began to understand that his profession is not a glamorous one. Archaeologists in Veracruz have a less exciting life than people may imagine: they supervise pipelines of belonging to Pemex, México's state-owned oil company, and do studies for private companies, such as the reports a supermarket chain would require before building a new franchise.

Martínez met Lucy Díaz during a course on forensic science held by the state university. Initially, the relatives wanted to use machinery to dig up Colinas de Santa Fe, authorities demanded the presence of an archaeologist. When they invited him, Carlos accepted without hesitation. He quit his previous job, even though he was earning double.

"I do this because I like it a lot. I always take jobs that I like, I never ask about the payment," he said. "I want to live the experience."

Martínez is tall and young and looks like a big boy. He's the expert, but he doesn't act any differently from those around him, who he respects and values. He is dark-skinned, wears glasses and ties his curly hair in a ponytail. His father is a retired public employee, his mother, a massage therapist.

"A bone is a bone. Inside the grave I work on autopilot, I put on my archeologist suit," said Martínez. "But once outside, I think about the people buried there. I think about it a lot.

Martínez enjoys Discovery Channel documentaries, listening to music and spending hours in front of his Nintendo. His favorite game is *The Legend of Zelda*, a video game from the 1980s that's all about rescuing a princess.

Guadalupe Contreras is the only one of the six bone searchers with a missing relative: his son Iván Contreras. Iván was disappeared on October 13, 2012, when he was 38 years old. He is the father of three children, who now are 13, 10, and eight years old.

Don Lupe, as he's known, was born in the state of Guerrero. He is slight, with sun-tanned skin. He left his village due to a drought that put his farmer father and family of nine children in trouble. Don Lupe's mother worked washing other people's dishes, he began working at the age of nine in the fields, planting corn, bean and sesame.

"When I turned 13 I went north, between Houston and Dallas. I knew that my grandmother had money saved and I took it from her," he said, laughing openly, showing his missing teeth. "But later I returned it. I crossed the border with a friend, there was no surveillance. We worked on a ranch, feeding a crappy herd of buffalo. I came back because I wanted to see my brothers, my mother. In three years I had never sent a letter to them, they thought I was dead."

He never went back to the United States.

Don Lupe has been a farmer, a migrant worker, a soldier, a bricklayer, a mason, and now he's a bone searcher.

"I've been many things. My boss used to say that 'boredom is the mother of science.' But if someone had told me ten years ago 'you're going to be a searcher,' I would have told them to fuck off," he said.

When Don Lupe realized the unwillingness of authorities to search for the disappeared, he decided to go out on his own to look for his son in the hills of Iguala, the same city where the 43 students of Ayotzinapa were disappeared. He was one of the first searchers, and later became a member of the search group *Los Otros Desaparecidos* (The Other Disappeared) in Iguala. The mothers who are part of Solecito learned of Don Lupe went to look for him and offered him a job, which would also become like an education. Don Lupe is strong, charismatic, and easy-going.

“When a body is decomposing, the grass doesn’t grow, it turns yellowish because it emits gases. When the body has already decomposed, it serves as fertilizer and the grass turns green,” said Don Lupe, sharing one of his lessons. “At the beginning, when you spotted a bone you wanted to cry because you didn’t know if it was your relative. But finding so many corpses makes you stronger.”

Don Lupe smokes one cigarette after the other. He thought he would stay three months in Colinas de Santa Fe, it’s been almost three years. He has the most experience with exhumations in the group, and has shared what he has learned with groups from Sonora and Sinaloa. He keeps in touch with many family members on a daily basis via chat.

The boardwalk in the Port of Veracruz is perfect. There are small stone benches with curved and avant-garde designs, still wrapped in plastic, waiting to be used. There are new sculptures, minimalist gardens and concrete squares, kind of like postcard frames to take pictures or to see the sea as if though a large peephole.

The sun is rising. Boys and girls run in matching steps, coordinated, chanting snappy slogans of success, effort, and strength. They pass by in several groups. They all wear the same uniform: polyester sports pants and a white t-shirt with the word “Navy” on the back. They are the future marines who will later join the most powerful branch of Mexico’s armed forces.

A mother prepares her daughter’s costume for the carnival. Everyday life is like a bright street, the rough figures are kept in the shadows. A new grave was found in Sayula de Alemán, closer to the sea, and five new graves in Río Blanco, up into the mountains. But nobody talks about that.

The marines cruise, patrol, move through the city. They are everywhere, except in the poorest and most violent neighbourhoods. There is not one of them where the six bone searchers are looking for human remains.

Colinas de Santa Fe is like a hole in the middle of a large green carpet. It is 12 kilometres from the hustle and bustle of Veracruz, the most important port in the country. It is an island of sand that can barely be seen from the air in a strip between the Gulf of Mexico and Highway 180, a fearsome road that leads to several more clandestine graves (Rancho Renacimiento San Julián, Arbolillo, and La Gallera).



Colinas de Santa Fe is a clearing that looks like emptied, like nothing at all.

The road to the graves is private property. It starts in a small, working class neighbourhood built up with Mexico's version of cookie cutter public housing. The area is rife with abandoned houses, there's a 24-hour shop near the entrance from where clerks could easily have been witnesses to traffic passing on the way to bury people. The shop has been robbed many times. We are told the last time was just this morning.

At the start of the road into Colinas de Santa Fe, a rusty, beat up van is always parked in the same place. The faded "Ministerial Police" sticker on the vehicle is barely readable. Under the only tree that gives shade, there is a white car without official identification. A big man wearing tight pants and a cowboy belt sits in the car, he's the police officer in charge of overseeing us today. A sleepy policeman, sent to protect lands studded with human bones, a scene that is repeated in other killing fields, such as Patrocinio in Coahuila.

There is no public access to the grave site, the authorities have it blocked off. They don't allow access to media, or to people invited by the family members who belong to the Solecito collective. Veracruz's state prosecutor, Jorge Winckler, seems determined to hide the place. We requested an interview with him for this story, he never replied.

The sand is hardened into a crust, but it crumbles when pierced with a metal rod. Carlos compares the work in the heat and humidity to being inside a boiling pot of tamales. Sweat runs down his face.

The brigade members pose for a group portrait: Gómez García, Don Lupe and Cabrera; Carlos and another archaeologist, José Casas Chávez. There are also two women who accompany the brigade on behalf of Solecito, bringing the workers payment: Rosa García Ramón, mother Óscar Omar Gómez García, and Jannette Helen O' Relling Carranza, who is looking for her brother Rommel and five other relatives. The team is also includes a former local prosecutor, a man who flees from the photos, doesn't want to be interviewed, and asks us not to mention his name.

Over the past few years, it has been practically the same group of people. Only one of the laborers left the group, his name was Daniel, a 30-year-old who was friends with

Beto, Rosalía Castro Toss' missing son. He didn't know whether to continue to help or change jobs because his salary of \$50 a week was not enough.

"It's not enough. I play basketball and I can't afford a pair of sneakers. The ones I'm wearing were a gift from the team leader and it's been years since someone gave me a pair of sneakers," said Daniel, who preferred not to give his last name for safety reasons. "I can't even afford my boxers".

The risks are high: the bone searchers are not exempt from violence, and there are many poisonous snakes around. So far, they have found 11 vipers, they pack around a snake bite antidote with their tools.

Nightmares are also frequent.

"Being here is not healthy for anyone. You see the magnitude of the evil that this entails," said Daniel. "What impacts you the most is finding skulls. Once I found a skull gagged with duct tape, kidnapper tape, as we call it."

Gómez García remembers finding a light-skinned woman inside a sleeping bag. He remembers mutilated bodies, their arms cut to pieces, some partially burnt. When he started as a searcher, he would bathe before arriving at his house. He couldn't sleep with his family and he would wash his clothes separately.

"Cloudy days are a relief," Lupe smiles. We relax in order not to feel the time passing by, not to feel the pressure. We try not to get infected by what we're seeing.

The searchers have a speaker and listen to music while they dig. The music gets the men arguing: some want to listen to a *corrido*, others prefer salsa and rock; the official bids for rap. His teammates clearly annoy him.

"At the beginning, I was surprised that they would listen to music," says Martínez, the archaeologist. *Narcocorridos* make me feel a little uncomfortable but if they like it, it's fine. I understand music now, it is a way of generating normalcy.

Not only does it happen here, most search groups listen to music while they walk and dig.

1. Rea brand tank top/
2. A pair of black Settia shoes, size 9.

3. A pair of gray socks. Remains of garbage and towel and bandages.  
Toilet paper.
4. A black size 6 Ferrys Active brand boxer.
5. Optima size 40 tank top.
6. Pressed black pants, size 40 or 44.
7. Four skulls.
8. 22 short bones.
9. Black bag with fabric.
10. Short bones.
11. Short bones removed manually.

These are the findings from the grave on October 31, 2016. The details are written in a faded notebooks, with yellowed edges from constant handling. These notebooks contain the details of who attended the exhumation, if they found signs of a grave, if they removed bones or any objects, what the experts took, and anything else that might have happened.

This is data that authorities ignore and which could be crucial for a family member: the clothes a loved one wore at the time of their death, their belt, their favourite shirt.

Rosalía Castro Toss has written every word in the log. She is a woman with pale skin and gray hair with carefully dyed blonde highlights. She wears gold earrings, a smart watch and matching clothes. She has the soft and languid arms of an elder, the attentive gaze of one who listens with attention, and a strong, relentless character. Everyone calls her doctor because she is a well known odontologist in Huatusco, a small town with its park, colorful church and old ladies selling avocados and potatoes on the sidewalks. The moist lands, blue sky and fresh air among the coffee plantations feels endless.

The notebooks have some blank sheets.

“Because there was a time, two months, that I got sick of reading all this,” said Castro Toss. “I realized that it was killing me. Then I said to myself, ‘if I don’t do this, who will?’”

Castro Toss manages the logbook, and controls the brigade, she’s also in charge of one of Solecito’s three thrift shops. Hers is a small rectangular shop with a door and a window on the main street of Huatusco. There are two makeshift tables with easels,

and the wooden remains of what was once a bed frame. There are also hooks hanging from the walls.

It mostly smells like soap and freshly ironed clothes, but the smell of mothballs also wafts in. Blouses and shirts cost ten Mexican pesos (50 cents), bags cost 30 pesos (\$1.50) and party dresses cost 50 pesos (\$2.50).

“Tomorrow I’ll come to get this shirt and this princess costume,” says an old lady from the sidewalk who walks slowly with the help of a walker.

The thrift shop is set up in what used to be the waiting room of Castro Toss’s odontology practice. She has weeks during which sales are good, when she sells over \$250 worth of clothes, and others where she sells just \$25. She is there not only to raise money: part of the purpose is to inform her neighbours about the work of Solecito. Castro Toss has been threatened several times. She has confronted prosecutors and has looked into the eyes of a leader of Los Zetas, a man called Popeye.

“I’m not afraid of anything anymore. Pain turns into bravery and courage,” she said, pausing briefly as if puzzled. “I never thought I would be the way I am now.”

Her clinic has a brown armchair, a desk, display cases and walls covered with diplomas: an odontologist’s degree and certificates from many courses. The air smells confined and stagnant, but it’s very tidy.

“It is cleaned every week,” Castro Toss explains proudly.

It is cleaned but not used.

Rosalía stopped seeing patients in her office on December 26, 2011, 48 hours after the disappearance of her son Roberto Carlos Casso Castro.

“I no longer have the physical or mental conditions to work. This is a job of precision. I had a perfectly steady hand, but my mind is already somewhere else. It’s been seven years and two months of searching and I have lost my steady hand, my nervous system is damaged,” said Castro Toss. “It is dangerous because a wrongly performed injection can leave a patient with a droopy eyelid, bad hearing or facial paralysis. Besides, I’ve lost my patience.”

She doesn't want to work again as an odontologist but refuses to take apart her office.

"I know one day I have to get rid of all this stuff, but it still hurts. I am not prepared to give it up," she said.

There are no bathrooms. The pay isn't enough. The prosecutor's office no longer provides them food. The bone searchers have the same complaints any laborer might, but they don't say it out loud, instead they keep digging. Money is not their only motivation. The women of Solecito gather as many resources as they can and make lists for accounts payable: tools, salaries, bonuses in December.

Alejandro Vélez Salas, an anthropologist, was one of the first academics who began to investigate the violence of these years. Together with Catalan writer Lolita Bosch, he started the website *Nuestra Aparente Rendición* (Our Apparent Surrender), and began to publish details of the horrors. But he didn't know about the searchers. For him, learning of them generates a contradiction: he doesn't want any more people put in danger for trying to fill the gaps left by the absence of the state, but he is drawn to the commitment of those who aren't direct victims.

"Bone searchers are the opposite of mercenaries. They could earn more working for the other side, participating in crime, or be part of the millions that remain indifferent, but instead they choose to do this. I find it fascinating," he said.

"We've never had this kind of an experience," said Mercedes Doretti, from the Argentine forensic team. In 50 countries, after digging graves around the world, EAAF anthropologists, archaeologists and experts had never seen bone searchers hired and paid for by the victims.

"Of course I'm worried about how the evidence is collected," says Mercedes, relentless in methodology and protocols, her specialty. "It worries me, but I believe that family members do this because of the unwillingness or insufficiency of the state. I understand clearly why they go out, they do it because of the conditions they are in. It is a loud plea to pay attention to the State's response, which has been insufficient so far. So far because there is an opportunity for this to change," she said. "I hope."

Vicente Octavio Colorado, Gerson Quevedo, Pedro Huesca, Gerardo Montiel, Arturo Figueroa and Giovanni Palmeros.

These are the people who have regained their identity thanks to the work of the bone searchers and Colectivo Solecito. Over the last three years, 12 more people have also been identified, but their names have not been released.

Eighteen bodies have been exhumed from the graves of Colinas de Santa Fe. Eighteen people who were returned to their loved ones thanks to the bone searcher.

“When we open a grave and see the bones, we say ‘Welcome to the light,’” says Lucy Díaz. “Because it is a clandestine grave, they should have never been there, nor should they have lived through the worst terror that a human being can experience. It was the last thing they saw. It sounds like fantasy perhaps, but I believe they do feel it when we say ‘Welcome. We love you here, you don’t have to suffer anymore. You are with people who love you and receive you with all the love in the world.’”

This is the only moment during a long interview when Díaz pauses to be silent.

The bone searchers and the brigade members are mediators between the living and the dead: “There is no way to be paid enough for this work, and you enter a morbid spiral as they’ve described,” said psychoanalyst Andrés Ize. And although the searchers and the brigade are the ones who remove the bodies from the land, the remains go to offices in Xalapa, the capital of Veracruz. They were allowed to enter those offices only once.


“Everything was scattered. Skulls over skulls, bones on the floor, all scattered. How can they make such a mess? It’s chaos,” Rosalia tells us, tired.

As of May of this year, the brigade has found more than 70,000 bones and 302 bodies. There are many small bone fragments. Tiny bits that, perhaps, would be the only thing a family waiting for news might ever recover.

“The Scientific Police told us that they only carry out DNA tests on skulls and long bones,” said Castro Toss.

Thousands of bones. Mountains of bones. Bones that once were people, which are still people. In the darkness.

A small spider walks across his face. Gonzalo Gómez García lifts it delicately and leaves it on the floor without getting scared or stopping the conversation.



He has no missing relatives, but in these years, his childhood friend, Edilberto Malpica Mora, was disappeared. He was also his boss.

“Has your life changed since you became part of the brigade?” we asked Gómez García.

“Too much. I have become more consistent,” he said. “I have learned to handle things and to understand what it is to lose a loved one, to not know anything about where they are.”

“How do you imagine your future?” we asked.

“If there is the option to keep on searching, I’d like to keep on doing so. Because it feels very good when a mother arrives and says ‘Thank you for finding my son.’” said Gómez García. “And because if they took me or my children, I would like people to come from their villages to look for us.”

Gómez García has a red bicycle, the only means of transport for the family. Smiling, he says that his eldest daughter is going to start college. He takes great pride in his work.

“Now I believe God gave me life for a reason.”

*Translated by Toward Freedom. The original text was published in the Mexican monthly Gatopardo.*

# DANGER! INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS AT WORK OR

## HOW INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS CAN TELL THE STORY AND KEEP SAFE

Investigative journalism is one of the most dangerous forms of journalism. Every year there are numerous killings, physical attacks, acts of legal harassment and online abuse targeting investigative reporters and editors. All over the world journalists exposing corruption and abuse of power come up against ruthless individuals and institutions willing to commit acts of violence to pursue their goals and to silence those standing in their way.

Investigative journalists are familiar with strategic lawsuits aimed exclusively at journalists who cannot afford to pay immense legal costs or face financial ruin from huge fines. They are also aware of threats, directed at them or their family members, through phone calls, text messages or social media posts. Often, these threats escalate into actual physical attacks, in some cases even leading to murder.

Investigative journalism can never be entirely safe, but journalists must do everything they can to anticipate risk. This includes:

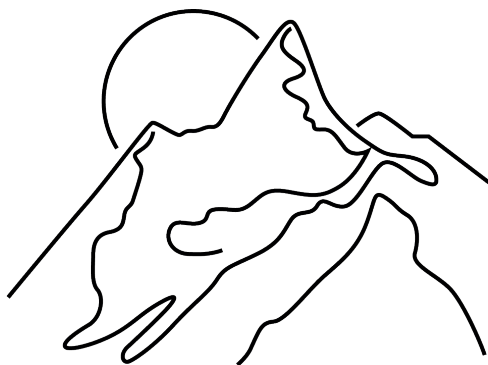
- being familiar with the laws of the countries in which we operate;
- ensuring our devices are protected from external attacks and surveillance;
- having legal insurance and direct access to legal counselling;
- working in teams, whenever possible, and ensuring we inform colleagues of our locations and meetings.

Most importantly, journalists need the support of the community in which they operate, of their audience, their colleagues and social media followers. This, too, will shield them from some attacks.

The times when investigative journalists were lone wolves has passed. Today, working collaboratively with colleagues and supporting networks keeps us safe and gets the story told.

**BARBARA TRIONFI**  
*Executive Director at the International Press Institute (IPI)*





# **EXCELLENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM**

# EXCELLENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM

Among the eight shortlisted entries covering environmental issues were some beautifully told and touching stories, such as the difficult challenge of saving sea turtles from being the innocent casualties of the local fishing trade in east Africa and an inspiring story of the fledgling coffee industry in a picturesque valley in Andhra Pradesh, India. Yet another story of local interest was the intriguing and original tale of ship-worms eating into the heritage of marine communities in Northern Europe.

Equally captivating were other stories with more of a life-or-death edge, for example a powerful and detailed investigation that exposes the problems of water supply control and farming methods in Gaza. This had a local focus, but another entry looked at the global water crisis, touching on an issue that requires much more attention in the coming years.

Another issue which will continue to figure high on the environmental news agenda concerns the issue of deforestation, and one story highlighted how in Brazil efforts are being made to reverse the process with new tree initiatives.

The judges welcomed the variety in style and content across this category but had no doubt as to the winning entries, all of which touched on the lives of people and communities facing life and death struggles as a result of environmental exploitation and neglect.

The first prize went to **Isaac Anyaogu** (Nigeria) and **Petra Sorge** (Germany) for their report *Dying in Instalments* which outlines the way that Nigerians are dying as a result of the recycling of lead acid batteries. The journalists carried out a three-month investigation into the work of companies in Ogun and Lagos. This reckless trade is poisoning air, soil and water sources, leaving workers and residents with frightening and life-threatening levels of lead in their blood.

This was a public health emergency of major proportions. The scrupulous detail of the investigation was an example of public interest journalism at its best, holding those in power to account by presenting an unanswerable fact-filled case and exposing the

inhumanity of a callous business. Following publication, the German government and European Union restricted the import of lead from Nigeria and there have been new efforts to monitor local lead acid battery recyclers.

The second prize was awarded to **Philip Jacobson** (United States) and **Tom Johnson** (United Kingdom) for their report *The Secret Deal to Destroy Paradise*, a story of dirty dealing that puts the planet's precious resources at risk.

This threat to the rainforests of Indonesia, involving the corruption of local officials and the creation of a secretive business network, was uncovered by outstanding reporting on the ground.

This report was the third part of a series highlighting the land crisis in Indonesia. It involved 22 months of research and on the ground reporting, interviewing everyone involved – companies, lawyers, local fixers and communities in the firing line. Like many of the winning entries in this year's competition, it also involved cross-border collaboration between news media.

One of the prize-winning journalists, Philip Jacobson, was later detained by the Indonesian authorities while on another, unrelated assignment. His detention prompted protests from press freedom groups and meant he missed the award ceremony.\*

The third prize went to another story from Nigeria, by **Amos Abba** for his report *How Nestle Nigeria Contaminates the Water Supply of its Host Community in Abuja*. This excellent and fearless report called out the global multinational company Nestle over broken promises and neglect following the opening of a new water plant which aimed to be the best in sub-Saharan Africa. Two years on, this report revealed the betrayal of the company's pledge to provide clean water. With contamination in the local water supply and the company's water factory creating serious ecological danger - destroying farmlands and access roads in the community - this reporting demanded a serious and immediate response.

\* The reference to Philip Jacobson in this report was updated by the editor on May 25th, 2020.

# FIRST PRIZE WINNER

**ISAAC ANYAOGU (NIGERIA),  
PETRA SORGE (GERMANY)**

## **DYING IN INSTALMENTS**



Isaac Anyaogu is an award-winning business journalist with West Africa's biggest business daily, BusinessDay, based in Lagos, Nigeria. He also edits the paper's energy section.

His reporting focuses on the environment, energy, sustainability, health and technology and he also carry out investigative reporting on issues within these sectors. He won the 2018 Citi Journalism Excellence Award and emerged the first runner up in the 2018 Sanlam Financial Journalism Award in South Africa as well as other local awards and fellowships in Nigeria.

Isaac Anyaogu studied Mass Communication and has attended many training courses related to journalism practice.



*Photo by Juliane Werner*

Petra Sorge has recently joined the news agency Dow Jones at the Wall Street Journal in Berlin, Germany, an energy and climate reporter. Previously she worked as a freelance print and radio journalist for publications like Der Spiegel, WirtschaftsWoche, USA Today or the German national broadcaster. She won the Otto von Habsburg Prize 2018 for excellent reporting on minorities in Europe, and received three German journalism awards. In 2016, Mrs. Sorge spent three months as a guest author at The Indian Express in Delhi with the Robert Bosch Foundation, where she got fascinated in cross-border investigations.

# PART 1

## DYING IN INSTALMENTS: HOW LEAD BATTERY RECYCLERS ARE POISONING NIGERIANS

*By Isaac Anyaogu and Petra Sorge  
BusinessDay - December 14, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
[https://businessday.ng/businessday-investigation/  
businessday-investigation-f/article/dying-in-instalments-  
how-lead-battery-recyclers-are-poisoning-nigerians-part-i/](https://businessday.ng/businessday-investigation/businessday-investigation-f/article/dying-in-instalments-how-lead-battery-recyclers-are-poisoning-nigerians-part-i/)*

*A three-month investigation uncovers how companies recycling lead acid batteries are poisoning air, soil and water sources in Ogun and Lagos states leaving workers and residents with scary levels of lead in their blood and leading experts to conclude these Nigerians are dying in instalments, writes Isaac Anyaogu and Petra Sorge.*

The air around Ipetoro and Ewurokun communities in Ogijo, Sagamu Local government of Ogun state, has the acrid taste of alkaline; the sky is soggy dripping with smoke rising from powerful kilns inside Everest Metals Nigeria Ltd and Monarch Steel Ltd, Indian-owned companies recycling lead acid batteries and pulverising metals in the community.

Every house within a thousand meters of these factories has something in common: darkened ceilings, windows that are shut both at day and night, black soot settling on furniture, inside the kitchens, in their water and inside their lungs.

“We hardly sleep, both day and night we are faced with smoke, noise and soil pollution,” said 41-year old, Rufus Noel, a local pastor, who lives three hundred and fifty meters away from Everest Metals. “My children constantly suffer runny nose, fevers from

time to time, their health is at risk,” Rufus, a widower, has taken his youngest child who is seven, to the hospital, three times in October, 2018 when we visited. The doctors say the same thing; the child is at risk of complicated respiratory problems.

Rufus blames both companies for the smoke, but holds Everest Metals accountable for ruining soil and water sources in the community through its hazardous waste materials.

But Rufus’ family, like over 500 households live in their own house, many still without paint or plaster and others still at deck levels, as they carry a valiant struggle to hold off penury.

The community also constitute the bulk of the labour force of these companies. Jobs are few and opportunities fewer. The companies are a blessing and a curse.

With labourers earning between N42,000 and N50,000 monthly, it’s the best paying gig in the sleepy community. The other options are subsistence farming, teaching at a local school or joining the transport business which offers a quarter of what these companies pay.

But it comes at a high cost. Half a dozen children have died in the community within the last five years suspected of respiratory complications, said Samson Onasanya, another religious cleric whose church ceiling has holes in them, for which he blames the company.

## ***Blood Tests***

Following an outcry by residents, BusinessDay’s correspondent collaborated with Petra Sorge, a freelance German journalist in an investigation supported by the European Centre for Journalism, to test the residents’ claims that Everest Metals is responsible for respiratory diseases and deaths of children and livestock in Ipetoro as well as hold accountable international companies who buy lead from these factories.

Tobias Eisenhut, a German paediatrician with experience on the subject was flown into Nigeria to conduct blood tests using Lead Care II, a medical testing device manufactured by the United States biotech manufacturer Magellan Diagnostics,

capable of immediate measurement of results without sending the blood samples to a laboratory. The Ogun state ministry of health and the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA) provided approvals and were duly carried along.

On October 26, at Likosi Primary Health Centre, in Ogijo, Eisenhut assisted by the Oluwaseun Akinsanya, the matron, took blood samples from 40 volunteers from the affected communities, including residents and factory workers. Six samples were taken from volunteers in Metalworld Recycling facility in Lagos and six were used as controls including an official of the ministry of environment who monitored the tests. Everyone agreed to share the results with the press but the workers pleaded for anonymity.

At above 5 micrograms per deciliter, the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) regards it as a reference level at which it recommends initiating public health actions. The World Health Organisation (WHO) says blood lead above 10 micrograms per deciliter, is a high level of concern and classifies it as lead poisoning.

Forty-six samples exceeded the WHO threshold of 10 micrograms per deciliter of blood. Everyone tested who lived close to Everest Metals factory or worked in Metalworld recycling had high values.

“They are killing us gradually,” said Rufus upon discovery that he has 27 micrograms of lead in his blood.

The WHO says that in adults, blood lead levels as little as 5 micrograms per deciliter can cause cardiovascular problems and reduces the immune system. In children and embryos, lead attacks brain and nerves and can lead to learning difficulties and even mental retardation. Each microgram costs a quarter to half IQ point.

“Statistically lead blood lead levels of 10 micrograms and above in about half of the children can lead to developmental delays,” said Eisenhut.

The children come to an average of 19.8 micrograms while adults recorded an average of 21.1 micrograms. For instance, seven year old, Azizat Adokoya, had 21.6 micrograms and ten-year old Faruk Balogun, who often plays football near the factory had blood lead levels of 27 micrograms. Even toddlers are not spared with Kehinde and Taiwo, twins of one-year and ten months recording 19.2, and 24.4 micrograms respectively.

Eisenhut explains the level of exposure and capacity of the immune system could account for differences.

Everest Metals is located less than 500 meters away from Christeirs Nursery and Primary school, which had over 200 students, who are between 2 and 14 years. The head teacher who didn't want to be named said she sometimes considers sending the children home when the smoke becomes intense.

"But then their homes are also in the community," she said.

Eisenhut said the results from children who attend the school indicating high levels of lead in their blood were not surprising.

There's only so much the children can learn with the haze of smoke and the rotten smell from the factories, Blessing Olaiya, a class teacher said.

Akinsanya, the matron at Likosi primary healthcare centre said complaints from residents in the community includes coughing, persistent headaches, anaemia, irritability, fatigue, and general weakness.

As control for the test, Tobias Eisenhut, Leslie Adogame, the founder of non-profit, SRADEV who had conducted soil tests in the community, his staff and the journalists were tested and reported average blood lead levels of 3.7 micrograms.

### ***Lead Pollution in Lagos***

A blinding haze of smoke from a factory will surely not go unnoticed by the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA), but lead poisoning, more insidious even if subtle, happens in Oshodi, only 18 kilometres away from their office at Alausa.

Metalworld Recycling Limited in Oshodi, along with smaller recyclers in Ojota, Agege, Ijora, Festac and Apapa engage in activities to separate lead inglots from car batteries but their operations violate safety standards.

We observed at Metalworld Recycling that workers were not wearing adequate protective gear, lead dust easily drifts into the atmosphere, and the facility is sited close to residential and business areas.



“We buy from the local surrounding areas,” Vinod Jindal, the managing director of the company told us. “We simply ask the buyer to bring without the acid. They bring it after removing the acid.”

But our investigation showed that the company’s suppliers who are mostly Nigerian firms discharge the battery acid unfiltered into the environment. Individuals also are in the trade like Oluchi Olehi, who buys used lead acid batteries from solar energy companies and sells to Metalworld and Everest Metals.

### ***Soiled Soil***

Last year, Adogame, took soil samples around the Ipetoro as well in the premises of Metalworld Recycling and the result showed three of the four test tubes taken exceeded the permissible lead limits.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allows no more than 400 milligrams per kilo near the settlement. In Ipetoro the values were 1900, 2700 and 130,000 milligrams. In Metalworld Recycling the values range between 12,000 to 140,000 mg/kg.

“The soil is totally destroyed and is unsafe for agricultural purpose,” says Adogame who accompanied us to Ipetoro community. Adogame said that what needs to be done is move the people away and carry out remediation activities on the land.

### ***Dangerous Work***

Everest Metals refused to grant us access to the facility to speak to them or inspect the claims of residents of Ipetoro while Metalworld Recycling provided access. We decided an undercover operation as a last resort to get into Everest Metals.

To get a job at Everest Metal Nigeria Ltd, you only need to show up. Work hours are between 7am and 6pm with a thirty minutes break by 10 am and an hour break by 1pm.

You are then sent into a warehouse filled with all sorts of metals, zinc, aluminium or lead and told to sort like materials. If you’re not adept even at that, you are then told to help someone who is sorting. No one is turned away on account of their intellectual

inadequacy; this is not a job where high intellect is highly priced, you only need to have a pulse.

“When you enter here, you will look at others, the way they are doing, you copy them,” an experienced worker said. This we soon learn is the only orientation you get until you graduate working the furnace.

Everest Metal Nigeria Ltd, incorporated on May 12, 2009, has as key sections: battery demolition, lead furnace, raw material storage area, crucible, bailing machine section, administrative blocks and staff residential quarters.

We counted a dozen staff in the most critical sections – battery demolition, lead furnace, crucible and storage sections with scant personal, protective equipment. In the yard, half the size of football field, car batteries are stacked on unpaved surface.

In the workshop, workers chop and saw without a breathing mask. At the rotary kiln, in which the battery plates are melted to lead, a man pierces the liquid metal as blue gas escapes at several points.

“This is absolutely negligent,” says Andreas Manhart, environmental scientist, at the Öko-Institut when he reviewed our pictures.

Manhart has visited several lead factories in developing countries and knows that the liquid, glowing lead that escapes uncontrollably during this step is hazardous.

“The worker should actually be fully equipped with special protective clothing and visor in front of the face,” says Manhart. The environment is “probably highly contaminated,” he said.

Metal sheets covering the furnace at Everest have been eaten away by corrosive sulphuric acid. A test on 16-year old Omisore Abiodun, who breaks battery to discharge the acid content showed the highest blood level of 65 micrograms.

Everest Metals staff working in the furnace section refused to be tested. But five others in related sections who agreed to the test but wished to remain anonymous, and who frequently complain of headaches, persistent cough, dizziness and even anaemia, have the following values: 21.8, 32, 38.1, 41.4, and 42.3 micrograms.

## *Thriving Industry*

According to research by Recycling and Economic Initiative Development of Nigeria (REDIN), an environmental non-profit, supported by the Heinrich Boll Stiftung (HBS) Nigeria, over 500,000 tons of used lead acid batteries (ULABs) are generated in Nigeria annually from the automobile and renewable energy sectors.

The retail cost of used lead acid batteries ranges between N4,000 and N10,000 per unit. Each ton is sold at N340,000 translating to a market value of N170bn. The cost of transporting each ton is put at N11,000 and at the rate of 500,000 tones, the estimated cost is put at N5.5billion. This puts the estimated value of the sector in Nigeria to over N175billion.


The real money comes in hard currency when it is shipped abroad. Depending on their size and lead content, agents for the vehicle battery in Nigeria pay between 12 and 24 euros. The kilo price is around 82 cents, the ton at 820 euros. At the London Metal Exchange, raw lead is traded for about 1.70 euros per kilo – 1700 euros per ton.

Everest Metals buys lead batteries repurposed from vehicles and solar energy components from local suppliers within Lagos, Onitisha and Abuja who may or may not have drained the battery of acid. Three residents of the community including Rufus say the company disposes of the acid water into the community whenever it rains.

Everest Metals pays good price to its suppliers, and Oladimeji Ojewale-Azeez, an artisanal recycler confirms this. He has a workshop – Metal Made Recycling – in Agege. The car batteries are stacked in one corner and the sacks of uncovered scrap in the other. Metal Made consists of him and his three brothers.

Azeez, who wears rubber muffs and plastic boots, puts on a surgical mask, grabs a long knife, a rusty metal bar, and attacks the car battery. Local collectors, like Azeez break open car batteries and empty the acid water into gutters, canals and rivers and supply to exporters like Everest Metal Nigeria Ltd. But it is also another very dangerous part of the work. Azeez had a blood lead level of 50.6 micrograms.

Everest Metals along with other exporters in Nigeria are making a fortune from the export of lead from an unregulated Nigerian environment to markets in Europe, India,



and China but are unwilling to make the investments to carry out their operations in an environmentally sound and safe way.

*This investigation was supported by the European Centre for Journalism and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Petra Sorge, freelance journalist from Germany assisted with the research for the story.*

## PART 2

# DYING IN INSTALMENTS: FOREIGN BUYERS PILE PRESSURE ON POLLUTING COMPANY

*By Isaac Anyaogu and Petra Sorge  
BusinessDay - December 17, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*  
[https://businessday.ng/businessday-investigation/  
businessday-investigation-f/article/dying-in-instalment-  
foreign-buyers-pile-pressure-on-polluting-company-2/](https://businessday.ng/businessday-investigation/businessday-investigation-f/article/dying-in-instalment-foreign-buyers-pile-pressure-on-polluting-company-2/)

*Two weeks after blood tests confirmed a link between lead acid battery recycling by Everest Metals Nigeria Ltd is poisoning Ipetoro community in Ogun state, the investigation shifts to foreign car makers who buy lead ingots from the company. When confronted with evidence of the company's dangerous operations, they rethink their business relationships, write **Isaac Anyaogu and Petra Sorge**.*

We decided to confront the buyers of lead ingots from Everest Metals Nigeria Ltd, the company whose lead battery recycling operations in Ogijo is contributing to lead pollution in the community, to understand how companies, mostly car makers, that publishes adulatory sustainability reports would condone what experts refer to as dangerous work practices.

We tracked the final destination of lead ingots recycled from Everest Metals in Ipetoro, Ogijo, Ogun state to car makers in Europe. The company operates as part of the Indian conglomerate, Kejriwal Group, which incorporated Suryadeep International FZC in Dubai, as a sister company involved in the lead business.

Everest Metals ships its lead ingots sourced from Nigeria majorly to WITL Ltd registered in Manchester, UK. Posing as dealers, we contacted Philip Gottlieb, the company CEO who said he gets lead from Nigeria. He said he delivers to Germany through Weser Metall.

Weser Metall, based in Nordenham, Lower Saxony, is part of the Paris-based Recyclex Group and is the third-largest European lead recycler processing over 100,000 tonnes annually. The raw material for the lead paste is mainly sourced from Nigeria. In 2017, it sourced 109,700 tonnes and 2018; it fell to 62,600 tonnes, company's records show.

Weser Metall is also one of the largest suppliers of US-based Johnson Controls who in turn supplies car makers like BMW, Daimler and Volkswagen. Having established the route through which Everest Metals Nigeria ships its lead, we presented the buyers with proof the company's poor practices.

## ***Shock, Outrage***

Upon receiving evidence of the company's dangerous operation including secret pictures of unsafe work practices, tests carried out by an environmental non-profit indicating contaminated soil, and results from blood tests conducted in the community, the reactions were fast and furious.

"Johnson Controls was just made aware of the relationship between one of its lead suppliers purchasing a portion of lead from a Nigerian source. We immediately initiated an investigation with the supplier and will take appropriate actions," the company responded on November 27.

Heike Rombach, international business communications Mercedes-Benz Cars responded on November 27 saying Daimler supply chain is complex, "However, we take your advice very seriously and consider it our social responsibility as a global mobility provider to take immediate action here, even if Weser Metall and Everest Metal Nigeria Limited are not direct suppliers of Daimler AG."

Matthias Compes, managing director of Weser-Metall wrote on November 27 claiming it was no longer doing business with Everest Metals.

“Weser-Metall GmbH has identified only one of its suppliers based in the United Kingdom, which is owned by Everest Metals Nigeria Ltd. Had related material. We did not engage in direct commercial transactions with this Nigerian company and have not been notified by our supplier of any infringement or misconduct of this company. For your information, we do not buy any more material from this supplier.”

But on November 30 Volkswagen, who gets supplies from Johnson Controls, who in turn is supplied by Weser-Metall, responded, “We were not aware of the connection and business relationship in the 4th stage of our supply chain...We do not accept these violations, and the practices are a clear violation of our contractually-defined sustainability requirements.

“Due to the seriousness of the allegations, an immediate stop of the purchase of lead from the subcontractor in Nigeria was obtained. Until the end of the investigations, Volkswagen will be in constant communication with the main supplier and will be informed about all steps and results.”

### ***‘Please Let’s Meet’***

Faced with threat to its bottom-line, Everest Metals invited us for a meeting and an inspection of the factory. We agreed to the meeting but the inspection was no longer necessary. On November 24, Vikas Das, the company’s managing director and I met at Mama Cass Restaurant in Palm Grove, Lagos where he presented the company’s side.

Das denied his company was responsible for the lead in the blood of residents of Ipetoro claiming there were other companies around the area also recycling lead batteries and his factory is farther. This is not true; the company is in an industrial area that is right inside the community.

He showed pictures of a tank where he claimed the acid content of the recycled batteries were deposited. He was shown a picture of watery acid content dripping into the community behind the factory.

Das further presented a picture of a borehole project his company was planning to build for the community this December. We confirmed assertion by residents that the project was initiated two years ago and had been abandoned.

Das further presented four different environmental monitoring reports prepared by Batmol Environmental Consultancy Services that basically said the company's operations were within the limits set by the Ogun State Environmental Protection Agency (OSEPA).

"The state does not have the resources to fund the tests, so we paid for it," Das said in response to a question on how the tests were funded.

OSEPA mandates manufacturing companies to submit environmental monitoring report every quarter but regulation is weak. Residents in Ipetoro remember only two visits in the last four years and after the officials visited the company, they hear nothing again about their complaints.

Everest Metals further presented an exporter registration certificate issued by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (REF. NO 0003356) valid till 16/02/2020, several receipts of purchases of PPE equipment which were mostly dated between October and November this year and an environmental approval by OSEPA which expired March 18 this year.

Das pointed out that his company only resumed operations in August this year after being shut for most of this year due to lack of batteries.

Andreas Manhart, environmental scientist, at the Öko-Institut, who has carried out audits of battery recycling facilities saw pictures of working conditions taken inside Everest Metals and said, "This is totally improper storage and handling of used lead-acid batteries, an extremely lax handling of occupational safety up to a probably highly contaminated working environment."

Das was asked for response and he countered, "We provide workers with personal protective equipment but you know workers, some rarely use it. These are receipts,"

In 2011 Das, along with four other officials of the company were arrested in Nigeria for illegal exports of scrap metal. The company boss said it was a misunderstanding.

"Yes, we were arrested and charged to court but the case was straightened out in three days. What happened was, the metals we exported had mud on them and the authorities thought perhaps they contained lead. So they seized the container but



when it was tested and clarified the case was dropped. In a few months we were given our license to operate. The matter is over for a long time,” Das said.

Curiously, Vikas Das presented an envelope filled with cash begging that he be ‘assisted’. This was promptly rejected.

### ***‘I Challenge the Authenticity of Your Report’***

On his part, Vinod Jindal, the managing director of Metalworld Recycling, in Oshodi, whose battery recycling facility had workers without personal protective equipment and had high levels of lead in their, fired an angry mail refusing to accept responsibility.

“If that is report from my factory I challenge the authenticity of your report, and if it is from our warehouse, then you have to tell me from which part of land you have taken a sample. Did you know within the compound there (is) two units working in battery scrap. Moreover the pictures you send of my warehouse some does not belong to us. I expect truthful behaviour at your end about our company.

“If you have taken the soil sample from the gate of our warehouse near the scale you may understand what shall be the result. Check your findings first before to conclude my dear friend of environment,” Jindal said.

Our investigation however, showed his claims are false. Both companies operating from the same vicinity are culpable. Vincent Nwodo, a Nigerian and the head of Battery Recyclers Association of Nigeria, who operates the second unit, admitted their operations could be improved and submitted for the test which indicated blood lead levels of 44.6 micrograms. However, Metalworld has the biggest operation. Soil samples taken by non-profit SRADEV also showed high volumes of lead in the soil.

### ***‘We’ve Fixed Our Mess’***

By December, Everest Metals and its parent company Kejriwal were feeling the heat. Their biggest customers, European car makers were cancelling contracts; banks were calling their loans, and Anil Kejriwal, the global managing director, sent a panic mail.

“Following your mail concerning environmental, health, safety and other issues raised by you, we have taken additional measures to fix all issues in our factory,” Kejriwal wrote in an email sent on December 6.

“We invite you and your team to inspect our facilities at the soonest possible. If any additional corrective measures need to be taken, we will implement the same immediately.

“Our orders from our clients have been suspended in the meantime and this will affect the direct and indirect employment given to hundreds of people of local area in addition to stress on our company to repay bank loans.

“We are willing to make any and all corrective changes in our company so that we comply with all local and international norms. We request your kind cooperation and guidance,” he wrote.

Residents in the community say they were yet to see change. The only change is that the company has shut down its website.

*The concluding part of this investigation will highlight the regulatory failures that led to the tragedy in Ipatoro.*

*This investigation was supported by the European Centre for Journalism and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Petra Sorge, freelance journalist from Germany assisted with the research for the story.*

# PART 3

## DYING IN INSTALMENTS: HOW FAILURE OF REGULATION CONTRIBUTED TO LEAD POLLUTION

*By Isaac Anyaogu and Petra Sorge  
BusinessDay - December 18, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
[https://businessday.ng/businessday-investigation/  
businessday-investigation-f/article/dying-in-instalment-  
how-failure-of-regulation-contributed-to-lead-pollution-3/](https://businessday.ng/businessday-investigation/businessday-investigation-f/article/dying-in-instalment-how-failure-of-regulation-contributed-to-lead-pollution-3/)*

*The third part of this investigation uncovers how regulatory failure allowed lead acid battery recyclers without even the requisite government approvals to operate with reckless abandon and endanger the lives of many Nigerians, write **Isaac Anyaogu and Petra Sorge** .*

Confronted with test results showing high levels of lead in the blood of people living close to its lead battery recycling operation in Ipetoro, Sagamu, local government area of Ogun State, Everest Metals Nigeria Ltd's first line of defence was that it had all the government registrations required for the business.

This is not true.

Nigeria is signatory the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, an international treaty that was designed to reduce the movements of hazardous waste between nations and specifically to prevent transfer of hazardous waste from developed to less developed countries.

Therefore to be eligible to move hazardous waste, of which used lead acid batteries (ulabs) are part of, the Ministry of Environment issues a company dealing with hazardous waste a certificate to export the waste material. Without this certificate, when a container carrying waste material arrives in a different country, it is seized and returned to the country of origin.

So to ascertain the company's claim of having the right registrations, we visited the Ministry of the Environment in Abuja and secured a list of approved lead battery recyclers permitted to export lead recycled locally and found that it does not include Everest Metals Nigeria Ltd.

However, a source inside the ministry informed us that the company's registration was withdrawn after a non-profit, Sustainable Research And Action For Environmental Development (SRADEV) published a study last year, indicating high levels of lead in the soil samples taken from the company's facility.

One senior official of the ministry confirmed that Everest Metals Recycling was operating illegally because they have not been awarded clearance to export hazardous waste.

The same is true for Metalworld Recycling in Lagos, the official said. Recently, Metalworld Recycling Ltd's consignment was reportedly sent back from Spain to Nigeria because it was not issued an approval from the ministry, a source in the ministry told us.

The ministry of environment is yet to respond to requests for comments at the time of publication.

Yet Everest Metal was issued an export license by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) for the same waste it did not secure approval to export by the Ministry of Environment. Vikas Das, managing director of Everest Metals presented an exporter registration certificate issued by the NEPC (REF. NO 0003356) valid till 16/02/2020 raising questions about coordination and synergy in the ministries.

The NEPC has not responded to questions on the process that led to awarding Everest Metals an export license as at the time of publication.

## ***‘We Will Do Something About It’***

Environmental monitoring falls under the jurisdiction of the ministry of environment through the Ogun state environmental Protection Agency (OGEPA). We sought the opinion of Bolaji Oyeleye, the state commissioner of environment on how the company could be allowed to carry on with its dangerous activities in the state.

“We have had problems with those companies in that community in the past, but it is something we are looking into. We will definitely do something about it.” Oyeleye said by phone.

However, civil servants who didn’t want to be named confirmed that the ministry is seeking to balance attracting investments and protecting the people’s health. It is not difficult to see that business clearly is winning.

“It is clear the community is seriously polluted, this should call for an emergency,” said Leslie Adogame, executive director of SRADEV. “What needs to be done is to carry out remedial activities on the land and move everyone out.”

However, Vikas Das, the managing director of Everest Metals Ltd presented an environmental approval issued by the Ogun State Environmental Protection Agency (OGEPA) as evidence that it was complying with the state’s laws. The only problem is, it expired in March this year.

Enquiries at OGEPA showed that when the company was being established, it was compelled to install facilities that will mitigate the consequences from its activities. According to the statutes setting up the agency, it has to serve series of notices before it can seal up a defaulting company.

While the government agency checks off each box on its bureaucratic forms, residents in the community endure lead pollution. Blood tests conducted on residents showed children had average blood levels of 19.8 micrograms per decilitre, adults had average levels of 21 micrograms per decilitre and workers in the factory had average levels of 44.6 micrograms per decilitre.

At above 5 micrograms per deciliter, the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) regards it as a reference level at which it recommends initiating public health actions. The

World Health Organisation (WHO) says blood lead above 10 micrograms per deciliter, is a high level of concern and classifies it as lead poisoning.

Funmilayo Kuti, the general manager of OGEPA when contacted requested for a letter before she can issue a response. This was sent to her through her email, but she did not respond until publication date, almost one week later, through her press officer.

“She wants you to come to her office and submit it physically,” Kemi Oyeleye, the press officer said on the phone.

It was understandable why the community leaders said they made representations to the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency, (NESREA) office in Ibadan. The officials merely visited the community and went into the company and nothing has since been done.

Since state officials were not permitted to speak on record to the press, we visited NESREA office in Abuja to meet with the director general. But on the agreed date, he was summoned by the national assembly and the meeting could not hold. However, the result of this investigation was shared with a senior director of the agency.

The response mirrors the same remarks made by the director general Lawrence Anukam, when I interviewed him in his office in February last year on a related story about hazardous artisanal lead acid battery recycling. He mentioned poor funding to effectively monitor the state and inability of operators to operationalize and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

The Federal Government has developed a National Environmental Regulations with provision for the EPR. The EPR shifts the responsibility for waste management from government to private industry, obligating producers, importers and/or sellers to internalise waste management costs in their product prices and ensure safe handling of their products.

The battery producer is tasked with monitoring of their products from cradle to cradle and administers recovery and recycling programmes through the PRO. On the other hand, the government would monitor compliance, ban designated hazardous materials from use in products and/or disposal, establish relevant environmental standards, register and accredit recyclers as Authorised Treatment Facilities (ATF), and issue permits.

NESREA has developed operational guidelines that explore the use of economic instrument to ramp up compliance but enforcement as regards ULABs has not received the attention it required leading to the pollution in Ipetoro.

Over a year after, Anukam, said sector players have now nominated a PRO and would soon operationalize the EPR, operators are yet to fully agree on the modalities for setting up the organisation.

In November, President Muhammadu Buhari signed a new NESREA amended law which empowered the agency to tackle perceived environmental threats, pollutants as well as impose stiffer penalties and fines on illegal trafficking in wildlife, endangered species and poaching.


“In the past, environmental crimes attract paltry fines and levies, with the amendment, the courts are now at liberty to impose stiffer fines that are commensurate to the gravity of the crime committed,” says a statement by Oyofe Sule, deputy director of information of NESREA.

So it seems the only thing holding back the agency now is money to buy petrol for their cars.

### ***Postscript***

Following the publication of this story, the German government and European Union have placed restrictions on importation of lead from Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Environment has been mandated by the European Union to improve monitoring of local lead acid battery recyclers.

Meanwhile, Everest Metals Nigeria Ltd has moved its battery storage further away from the community and blocked the path through which liquid lead wastes seeps into the community. It has engaged environmental consultants for advice and has carried out an environmental audit of the company's processes. It is also carrying out social responsibility activities grading the roads and now trying to bring power into the community and setting up a local medical center.



A lawyer has offered to sue the company on behalf of the community but the community says it wants to see out the company's corporate social responsibility efforts before it can agree.

Meanwhile, high level engagement with the Federal Ministry of Environment has led to the amendment of the NESREA Act and monitoring of the operations of battery recycling companies in Nigeria has intensified.

*This investigation was supported by the European Centre for Journalism and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Petra Sorge, freelance journalist from Germany assisted with the research for the story.*



# SECOND PRIZE WINNER

**PHILIP JACOBSON (US),  
TOM JOHNSON (UK)**

## **THE SECRET DEAL TO DESTROY PARADISE**



Philip Jacobson is a senior contributing editor with the environmental news site Mongabay, which produces original reporting in English, Indonesian, Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese by leveraging over 500 correspondents in some 50 countries. His investigative work has focused on corruption, corporate malfeasance and conflict over natural resources; in early 2020, he was jailed in central Borneo over his journalism. His narrative nonfiction has been highlighted by [Longform.org](https://longform.org).

Tom Johnson is the founder and editor of The Gecko Project, an investigative journalism initiative established to shine a light on the corruption driving land grabs and the destruction of tropical rainforests. The Gecko Project seeks to create and maintain a sense of urgency over the role of large land deals in some of the most pressing global challenges: climate change, the collapse of biodiversity, food security, and the rights of indigenous peoples and other rural communities. Tom manages investigations and cross-border collaborations with The Gecko Project's partner publications across Asia.

# THE SECRET DEAL TO DESTROY PARADISE

*By Philip Jacobson and Tom Johnson  
Mongabay.com - November 28, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following links:*

<https://news.mongabay.com/2018/11/the-secret-deal-to-destroy-paradise/> (English)

<https://geckoproject.id/kesepakatan-rahasia-hancurkan-surga-papua-b347e51639fb> (Bahasa Indonesia)

The story behind the single biggest threat to the rainforests of Indonesia.

BY MALAYSIAKINI, MONGABAY, TEMPO, THE GECKO PROJECT

- *“The secret deal to destroy paradise” is the third installment of Indonesia for Sale, an in-depth series on the opaque deals underpinning Indonesia’s deforestation and land-rights crisis.*
- *The series is the product of 22 months of investigative reporting across the Southeast Asian country, interviewing fixers, middlemen, lawyers and companies involved in land deals, and those most affected by them.*
- *“The secret deal to destroy paradise” is based on a cross-border collaboration between Tempo, Malaysiakini, Mongabay and Earthsight’s The Gecko Project.*

## **Prologue: Johor Baru, 2012**

In December 2012, at a press conference on the sidelines of an Islamic business forum in Malaysia, a man named Chairul Anhar made a bold claim. His company, he said, held the rights to 4,000 square kilometers of land for oil palm plantations in Indonesia.

If true, it would make Chairul one of the biggest landowners in the country. That land was not just anywhere, but in New Guinea, a giant island that glittered in the eyes

of investors. Shared by Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, the island had the world's biggest gold mine, untapped oil and gas, and the largest remaining tract of pristine rainforest in Asia. For the companies that had steadily logged their way through the rest of Southeast Asia, New Guinea was the last frontier. For the investor who could tame it, a fortune awaited.


Then in his mid-40s, with a stout build, a thin moustache and a buzz cut, Chairul presented himself as such an investor. He claimed to be the president, CEO and owner of a sprawling conglomerate, the Menara Group. He traveled in a Bentley and private jets, and rubbed shoulders with the political elite of Malaysia and his native Indonesia.

The basis of his claim was the Tanah Merah project, a plan to generate billions of dollars by logging untouched rainforests, home to indigenous tribes and a treasure trove of biodiversity, then razing what remained and replacing it with oil palms. If fully developed, it could become the single biggest palm oil plantation in Indonesia. But Chairul's business, and his connection to the project, was more convoluted than the image he presented.

The rights to the land in Indonesia's Papua province had been acquired through a maze of shell companies. The shareholders were mostly fronts, controlled like puppets on a string. The companies were a façade, masking whoever was truly set to benefit from the project — whether Chairul or someone else.

By the end of 2012, most of the equity in these shell companies — and with them the rights to the project — had been sold to offshore firms based in the Middle East and Singapore. Those sales channelled at least \$80 million, likely several times more, back to the web of shareholders connected to Chairul, and brought a varied cast of new actors into the project: a former Indonesian chief of police, a secretive Yemeni family, a notorious logging firm from Borneo, and a conglomerate connected to a major Malaysian corruption scandal.

By the time of the press conference, Chairul had only a slender claim to the land. He was the business Svengali who had brought these other interests together, generated a fortune, and lit the fuse on an environmental disaster that is only now beginning to unfold.



The threat to the rainforests of Indonesia was very real. Since the turn of the century, only Brazil has lost more rainforest than Indonesia. One of the leading causes of this deforestation was a boom in industrial-scale plantations that began in the early 2000s. Those plantations enabled Indonesia to become the leading producer of palm oil, an edible oil used in an endless array of consumer products. But it also sparked an environmental crisis, as the carbon locked up in rainforests was released into the atmosphere.

The volume of greenhouse gas emissions from Indonesian rainforests has made it a matter of international concern. Norway has pledged \$1 billion in an attempt to incentivize reforms to curb them. Since 2015, the administration of President Joko Widodo has sought to rein in the plantation industry, most recently by enacting a temporary ban on any new permits for palm plantations. Though just a small proportion of the Tanah Merah project has been developed, the permits were issued before the ban came into force, and the forest remains slated for destruction.

Today, an area larger than Manhattan has been cleared within the Tanah Merah project. This is only a fraction of the total project area. If the rest is bulldozed as planned, it will release as much emissions as Virginia produces by burning fossil fuels each year. If the giant sawmill that is today being constructed on the land is completed, it will suck in timber for years to come, settling the fate of swathes of rainforest in southern Papua.

In the decade since the inception of the project, the ways in which the rights to it have been obtained and moved have been shrouded in secrecy. The companies involved have employed all of the tools of corporate secrecy that prevent key questions from being answered. Critical aspects of the permitting process that underpin the entire project are being withheld from public scrutiny. The true owners of the companies clearing the forest today remain hidden.

A cross-border investigation involving news organizations from four countries — The Gecko Project, Mongabay, Tempo and Malaysiakini — attempted to pull back the corporate veil. We sought to find out who had obtained the rights to a project of such magnitude, and, perhaps more importantly, how. Our investigation exposes the methods apparently employed to ensure the people who control the fate of these forests — through their money, power and political decisions — have covered their tracks.

## ***Part One: 'I wasn't going to issue permits to just anyone'***


When Yusak Yaluwo was elected chief of Boven Digoel district in 2005, at the age of 35, he assumed control of an area at the heart of a vast stretch of jungle. The district lies in the very eastern corner of Indonesia, in Papua province. "When you fly over the island, still even today, mostly what you see is unbroken expanses of rainforest," said Bruce Beehler, a biologist at the Smithsonian Institution, who has spent the last four decades studying the trees and birds of New Guinea.

Across the rest of Southeast Asia, such landscapes have been steadily destroyed over the past half-century. The human activities that drive deforestation tend to work incrementally. First comes logging that fragments and damages the integrity of the forest, bringing roads that act as a conduit for more pressures. The damaged forest becomes prone to fires and, finally, it is clear-cut to be replaced with plantations.

The consequence is that intact or primary forests, which hold the most carbon and support the most wildlife, are increasingly rare. Papua has more of this forest than any other province in Indonesia, with districts like Boven Digoel, among the largest in the country, stretching across 27,000 square kilometers (10,400 square miles) of mostly pristine jungle.

Some of the species that evolved here are iconic, like the brightly colored birds-of-paradise. The island has high levels of endemism, with species found nowhere else on Earth. Many more species remain unknown to science, yet to be discovered by outsiders, Beehler said. "I can assure you that the forests of the Digul [River basin] are super-rich, and have probably millions of species of invertebrates, micro-organisms, and plants," he said. "They may hold in their chemistry all sorts of odds and ends that could be very useful to humankind in the future if we were to get a grip of them."

The indigenous peoples of New Guinea, composed of clans speaking hundreds of different languages, have lived in close connection to the forest for millennia. Their identity and culture remain deeply bound to the natural world. By the time Yusak took office in 2005, many of the people under his jurisdiction still pursued livelihoods dependent on hunting, gathering fruit and processing starch from the sago palm. These pursuits have had a light impact on the forest.



Perhaps the most transformative power available to a district chief — known in Indonesia as a bupati — is the authority to issue permits for large plantations. Such plantations can bring investment to districts with basic economies and limited budgets. But if not carefully managed, they can also set the people and environment on a collision course with a form of development that could be both exploitative and destructive.

In 2005, the warning signs were there already. Boven Digoel was the site of the first large-scale plantation in southern Papua, one that predated Yusak assuming office. It had been developed by a South Korean conglomerate and sparked lingering conflicts with the indigenous population, who complained that their land had been taken without adequate compensation and that their food sources and medicinal plants had been destroyed.

But Yusak did not heed these warnings. Government documents show that in December 2007 he exercised his permitting power liberally, issuing permits that covered seven contiguous blocks of forest. The largest of them stretched more than 60 kilometers (40 miles) east to west. Seen on a map, they stacked together to form one single block measuring 2,800 square kilometers (1,100 square miles), some 10 percent of the district. Laid on top of London, it would cover the entire city nearly twice over. In Papua, it would create a giant hole in the rainforest.

The seven permits were issued to seven different companies. Yusak told us these were linked to a Malaysian conglomerate called the Genting Group. But two of its executives insisted that Genting had never incorporated or owned them. Determining who did proved easier said than done.

Corporate records obtained from a public government database in Indonesia reveal the seven companies were all set up within eight days of each other, in February 2007. Based on our investigation, they were registered to what appeared to be fake or front addresses. For some, the address did not exist. Others took us to small shops, where no one had any knowledge of the companies.

Each of the companies had two different shareholders. We tracked down one of these people, a woman in her late 50s, to her home, a room in a boarding house squeezed into a narrow alleyway in the south of Jakarta, Indonesia's sprawling, smog-choked

capital. She insisted she had never been involved in the company, or in such a role in any other company. At the time the company was incorporated, with her name as a founder, she was working as a janitor in a bank. The number on her national ID card proved that she was the same person listed in the corporate records. “I’m just a cleaner,” she said. “There’s no way I could make a company.”

The address of another shareholder, listed in the corporate records, took us to a slum in West Jakarta. The woman wasn’t home, but her father was selling fruit in the street outside. He said he had no idea his daughter had been connected to such a company. She too had been working as a cleaner in a bank at the time the companies were incorporated.

The evidence suggested that whoever formed the companies, it wasn’t the people named in the corporate records. The plantation could one day become the biggest in the country. But its very origins were cloaked in mystery.

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The mysterious shell companies lay dormant, the idea of a mega plantation fading. Until, one day, Chairul Anhar turned up. Yusak told us he and Chairul first met in 2009, in a restaurant in Jayapura, the capital of Papua province. He said Chairul had arrived in the city on a private plane, flanked by a man named Dessy Mulvidas, who would play a central role in the scheme that followed. Chairul told him the Menara Group had bought the seven companies, but the initial permits had expired. He needed Yusak to renew them.

Yusak told us he received overtures from “many” investors seeking land in his district, almost all of which he rejected. “I wasn’t going to issue permits to just anyone,” he said, in a recent interview at a Jakarta mall. Chairul’s approach offered him the opportunity to revive a massive investment into the district, providing the bupati brought the permits back to life. But the businessman who had approached him was an unknown quantity. Who was Chairul Anhar?

Chairul’s occasional appearances in the media up to that point show he was not new to pitching grandiose schemes. In January 2007, he was described in news articles as

the president of a company named PT Indomal Usahasama, which had plans for a \$1 billion “Palm Oil Centre” on a remote island in the Molucca Sea. Four months later, he was identified in a trade publication as the president of PT Destini Marine, a company he claimed had booked orders worth \$200 million to build tankers and cargo ships for clients across Europe.

The common threads running through both investments were bold claims, reports of unnamed Malaysian backers, and the fact that they disappeared without trace. Now, two years on, he presented himself as the owner of the Menara Group. The name, with *menara* meaning “tower,” conveyed the idea of an imposing conglomerate. In fact, there was little evidence to suggest the firm was more than paper thin. It had an office in a Jakarta tower block, but no track record of establishing plantations, no website, no online footprint.

In rural, cash-strapped Indonesian districts like Boven Digoel, local governments seek to rely on major investors to assume responsibilities extending far beyond the confines of their business. Under the umbrella of “corporate social responsibility,” they expect plantation or mining companies to construct roads and provide support for health care and education. In exchange for the riches to be made from palm oil, companies are legally required to plant and hand over plots of land — amounting to a fifth of their licensed area — to local farmers. Yusak told us he saw the Menara Group as a genuine investor that could deliver on these obligations, and that Chairul promised he would do so.

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Within months of Chairul taking over the Tanah Merah project, it hit a major roadblock. One night in April 2010, Yusak was arrested by the KPK, Indonesia’s anti-graft agency. The agency had caught wind of a string of suspicious payments out of the Boven Digoel budget and swooped shortly after Yusak landed at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Jakarta. It marked a notable fall from grace. The year before, Yusak had led the campaign in Papua province for the eventual winner of Indonesia’s 2009 presidential election. Now, he was shuttled to a top-security prison in Jakarta to await trial.



When Yusak's offenses were later laid out in court, they were strikingly crude. Barely three months into his first term, he had arranged for the district government to take out a 6 billion rupiah (about \$580,000 in 2005) bank loan to buy a 3.5 billion rupiah (\$340,000) oil tanker, and had the balance transferred to himself. Over the next two years, he repeatedly instructed a subordinate to withdraw money for him to use. By the time he was finished, according to the KPK, Yusak had siphoned off some 64 billion rupiah, then equivalent to almost \$7 million.

Such brazen acts of corruption were not out of the ordinary in Indonesia's regional politics. From 2003 onwards, as Indonesia embarked on a program of decentralizing power, bupati, town mayors and provincial governors assumed control of large budgets and pliant bureaucracies. Largely left to their own devices, many found the temptation of corruption too much to resist. Skimming money from budgets and engaging in procurement scams proved to be common models, routinely prosecuted by the KPK. Investors also funded corrupt election campaigns — in which candidates handed out cash to secure votes — in the expectation of receiving business permits once their chosen candidate took office.

The KPK has also caught politicians receiving cash bribes in exchange for issuing permits for mines and plantations. Investigations and research, including by the KPK, show that this type of graft occurs far more widely than prosecutions might suggest. Yusak himself said payments for permits, at all levels of government, were the norm. "That's the culture of Indonesia," he told us, though he insisted he had not indulged himself. At the time of Yusak's arrest in 2010, the NGO Indonesia Corruption Watch said more than 500 requests had been submitted to the KPK to investigate graft among regional leaders.

The Tanah Merah project remained at the early stages of what could be a lengthy permitting process. Chairul needed several permits for each of the seven companies — from the bupati, from the provincial government, and from the minister of forestry. Each of these permits was dependent on the one before. Yusak's arrest threatened to create a bureaucratic freeze in Boven Digoel that could stall its progress. This was compounded by the fact that his term in office was scheduled to end just four months later, at which point a new politician, one potentially less conducive to such a giant scheme, might be elected to replace him.

Despite his incarceration, Yusak sought to continue his political career as if nothing had happened. Even though the KPK had never lost a case against a person it had charged with corruption, the district electoral commission allowed Yusak to stand for reelection. Though he was detained in Jakarta and unable to campaign in person, his campaign team continued on his behalf, supported on the trail by his wife, Ester Lambey. On Aug. 31, 2010, he won a second term.

In an interview with a reporter carried out in prison two months after his reelection, Yusak credited his victory to his achievements during his first term. “The community chose me because I can fulfil their needs, answer their wishes,” he said. A week after the interview was published, he was convicted of corruption, and sentenced to four and a half years in prison.

On the face of it, Yusak’s arrest should have frozen the permitting process, or at least his role within it. He was suspended from office three weeks before the election. For months, because he was in prison but had won the vote, the bureaucracy did not quite know what to do with him. The district parliament wanted him reinstalled as bupati; others, including the KPK, pushed back against that. The eventual compromise saw him inaugurated, in March 2011, but immediately made “non-active,” to avoid the farce of a district being administered from a prison cell. His running mate, Yesaya Merasi, was appointed acting bupati in his place.

But a trail of government documents we uncovered shows that while he was locked up on the island of Java, 3,600 kilometers (2,200 miles) from the Boven Digoel district capital, Yusak continued to play an active role in pushing through the Tanah Merah project. During this window of time, he signed decrees affirming that each of the seven companies acquired by Chairul had completed satisfactory environmental impact assessments. Yusak denied issuing these specific permits, but admitted to us he had signed documents in prison.

“At the time, I was officially still in office,” he said. “So, when there was a letter, I signed it.”

## ***Part Two: ‘The name of the game is to obscure the real person in control’***

While Yusak was pushing through the permits from a prison cell, Chairul was searching for wealthy backers for the project in more luxurious environs. A well-connected Malaysian businessman told us he was approached by Chairul with an offer to take part in an ambitious deal in Papua. He recounted how Chairul had arrived at their meeting at a five-star hotel in Kuala Lumpur in a Bentley, and unfolded a map as he explained the project. The businessman, who passed on the opportunity, described Chairul as a “storyteller.” “People like Chairul, we call them Ali Babas,” he said, referring to a Malaysian idiom in which front companies gain access to contracts, and others deliver on them. “They don’t like to get their hands dirty.”

In a series of interviews this November, carried out by videoconference, Chairul, now 52, told us he had tried to secure financing to develop the Tanah Merah project. He estimated it would cost \$1.4 billion to convert the forest into a plantation. But no one would back him, and so he turned to other, more established investors that could access the capital required.

The timing of the deals that followed, however, suggests he was hawking the rights to the project almost as soon as he had obtained them. “I don’t think their intention was to establish a palm oil business,” said a source who had firsthand knowledge of the Menara Group’s subsequent deals. “It was to establish the [companies], obtain relevant permits, and sell them to an investor. They’re selling paper permits, basically.”

By the end of 2012, most of the shares in six of the seven Boven Digoel companies had been sold on. Documents posted on the Malaysian stock exchange show that a 90 percent share in just two of the companies was sold for a total of \$80 million. By the time that deal took place, the project had yet to break ground; the value was based solely on permits. The amount paid for the other four companies was never made public, but on the basis of those that were, the paper permits for all seven companies could together be worth more than \$311 million.

Such permits have no official cost in Indonesia. District chiefs like Yusak are mandated to issue them, if they choose to do so, to whomever they deem fit to develop the land. The permits cannot legally be bought and sold. But one can, quite legally, buy and sell companies that hold permits. A thriving trade in shell companies with a single asset

— a permit for a plot of plantation land — has persisted in the country over the past 15 years.

There are perfectly legitimate reasons for this to happen. The conglomerates that dominate the palm oil industry control their holdings through networks of individual subsidiaries, each of which operates a single plantation. If they decide to sell one of these plantations, they can do so by trading a subsidiary.

But the system provides considerable space for less legitimate practices. It provides bupatis, who have an established propensity for corruption, with the ability to generate assets worth huge sums with the stroke of a pen. Previous investigations by The Gecko Project and Mongabay revealed how two bupatis apparently cashed in on their control over licenses in Borneo by issuing them to shell companies owned by their cronies and family members. These cronies and family members then sold them on to major palm oil firms, who were willing to pay millions of dollars to people one step removed from a politician.

For those who want to disguise such connections, and move assets and money without scrutiny, there are options available. They can use offshore secrecy jurisdictions, like Cyprus or the Cayman Islands, which allow companies to be incorporated and make barely any information about themselves publicly accessible. They can also use nominee shareholders and directors, in which a front man effectively rents their name to the real owner, shielding the latter from public scrutiny.

The 2011 World Bank report “The Puppet Masters” reveals in detail how such corporate structures have been used to disguise the beneficiaries in some 150 cases of high-level corruption, collectively worth \$50 billion, across the world. There are legitimate reasons for companies to use nominees, and in many jurisdictions it is legal to do so. In Indonesia, however, the practice was banned by the 2007 Investment Law.

We examined the ownership of the seven companies that held the rights to the Tanah Merah project after the Menara Group ostensibly took control of them. Corporate records show that on a single day in January 2010, the shares in all seven companies were transferred to 14 different individuals: two for each company, none of whom appeared more than once. Each was also named as a director or commissioner.

We visited the addresses listed for 11 of the named shareholders. One was a cheap boarding house, where no one had heard of the person named. At another address, the wife of a shareholder denied that he had been involved. The address of a third shareholder, Sarbani, turned out to be the home of his former mother-in-law. She said he had long since moved out. On paper, Sarbani had held 5 percent equity in a company valued at more than \$40 million. But his former mother-in-law said he was a poor man with a low-paying job as a debt collector in Sumatra. She found the idea he could be a co-owner of a major plantation company faintly ridiculous.

A source inside the Menara Group, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that many of the shareholders were not the true owners of the companies, and that their names had been used as fronts. He identified one as Chairul's driver. We also confirmed the driver's wife had been named as a shareholder.

Some of the shareholders were more prominent figures. They included Chairul, though his name appeared on just one of the companies. Another shareholder was Mohamad Hekal, who was elected to Indonesia's parliament in 2014. (Hekal did not respond to requests for comment.) There was also Dessy Mulvidas. He had appeared at Chairul's side when he first met Yusak in 2009, and he had served as Chairul's point man in Papua, the former bupati told us. Dessy would appear throughout the scheme in the coming years — in Jakarta offices when the companies were sold, and in villages in Boven Digoel smoothing the way for the project to begin. The source inside the Menara Group described Dessy as the "pioneer" behind the scheme. "He's the key," the source said. "He took care of it from beginning to end." The source with firsthand knowledge of the Menara Group's deals described Dessy marshalling other shareholders.

The picture that emerged was of a web of individuals, some of whom may have held equity in the companies and others who clearly did not. Chairul did not seek to hide that he was pulling the strings. But the question of who he was pulling them for was impossible to answer.

"Certainly, the name of the game for many of these sorts of schemes is to obscure the real person in control," Jason Sharman, an author of "The Puppet Masters" and an expert in high-level corruption, told us in an email. "Companies with nominee shareholders and/or directors are a common way to do this."

The challenge highlighted in “The Puppet Masters,” and more recently by the sprawling Panama Papers investigation, is that opaque corporate structures can disguise who profits from companies’ activities. Where those profits are predicated on permits or contracts issued by government officials, it raises the specter that those officials may have effectively held equity in the companies behind the scenes. We found no evidence that any corruption was involved in the permit process or in any of the deals in the Tanah Merah project. Nonetheless, Chairul Anhar appeared to have generated more than \$300 million-worth of assets based solely on government-issued permits. The structure of the companies concealed the people who benefited when those assets were sold.

A growing body of international law recognizes the role anonymous companies play in facilitating transnational corruption and money laundering. The US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), for example, requires US companies to ensure they are not — knowingly or otherwise — channelling money to foreign government officials. Tom Fox, a Texas-based attorney and FCPA compliance expert, told us the use of shell companies and nominee shareholders “would certainly raise multiple red flags” for any investor that fell under the jurisdiction of the FCPA.

“Such an entity would put a US company on very high notice that some illegal activity was going on,” he told us. He said the corporate structure behind the Tanah Merah project, while ostensibly controlled by the Menara Group, “stinks to high heaven.”

### ***Part Three: ‘I don’t remember the names of all the shareholders’***

In October 2011, a Malaysian construction and logging firm named Wijaya Baru Global, whose main shareholder was a member of that country’s parliament, became the first to enter into a deal with the Menara Group for a piece of the Tanah Merah project. Its business in Malaysia was troubled. It had been caught up in one of Malaysia’s largest ever corruption cases, stemming from the development of a new free-trade zone. In 2009, the chief operating officer of a Wijaya Baru subsidiary had been charged with defrauding a government agency in connection with the scandal. (He was acquitted in 2017.) Its timber business within Malaysia had dried up after its

logging rights in Borneo expired. The Papua deal offered the firm a new, multibillion-dollar lease of life.

According to the deal announcement on the Malaysian stock exchange, Wijaya Baru, soon after renamed Tadmax Resources, agreed to buy 90 percent stakes in two of the seven Boven Digoel companies for \$80 million. The four shareholders in these companies included Indra Yunaidi, who is Chairul's younger brother, and Dessy Mulvidas, his right-hand man. The other two shareholders were nominees: Chairul's driver and the debt collector. The source with firsthand knowledge of the deal said he thought the nominees were acting under Dessy's instructions. (Dessy did not respond to requests to comment for this story and could not be found at either of his homes in Jakarta.)

The \$80 million paid by Tadmax did not go through these shareholders. Instead, it was channelled through two additional shell companies in Singapore, each with a single shareholder. Our source inside the Menara Group confirmed that both were nominees, and that neither received any of the money. We reached one of them, Adwir Boy, on WhatsApp. He said he had had no involvement in the company, and that his name had been used by Dessy Mulvidas. Asked about the sale of the shares, he said, "I don't know anything about that, Mr Vidas took care of it." The money was paid to the nominees' lawyers, stock exchange announcements show. From there the trail goes cold.

The October 2011 deal was conditional, with its completion predicated on the Indonesian minister of forestry, Zulkifli Hasan, issuing forest-release letters that would formally rezone the land for development. These letters, along with permits allowing the companies to harvest timber in the concessions, were the last key regulatory obstacles to the project going ahead. In early December, six weeks after the deal was announced, news emerged that Anuar bin Adam, a retired Malaysian army major and businessman, was vying to take control of Tadmax by buying out its main shareholder.

The report, in the *New Straits Times*, said Anuar's takeover was backed by "a group of powerful Indonesian businessmen." It cited a source close to Anuar as saying he could "open a lot of doors in Indonesia," and that if he took control of the firm, this would become "self evident in the coming weeks." The day after the report was published, Anuar's takeover of the company was confirmed. Less than a week later,

on Dec. 14, 2011, Zulkifli Hasan signed forest-release letters for both of the companies, enabling the deal to complete. (Anuar bin Adam did not respond to requests to comment.)

The following month, in January 2012, Tadmax made an influential new addition to its board. Da'i Bachtiar, a former chief of Indonesia's national police, who had just completed a three-year stint as Indonesia's ambassador to Malaysia, was appointed as an independent non-executive director. In an email, Da'i told us that Chairul had asked him to help Tadmax with the Menara Group's investment in Indonesia, but that he was "rarely involved" in the business. He resigned from the board in 2014. He said he was unable to comment on the Menara Group structure and that he was not a shareholder.

The Tadmax deals were public because the firm is listed on the Malaysian stock exchange, imposing a degree of transparency on its business. A larger chunk of the Tanah Merah project was sold in a far more secretive manner. Corporate records show that in the second half of 2012, 80 percent stakes in four of the other Boven Digoel companies were transferred to new shareholders in the Middle East.

The new shareholders were a quartet of companies with generic names and no online presence. They were registered in the United Arab Emirates (UAE): two in Dubai and two in the Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone. These are secrecy jurisdictions, places where regulations are deliberately crafted to enable shareholders to hide their identities. The ownership of these four companies remains unclear to this day.

Greenpeace has published extensive evidence linking these four Boven Digoel companies to the Hayel Saeed Anam Group, a multibillion-dollar conglomerate owned by one of Yemen's wealthiest families. The group is a major palm oil trader, via its Malaysia-based subsidiary Pacific Inter-Link. After the shares disappeared into the anonymous UAE firms, members of the Hayel Saeed Anam family joined the boards of the four Boven Digoel companies, corporate records show. However, Pacific Inter-Link has repeatedly denied that it or the Hayel Saeed Anam Group ever owned the companies. It told us in a statement that the family members had joined the boards "in their personal capacities."



In all the deals, the Menara Group kept a small slice of the equity in the Boven Digoel companies. Tadmax and the anonymous UAE firms took between 80 and 90 percent. The remaining shares were transferred to new companies owned by Chairul, by some of the apparent nominees connected to him, and by a woman named Desi Noferita.

A court document (PDF) shows that Desi is the sister of Edi Yosfi, a low-profile but successful Indonesian businessman, who also held rights to proposed plantations in Boven Digoel. Aside from his business interests, Edi is known as a powerbroker behind the scenes in the National Mandate Party, or PAN, an influential Indonesian political party. PAN is also the political party of Zulkifli Hasan, the minister of forestry, who had signed-off on forest-release letters for four companies in the seven months before Desi Noferita acquired her shares in them.

In response to questions sent via text message, Zulkifli, now the speaker of Indonesia's highest legislative assembly, the MPR, said he was not involved in technical decisions while he served as forestry minister, and that forest-release letters were issued to companies that complied with the requisite regulations.

Chairul denied that Edi Yosfi had any involvement in the project. "He's a big businessman who doesn't want to help with something like this," he said. When asked about the role of Edi's sister, with whom Chairul co-owns a company, he drew a blank. "I don't remember the names of all the shareholders," he said. Edi did not respond to requests for comment. His sister could not be reached.

Chairul did not comment on a detailed list of our findings presented to him in a letter. However, in a series of telephone interviews the week before publication, he made a string of elliptical and sometimes contradictory explanations for both the structure of the Menara Group and the deals with other investors. In response to the allegation that the shareholders prior to the sales were nominees, he described the Menara Group as a "consortium company" that represented the interests of other investors as well as its own. He declined to identify the other investors on the grounds that it would not be ethical to do so. "We're a private company," he said. "It would violate their human rights."

Although company deeds and stock exchange announcements show that most of the equity in the Tanah Merah project was sold, Chairul insisted it was still owned by

the Menara “consortium.” He described the deals as a “corporate exercise” that would allow him to access international financing, providing the \$1.4 billion he estimated it would cost to develop the project.

Tadmax’s finances were in no great state either. But documents posted on the Malaysian stock exchange reveal how the firm planned to bankroll the project. An analysis commissioned by Tadmax estimated the value of timber in just two of the concessions at \$1.7 billion. On that basis, logging the virgin forests across the entire project could yield almost \$6 billion. Tadmax noted in its stock exchange announcements that the timber in the concessions would provide it with an “immediate and stable income stream.”

To take advantage of this veritable gold mine of timber, Tadmax declared its intention to construct a giant sawmill on the banks of the Digul River. The sawmill was to be a joint venture with Pacific Inter-Link and Shin Yang, a major multinational logging firm from Malaysian Borneo with a reputation for environmental damage, corruption and rights abuses. (Pacific Inter-Link has denied any involvement in the sawmill.) The specter of the sawmill suggested the forests of southern Papua would not remain intact for much longer.

#### ***Part Four: ‘He got beaten half to death in that room’***

One Sunday morning in April 2013, indigenous Auyu people in the village of Meto were praying in church when they heard speedboats coming upriver. When they walked down to see who had arrived in their village, they found a platoon of soldiers and police. The men were in a hurry, and told the Auyu to gather the remainder of the villagers at the small harbor, so they could get on with the purpose of their visit: to hand out envelopes stuffed with cash.

Meto is one of a string of villages whose land falls under the shadow of the Tanah Merah project. Since 2012, police and soldiers had made repeated appearances in the villages. Sometimes they disappeared into the surrounding forests to conduct mysterious surveys. News slowly emerged that the Auyu land was to be the site of a plantation project. But most Auyu had no idea how large the project was, or where exactly it would be. It rang alarm bells, but the villagers felt powerless. “We could see there were police and army in

the speedboats,” one villager told us. “So we kept quiet. We were asking ourselves, ‘this must be connected to our land, but why are they using the police?’”

In Papua, the use of the security forces to escort representatives of logging and plantation firms is routine. “It helps them smooth their business,” said Franky Samperante, the director of Pusaka, an NGO that works with indigenous communities in Indonesia. Since Papua was subsumed into the Indonesian state in the 1960s, its people have had a fraught relationship with government forces. In a region in which oppression and extrajudicial killings have gone unpunished, the presence of police and soldiers has had a chilling effect. “It makes people feel unsafe,” Franky added. “They have a memory of violence.”

Villagers from Meto and neighboring hamlets said their attempts to find out more about the Tanah Merah project, and to convey what they wanted from it, were stymied. According to those we interviewed, and information gathered by Franky and local priests, the villagers were made a string of promises to encourage their support for the project: that they would be paid a monthly stipend; that the company would provide electricity, educational facilities and health care. “They spoke to us with sweet words,” one man told us. “We were stupid to believe it.”

The meetings culminated on that weekend in April 2013 when the speedboats arrived in Meto. Police and representatives of the Menara Group, including Dessy Mulvidas, traveled through the villages handing out cash. Over the course of four days, they distributed the equivalent of \$1.2 million in just four villages, according to the calculations of a local priest, Felix Amias. Though a fraction of the true value of the land, it was a huge sum for the villagers. But for many it was an ominous and unwelcome sign. They were not told what it was for, whether it was just “door-knocking” money, as Dessy said, or if they had now effectively sold their land.

A week later, the villagers were told to meet at a schoolhouse in Getentiri, a village in the southeast corner of the Tanah Merah project. They believed they would be afforded the chance to map their land, discover what overlaps there were with the project, and finally convey their views. But when they arrived the atmosphere was oppressive. The schoolhouse was ringed by soldiers. Inside were the police and a local military commander.

After they gathered inside the schoolhouse and waited for the meeting to begin, one of the villagers joked that they would need to eat and smoke cigarettes first, if they were to have such an important discussion. “There was one police officer in front,” a man from Meto told us. “He started beating him. That friend got beaten half to death in that room.”

The villagers were left with vague promises and a growing sense of coercion. They had been given a fortune in cash, but didn’t know what for. “We didn’t even know where the plantation was [going to be],” another said. “So, people in the village were living under this sort of pressure... This is our land, and the people from the company have bought it, they’ve given us money, and we don’t even know where it is.

### ***Part Five: ‘Someone in government must be breaking the law’***

Boven Digoel was not the only district in eastern Indonesia in which Chairul Anhar had gained control of such a huge area of land. From 2010 onwards, while the Menara Group was laying the groundwork for the Tanah Merah project, the firm had been quietly moving ahead with a similar plan to develop a series of sugar plantations in Aru, a heavily forested cluster of islands some 500 kilometers (300 miles) west of Boven Digoel. These concessions covered 4,800 square kilometers (1,850 square miles), more than half of the entire archipelago.

The similarities between the two projects were striking. In Aru, the Menara Group had also used a maze of front companies to obtain the permits. Those permits had been issued by a bupati, Theddy Tengko, who, like Yusak, was eventually imprisoned for raiding the district budget, and who sought to hold on to office after his conviction. The permits in Aru had also been pushed through in the heat of an election campaign.

But Aru and Boven Digoel diverged in one critical way. In Aru, the eventual discovery of the project led to a groundswell of public opposition that grew into a powerful grassroots movement. The sheer scale of the project galvanized not only the indigenous peoples who inhabited Aru, but also a cohort of more seasoned activists based in Ambon, the provincial capital, who used their connections and know-how to build support for the movement in Indonesia and abroad. In April 2014, as the “#SaveAru”

campaign reached a crescendo, Zulkifli Hasan, the then-forestry minister, announced that the sugar plantations would not go ahead.

A critical component of the Aru campaign's success was the ability of the activists to expose the brazen illegality of the licensing process. They discovered that late-stage permits had been issued without an environmental impact assessment (EIA) having been completed, as required by law. When the EIAs later appeared, it was clear they had been done without consulting most of the communities that would be deeply affected by the project, another legal requirement.

Semmy Khow, a professor who served on the commission convened by the government to review the assessments, told us that company officials had offered him bribes to sign off on them. "I didn't want it," he told us. Abraham Tulalessy, another professor who headed the commission, said the entire scheme had been "criminal." "They should all go to prison," he told us, referring to everyone who had played a role in pushing the permits through.

This raised an obvious question: Were the EIAs carried out for the Tanah Merah project just as flawed? Government documents showed they had been reviewed by a commission convened the day after the Boven Digoel election, in August 2010. A week later Yusak Yaluwo issued environmental permits from a prison cell, rubber-stamping the EIAs as valid.

Chairul insisted the permits were clean. "We've always followed the rules," he said. "We're not opportunists."

But Franky Samperante, the activist who works with communities in Boven Digoel, questioned whether there had been any meaningful consultation, as the law required. He found that years after the assessments were approved, the villagers hadn't even seen a map of the project. When they finally did, they discovered that their hunting grounds, sacred areas, forest farms — "most of the important places", Franky said — were subsumed by it. "Often in Papua people are not given any information [about a development], then told to make a decision," Franky told us. "It's not based on factual information or truth. So the decision is effectively forced."

When Franky set out to find the assessment documents so he could provide them to the villagers, the picture grew murkier. He checked with the forestry and development

planning agencies in Boven Digoel; neither could supply the documents. At the provincial environment agency, he was told the EIAs hadn't even been completed. This agency should have had copies of the assessments, but appeared not to be aware they even existed.

In Merauke, a coastal city south of Boven Digoel, we tracked down Ronny Tethool, who works for the local World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) office. He was ordinarily a member of the commission that assessed EIAs for Boven Digoel. He told us he had been invited to a preliminary meeting before the assessments for the Tanah Merah project took place, but was excluded from the commission that examined the results. "They weren't shared [with us]," he said. "It was weird." He pointed out that his office kept a record of all of the EIAs for the district, but had been unable to obtain those for the Tanah Merah project. "It's like there's a mafia hiding it," he said.

The closest we got to finding the documents was a handful of photocopied pages from two of the EIAs, held in the office of an auditor in Jakarta. This suggested that the documents existed, but provided no clue to their contents. Franky arrived at the conclusion that they were being deliberately withheld. He suspected it was because if the true impacts were known, it would add grist to resistance from the communities. He observed that they had a legal right to see the documents. "If they've ignored those rights," Franky said, "someone in government must have broken the law."

## ***Part Six: 'The whole thing has to be shut down'***

By 2015, Chairul Anhar had climbed to the top of Malaysian society. That year, his daughter married the son of Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Malaysia's deputy prime minister. Chairul threw a lavish wedding reception at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Jakarta. In February, he played golf with Da'i Bachtiar's successor as the Indonesian ambassador to Malaysia at a Kuala Lumpur resort, as part of an event to encourage Malaysian investment in Indonesia. From then on, his presence at parties in Kuala Lumpur was documented on the website of the self-styled "high society" magazine *Tatler*.

But if Chairul's public stature was growing, his stake in the Tanah Merah project — and those of his partners — was anything but sealed. Of the seven Boven Digoel

companies, only two had acquired all the permits needed to begin operating. One of those companies, majority-owned by an anonymous firm in the UAE, with Chairul and Desi Noferita as minor partners, had begun clearing forest. But a trail of letters obtained from the current district administration shows that all seven of the Boven Digoel companies had become the subject of a sustained lobbying campaign aimed at revoking their permits so that new investors could take their place.

Beginning in December 2014, a Boven Digoel man named Fabianus Senfahagi, who held an influential position as head of the district's indigenous peoples' association, sent a string of letters to the district government urging it to cancel the permits originally issued to the Menara Group and reassign them to new investors. His letters argued that six of the existing companies had failed to begin operating, while the villagers in Boven Digoel were left "waiting and hoping" that the land would be developed.

In the two months leading up to the 2015 bupati election, Yusak's successor, Yesaya Merasi, issued decrees revoking the permits held by the two Tadmax subsidiaries and by the seventh company, which was still owned by the Menara Group, and reissuing them to three new companies. Corporate records show the three new companies were owned by a man named Ventje Rumangkang and his family members. Ventje is best known as a founder of Indonesia's Democrat Party, in 2001, but is predominantly a businessman with interests in mining and plantations.

Fabianus's campaign continued over the next two years, as he sought to get the rights held by all seven of the original companies cancelled. In 2017, he succeeded in getting a fourth concession, owned by an anonymous firm in the UAE, reassigned to an Indonesian company named PT Indo Asiana Lestari. The corporate records show that PT Indo Asiana Lestari is owned by two Malaysian firms. The minor shareholder is Rimbunan Hijau, one of the world's largest tropical logging operators, owned by the Malaysian billionaire Tiong Hiew King. The majority owner, Mandala Resources, is a shell company registered in Kota Kinabalu, in Malaysian Borneo. It is owned by two men who also have a contracting firm that undertakes palm oil development. Neither they nor Mandala Resources have any discernable online presence.

In a brief phone interview, Fabianus insisted he was solely representing the interests of the villagers, who were "traumatized" by the Menara Group's failure to develop the

land. “So, we leaders looked for investors who would prioritize their rights,” he said. He pointed to the fact that the villagers had signed documents rejecting the Menara Group as evidence of support for his lobbying.

Benediktus Tambonop, who was elected to a five-year term as bupati in 2015, told us he had supported the new companies because he believed they had the backing of the people. Letters sent within government, advancing the permits for the new companies, repeatedly referenced letters sent by Fabianus.

Until he turned against the Menara Group, Fabianus had played an important role in helping it secure the rights to the Tanah Merah project. He had appeared with Dessy Mulvidas when he carried out surveys of the land, along with the police. He insisted to us that his incentive had solely been to secure the best deal for villagers. But his successor as head of the indigenous people’s association, Antonius Uweng Kandang, made a different case.

“What happened was not done in the interests of the community,” Antonius told us. “It was only in the interests of Fabianus.” He alleged that Fabianus had been paid to secure the consent of the villagers. “People don’t want this. It’s indigenous lands. Customary, communal lands.” Ronny Tethool, the Merauke director of WWF, similarly characterized Fabianus as a “broker” who had been paid by companies. Fabianus ended our interview when the subject of the new companies was brought up.

In an interview, Ventje Rumangkang stressed that the local communities were the true owners of the land, and that without their support the project wouldn’t go ahead. But in an open letter published in January 2017 by Pusaka, Franky Samperante’s NGO, villagers claimed Fabianus had “trapped us into signing documents we didn’t properly understand,” while trying to convince them to support the entrance of Ventje’s companies. In October 2017, Pusaka published further testimony from villagers who said they were being threatened with violence to coerce them into signing letters of support for the other new company, PT Indo Asiana Lestari.

Today these companies are still awaiting the final permits they need, from the provincial government and Ministry of Environment and Forestry, that will allow them to begin operating.



In public, to its shareholders, Tadmax continues to claim the rights to the land. Its most recent annual report made no reference to any revocations or the increasing fragility of its permits. Chairul too presented it as unfinished business. He said he had already spent hundreds of billions of rupiah in the time since he first acquired the permits. “Nothing is a problem as long as you’ve got politics and money,” he said. “Have a little patience. It will all turn out alright.”

According to Felix Amias, the Boven Digoel pastor who has worked on behalf of local communities, many villagers have been left increasingly perplexed by the succession of companies claiming rights to their land. Recently, Felix began to receive a steady stream of requests to help resolve the confusion. He in turn reached out to Yusak, now out of prison, who he believed could serve as a guide among the interests now circling. Together, the duo set off to delve into the mess of overlapping claims.

We met them at a mall in Jakarta this October. They had recently sat down with Ventje Rumangkang, and were planning to visit government agencies. Yusak was tapping up the Boven Digoel and Papua bureaucracies to find out more. But they remained in the dark over who, if anyone, was in the ascendancy. “The story takes so many twists and turns that we’re all confused,” Felix said. “The people too. If the story isn’t clear, how are we going to solve the problem?”

Yusak, who had lit the fuse on the forest more than a decade ago, had come to the view that the entire project had been one big mistake. It would do irreparable harm to the people of the district, he now said. “I don’t want to sin against my people,” he said. “The whole thing has to be shut down.”

### ***Part Seven: ‘It feels like the clouds have fallen’***

When a team from Greenpeace flew by helicopter over the rainforest of Boven Digoel earlier this year, a thin mist gathered over the unbroken green canopy that stretched to the horizon. At one point, they passed a flock of some two dozen hornbills flying close to the apex of the trees. Then they arrived at the border of the Tanah Merah project. The verdant landscape gave way to a muddy red soil, pockmarked with oil palms planted in regimented patterns, and gray, fallen trees.

The land clearing started by the Digul River, close to the village of Anggai, and was working its way westwards. Villagers told us their sources of clean drinking water had turned red, the color of the soil, and that they had to walk increasing distances to find food. Those journeys were harder now that the forest canopy no longer protected them from the sun. “All the natural resources that God has given us... It feels like the clouds have fallen,” said an elder man from Anggai. “All destroyed in an instant.”

Today, an area larger than Manhattan has been cleared within the project. Two companies are now operating, both owned by anonymous firms in the UAE, 7,000 kilometers (4,300 miles) from Boven Digoel. Chairul is still a minor shareholder and is set to make a fortune if just this one section of the project is completed. He now serves as secretary general of the Indonesia-Malaysia Business Council, and routinely appears in photos in media reports next to people from the highest levels of politics in both countries. He boasted in his interview that he is friends with government ministers, and has “friendly chats” with the new prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad.

The area of forest cleared to date represents just 2 percent of the total project. But the giant sawmill is now under construction. Tadmax has now sold its share in the joint venture behind the mill. Now it is co-owned by the notorious logging firm Shin Yang and Malindo Investments, an anonymous company registered to an accountant’s office in a Dubai tower block. Chairul insisted that the delay in getting the mill built had been a key “bottleneck” preventing the project from moving faster. Without it, the companies had nothing to do with the timber. If the mill is completed, the destruction of the surrounding forests is likely to dramatically accelerate.

The secrecy surrounding the project has left even the district government in the dark. On the sidelines of a grub-eating festival in Boven Digoel this September, the current bupati, Benediktus Tambonop, told us he himself remained clueless as to who held many of the permits. After taking office in 2015, he discovered the district was encumbered by more licenses than any other in Papua. It had fallen to the KPK, the anti-graft agency, he said, to tell him there were more than 20 companies with permits in his own district. The owners only began to emerge when he announced on the radio that he would begin revoking those permits.


“One by one they started to call us,” he said. He discovered the companies were headquartered in Singapore and Malaysia, with no presence in Boven Digoel. “To this day, we’re still trying to find out even where their offices are located and how they got their permits.”

The twin subjects of corporate secrecy and licensing for plantations now preoccupy activists, journalists and government officials beyond the borders of Boven Digoel. Over the past year, a succession of analyses has revealed how the largest palm oil and timber conglomerates in Indonesia — those historically responsible for the catastrophically high levels of deforestation — have disguised the extent of their operations through “shadow companies,” entities managed by the conglomerates themselves but kept at arm’s length through front shareholders. Many of these companies channel profits through opaque corporate structures facilitated by offshore secrecy jurisdictions.

Over the past few decades, but mostly in the last two, some 210,000 square kilometers (81,000 square miles) of Indonesian land has been ceded to plantation firms. Permits were issued in opaque circumstances, principally by district politicians who have demonstrated considerable susceptibility to corruption. This year, the KPK completed its hundredth case against a regional leader, a haul that is widely believed to be the tip of the iceberg. Many of the same politicians who were convicted of budget skimming and procurement scams have played an important role in the licensing spree that has placed an area of land the size of Kansas in the hands of private firms.

Both of these subjects merit further investigation: to discover who is hiding what, and how they got their assets. But the Tanah Merah project emphasizes the intriguing overlap between these two phenomena. It raises the prospect that finding out who is behind a web of shell companies and front shareholders may also reveal exactly why those shell companies were granted valuable assets in the first place.

The government agenda may be moving slowly toward answering these questions. In September this year, Indonesian President Joko Widodo ordered a government review of all oil palm plantation permits in the country, as part of his temporary freeze on new permits. In March this year, another presidential regulation came into effect that requires companies to disclose the identity of their “beneficial owners”



to the government. If implemented, it could pull away the façade of any nominee shareholders.

The combination of these two developments could shed further light on key aspects of the story behind the Tanah Merah project. It is a story that is far from over, with the fate of this huge swathe of forest — and the indigenous peoples who rely on it — still hanging in the balance. The decisions that have taken it to this point were mired in secrecy; a tussle continues behind closed doors that may decide who ends up with the rights to the land.

Four years ago, the Menara Group's plan for a string of giant sugar plantations in Aru was dragged into the light and dissolved under the scrutiny. For now, the Tanah Merah project remains in the shadows.

“The whole thing is full of secrets,” Pastor Felix told us. “Only people with problems have something to hide.”

# THIRD PRIZE WINNER

**AMOS ABBA (NIGERIA)**

## **HOW NESTLE NIGERIA CONTAMINATES THE WATER SUPPLY OF ITS HOST COMMUNITY IN ABUJA**



Amos is an investigative journalist with The International Center for Investigative Reporting, ICIR, an online news platform in Abuja.

He currently reports the oil and gas sector with a special focus on how the activities of the oil industry in Nigeria impacts the environment.

In 2019, Amos was shortlisted for the Thomson Reuters Foundation Young Journalist awards, he was also a finalist for the prestigious Kurt Schork International Journalism awards.

In the same year, he emerged second runner – up at the inaugural Fetisov Journalism Awards, in Luzern, Switzerland in the environmental journalism category. Amos is passionate about solution journalism.

# HOW NESTLE NIGERIA CONTAMINATES THE WATER SUPPLY OF ITS HOST COMMUNITY IN ABUJA

*By Amos Abba*

*www.icirnigeria.org (International Centre for  
Investigative Reporting) - April 28, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*

*<https://www.icirnigeria.org/how-nestle-nigeria-contaminates-water-supply-of-its-host-community-in-abuja/>*

*On April 14, 2016, Nestle Nigeria assembled a team of geological experts, businessmen and politicians to witness the commissioning of a N5.6 billion water factory in Manderegi, an agrarian community in Abaji local government area of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The factory is celebrated as the most modern water plant in Sub-Saharan Africa.*

At the event, Nestle Nigeria promised to provide free access to potable water for not fewer than 1,000 residents of the community and improve technical competencies locally by establishing a technical training centre for the youths in Abaji.

## ***Broken Promises, Deferred Hope***

Two years after the water plant started full-scale operations, residents of Manderegi and its environs continue to struggle with chronic water shortages as the stream that serves as an alternative source of water supply is contaminated with wastewater directly pumped from the Nestle's water factory. Also, the channels for the release of the wastewater from the factory has created a gully erosion, that has caused serious ecological danger destroying farmlands and access roads in the community.

In contrast, a promotional video on Nestle Nigeria's website shows a water fountain built by the company in the outskirts of the community that purportedly provides potable water to 1,000 residents of Manderegi community which, according to Nestle Nigeria, had made the residents abandon the local stream and gain access to clean drinking water.

When The ICIR visited the site of the water fountain, there were only four taps, which were expected to supply water to 1,000 residents of the community.

The advert also claims to have provided 111 jobs for the local community and embarked on Project WET (Water Education for Teachers) to help teachers in the local council area raise awareness on proper hydration and conservation in children which reached 25 schools, 100 teachers and 2,500 pupils in 2017.

In the video, the community chief, Alhaji Seidu Garba, thanked Nestle for siting the water plant in his community.

"We thank God for Nestle that came here to Manderegi, I am very glad," he said before the video ended.

Time has proved Garba wrong.

Two years later, his tone has changed as expectations that the water processing plant would change the fortunes of the community for the better were dashed.

Recounting the details of the water crises faced by the community, Garba told The ICIR that, since Nestle Nigeria set up the multi-billion naira water factory in Manderegi, the community regularly has suffered scarcity of water.

And any announcement made by the company to ease the water problem in the community is a promotional stunt to build their public reputation.

"Nestle officials approached me and said they wanted to extend water supply from their factory to their gates so that people in the village could have access to clean water for their needs. They said though they didn't have the capacity to take the water into the village, they promised me that after one year they would ensure that a borehole is built inside the community to ease the burden of the people," he said.

It was later we realised that the water project located at the outskirts of the village was not built to solve our water problem but to serve as a tool of propaganda, he added.

“We didn’t know it was a ploy by Nestle to supply water to their customers. Today is Monday if you go there you will see tanker drivers with vehicles there, they didn’t build it for us. They control the taps from their factory and they turn it off when the crowd is much, leaving us frustrated, and without water.

Early this year, Nestle commissioned another borehole project in the primary school that will serve the school and the community but till today there is no water from that borehole,” he said.

Nestle Nigeria constructed a metal container for the village chief which serves as his “office” where he receives guests. In front of the container is a tap head that hardly produces water. When Nestle Nigeria inaugurated the second borehole project in the primary school inside the community in January, people’s hope was raised, but the four taps through which the water should pass remain dry till date.

“Now we have resorted to fetching water from the stream to get our daily needs of water. I leave them (Nestle) to God. Check the distance from this place to Nestle (water factory) just to fetch water, do you know how many kilometres that is,” he queried The ICIR.

Nestle has renovated a section of the LGEA primary school, Manderegi including the school toilet, but the restroom has been under lock and key because the borehole that is to serve the toilet is non-functional.

And despite the claim by Nestle Nigeria, the Headteacher of the school, Muhammed Sarki, told The ICIR that there has never been a water sensitization exercise carried out by Nestle for teachers in the school.

“To the best of my knowledge, no training has ever been conducted for teachers in this school by Nestle to teach water sensitisation for teachers and pupils. As for the borehole, currently, it is not working because one of the machines got spoilt that is why we don’t have water. When it is restored then there will be water,” he told The ICIR.

Like the school, the Primary Health Center, Manderegi, also does not have water despite the vast, underground water table in this community.



Umar Saidu, the head of the clinic who was transferred to the centre four months ago, told The ICIR that water is a big challenge because the clinic spends about ₦350 weekly to pay women in the community to supply water from the stream or from the water taps at Nestle's gate.

That is how the health centre has been able to prevent the outbreak of water-borne diseases at the clinic.

The World Health Organisation, WHO estimates a minimum daily entitlement of 20 litres of water per day for every individual to take care of basic hygiene needs including food hygiene, apart from laundry and bathing that require a large quantity of water. Most residents of Manderegi instead wake up every morning thinking about where to get water to meet their basic water needs.

### ***Burden Bearers of Manderegi***

The Manderegi community has experienced a persistent water scarcity for over twenty years. Despite, several borehole projects launched by the federal government within this period, their usefulness has been short-lived.

Two solar-powered borehole projects built by the former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua administration in 2008, barely worked for a year before it stopped functioning.

Years later the people of Abaji continued to draw water from the stream until Nestle Nigeria came with a water project that promised to end the problem of water scarcity in the village.

Residents expected the Nestle water project would make potable water accessible because they would no longer travel long distances to get water.

But the reverse has been the case.

Aisha Ibrahim's still engages in this daily ritual that has formed a part of her upbringing.

She has to wake up before the crack of dawn every day with her mother and siblings to walk for over one hour to the Manderegi stream to get water for their domestic activities for the day. It is a tough task for the eight-year-old whose exertion from the daily routine of fetching water affects her studies.

“I’m always late to school in the morning because before I get home from the stream and prepare for school, it would have been late,” she told The ICIR through an interpreter in her local dialect.

“At school, I feel sleepy in class because I have to get up very early in the morning to attend to my morning chores and it makes me tired but I try to stay awake and listen to my teachers. I would love to have a tap running close to my house so I don’t have to go very far to get water,” she said.

A 2016 study carried out by UNICEF in 24 countries in Sub-Saharan countries which includes Nigeria indicated that women and girls in these countries bear the burden of water collection which a round-trip takes averagely 33 minutes which could possibly affect the education of girls in the region and prevent their attending school altogether.

Sadiu Salihu, another girl resident in the village, told The ICIR that the physical exhaustion associated with the long-distance to get water is her main concern.

“I have to trek every morning and evening to get water from the stream with my friends and sibling. The road to the stream is rough and hilly, and with water on my head, I usually feel dizzy and exhausted,” the eighteen-year-old said.

She, however, explained that getting water from the stream is better for her because she prefers drinking from an unsafe stream than risk crossing the highway with water on her head, and become a victim of the road accident.

“The distance from this village to Nestle (water factory) is very far, and that means I would have to cross the major road with water on my head. Several women have died from crossing that road with water on their heads. To be on the safe side I would rather get my water from the stream which is safer,” she said.

She along with over 69 million Nigerians do not have access to potable drinking water and resort to getting water from compromised sources that put their health at risk according to 2018 data obtained from United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, UNICEF.

## ***Sourcing Water from a Contaminated Chalice***

When The ICIR reporter visited the stream he noticed that the wastewater from the Nestle factory runs directly into the stream through pipes. Also, cow dung littered the surrounding of the stream increasing the chances of pollution.

A water sample obtained from the stream in Manderegi on 28th February tested at the National Institute of Science Laboratory Technology, Ibadan, shows significant pollution.

The tested sample indicated a high presence of pathogenic bacteria at  $1.3 \times 10^{-3}$  mg/L beyond the recommended World Health Organisation WHO, limits of  $1.0 \times 10^1$  mg/L. Also, the total coliform count showed that it was  $1.0 \times 10^2$  in excess against the WHO 0.00 limits prescribed by the global health body.

A high coliform count shows that bacteria associated with human and warm-blooded animal waste are present in the water. Diseases such as typhoid fever, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, and dysentery can be contracted from the water with a high coliform count. It is recommended that faecal coliform be absent from drinking water.

Femi Adediran, a registered chartered chemist and member of the Institute of Public Analysts of Nigeria, IPAN, told The ICIR about the contaminants to expect from a water processing plant.

“You could test for residual chlorine and if present, there is the possibility of having trihalomethanes (a by-product of chlorination if done in excess). There could also be increased turbidity/suspended solids from frequent backwashing and cleaning of the factory,” he said.

However, the pH of the sample was surprisingly low at 6.95 against the recommended WHO 7.0. The total suspended solids also showed a moderate 268mg/L and residual chlorine was absent from the sample.

The Biological Oxygen Demand, BOD, of the sample, revealed a high 12.88mg/L which is dangerous and reveals increased pollutants activity present in the water.

According to Water Research Center, a water sample with BOD between 1 and 2 mg/L indicates very clean water, 3.0 to 5.0 mg/L indicates moderately clean water and greater than 5 mg/L indicates a nearby pollution source in the water.

However, the pollution of this stream has continued unabated for over two years without the intervention of environmental regulatory agencies mandated to regularly carry out inspections.

### ***Another Threat***

The landscape of Manderegi has changed visibly since Nestle set up their factory in 2016.

Unregulated discharge of effluents from the factory has created a gully erosion that rendered roads in the community inaccessible and destroyed farmlands.

The gully erosion starts from drainage outlets set up at the back of the factory spanning over an estimated distance of 100m into the community.

Mohammed Kabir, a deputy youth leader in the community told The ICIR that the roads destroyed were motorable two years ago but now residents in the community use people's farm as access roads to get to their destinations. Passing through this alternative route may get worse during the rainy season.

"Two years ago this place (pointing to the eroded portion of the road) was a major road where we used to get to our farms but now we can't walk on foot through this place because of the erosion. It was from day one when they started operations at this factory that they started pumping wastewater into our community, it started small until it escalated to this level with the rains approaching this year it is going to be worse," he said.

Alhassan Abdullahi, is a certified graduate with a Nigerian Certificate in Education, NCE, from the Nassarawa College of Education, Akwanga but he is currently engaged in part-time farming.

He is sceptical that his source of livelihood might be affected by the erosion.

"Farming is the main occupation for young people in this village but with our land slowly eroding away by Nestle activities I wonder what they expect us to do. When you apply for a job at their company they will tell you your skillset is not needed but

they promised to open a training centre to train youths but I don't know who they've trained in this village yet they're destroying our farmland gradually," he lamented.

The National Environmental Standards and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) is the agency saddled with the responsibility of regulating and monitoring the protection and sustainable development of the environment and its natural resources. It also imposes punitive measures on culprits.

Section 2 of the Environment Impact Assessment Act E12 of the 2004 NESREA Act stipulates that before private and public companies can carry out any activity, assessment of the potential impacts whether positive or negative, of the proposed project on the natural environment should be carried out first and observed.

Until the amendment of the NESREA Act in November 2018 which reviewed its existing regulations, increased strict penalties and permits the search of premises without a court warrant, the environmental body is no longer "toothless" according to a post on its Twitter handle.

Suleiman Oyoyo, NESREA spokesperson told The ICIR in a phone interview that the reviewed regulations have strengthened the agency to respond to environmental issues and effectively monitor the activities of companies.

"Unlike before when we need a warrant before we can enforce compliance of the law, the amendment has made it easy for us to operate and given us leverage to impose stiffer penalties on defaulting public and private companies which is something we've not been able to do in a long time," he said.

NESREA is still faced with the challenges of conducting routine checks and monitoring the activities of companies that flout environmental laws. The ICIR sought to know from Oyoyo if the agency was aware of the environmental violations taking place in Manderegi by Nestle activities and their response mechanisms.

"No, we are not aware. The community will have to file a formal complaint to the Director-General of NESREA and then we can swing into action and take it up from there," he stated.

## *Nestlé's Response*

Oluwafemi Ojo, the Human Resources Manager at Nestle Waters, Abaji declined to comment on the issue raised.

“You will have to give me a document to substantiate the claims you’ve made so I can send it to the corporate headquarters in Lagos for their response because I can’t speak on these issues. Or I can give you my email address to send your questions for me to forward it to the appropriate quarters,” he said.

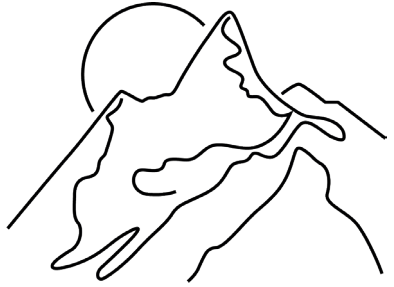
The ICIR later sent the emails to Ojo and the Lagos corporate office requesting to know if the Environment Impact Assessment was conducted by Nestle before siting the factory in the community, but the mail was not replied as at the time of filing this report.

Calls placed to the public affairs manager, Victoria Uwadoka, was answered by a female operator who asked the reporter to call back after an hour. When the reporter called back an hour later he was told the spokesperson was unavailable.

An environmental activist with Environmental Rights Action, ERA, Olatunji Buhari, said a functional public water system is the best way to make potable water accessible to people.

Sustainable Development Goal six can only be achieved by creating innovative solutions to make water available for all, he added.

“The easiest way to make the prescribed 25 litres daily quota of water which is a right for every Nigerian, readily available is by making our public water systems work. The usual complaint from the government is that there is no money but we are saying use innovative taxations by compelling big companies that use more water pay more but you will be shocked that the taxes paid by these companies are no different from the costs of water that a three-bedroom flat pays,” he said.



**EXCELLENCE IN  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
JOURNALISM**

**SHORTLISTED  
PUBLICATIONS**

**AMY YEE (US)**

## **RESCUING SEA TURTLES FROM FISHERMEN'S NETS**



Amy Yee is an award-winning US journalist who writes for the New York Times, The Economist, Washington Post and National Public Radio (NPR). She is a former staff reporter for the Financial Times based in New York and India.

She has won the United Nations Correspondents Association award three times; the South Asian Journalists Association award four times (and was a finalist seven times); and the Association of Healthcare Journalists award for public health reporting about reducing deaths of children in Bangladesh and India.

Amy has had three Notable Essays in the Best American Essays anthology. She is completing an MPA at Harvard Kennedy School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Amy also has a master's degree from Columbia University where she was a Knight-Bagehot Fellow, as well as an MFA in creative writing from Hunter College. She is a magna cum laude graduate of Wellesley College.



# RESCUING SEA TURTLES FROM FISHERMEN'S NETS

*By Amy Yee  
The New York Times - October 15, 2018*

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[www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/science/  
sea-turtles-endangered-fishing.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/science/sea-turtles-endangered-fishing.html)

*An organization on the coast of Kenya tries to persuade local residents to help return the trapped reptiles to the ocean, rather than sell their meat and shells for a living.*

WATAMU, Kenya — The young hawksbill turtle was accidentally caught in a net in the Indian Ocean off Kenya's coast.

The fisherman called Local Ocean Conservation, a nonprofit based in the town of Watamu that is the only turtle rescue and rehabilitation center on the East African seaboard. The hawksbill, critically endangered in this region, was a mere seven pounds; adults can weigh up to 160 pounds.

X-rays showed that the reptile's intestinal tract was clogged with plastic. Hogaar, as Local Ocean named her, floated and couldn't dive. Gas had built up in her innards after she had eaten small pieces of plastic mistaken for food such as jellyfish. Local Ocean staff members placed Hogaar in a rehab pool and gave her laxatives. She passed feces laced with shreds of packaging and had little appetite. After more than four months at Local Ocean, Hogaar died. A necropsy revealed her gut was also full of sharp shards of white, blue and pink plastic and tangles of blue and gray string.

Turtles are reptiles that have existed for at least 110 million years and survived the mass extinction that killed off dinosaurs. But today, sea turtles worldwide are threatened with extinction. And it's estimated that only one of 1,000 turtle eggs laid survive to adulthood.

Worldwide, hawksbills are critically endangered, while green and loggerhead turtles are endangered, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Olive ridleys and leatherbacks are vulnerable. All five species of these sea turtles are found in Kenyan waters. The global green turtle population has declined by an estimated 50 to 70 percent since 1900.

Conservationists are trying to protect turtles from a wave of threats, including pollution. Since its founding in 1997, Local Ocean has protected about 1,000 nests, conducted more than 17,000 turtle rescues and treated more than 480 turtles in its rehab center. About 60 to 70 percent of turtles are released back in the ocean.

Ten to 15 percent of the center's turtle patients are sick from eating plastic. Most of them do not survive. Spiky papillae lining turtles' throats prevent them from regurgitating plastic. And surgery on gastrointestinal tracts is difficult to do if it requires breaking open their shells.

Because some turtles presumably die in the ocean, there is no reliable estimate of how many are harmed by plastics. But there is no doubt plastic pollution is growing; three-quarters of marine litter is now composed of plastic and tons of plastic waste get dumped into the ocean every year, according to a 2017 report from the United Nations Environment Assembly.

An obscene rainbow of plastic debris washes up on Kenya's beaches, drifting there from as far away as Madagascar and Malaysia according to labels still legible on items. Local Ocean's volunteers collect the garbage, in sacks bulging with plastic lids, bottles, toothbrushes, yogurt cups, food packaging and more.

Turtles face many other dangers, including fishermen's hooks, boat accidents and habitat loss resulting from erosion and human construction — especially those obstructing nesting sites. They also suffer from ailments such as fibropapillomatosis, a mysterious disease that causes grotesque tumors possibly caused by pollution, and parasitic barnacles on their carapaces.

Poaching for turtle meat, shells, oil and eggs is also a major threat. Just a few decades ago in Florida and Hawaii, green turtles were killed en masse for food. In Kenya, eating turtles is part of its coastal culture and the marine reptiles are a source of meat and

income for families eking out a living. While poaching of any endangered species is illegal in Kenya and carries a fine of \$200,000, enforcement against killing turtles is rare.

While the plight of Africa's endangered megafauna — elephants and rhinos — captures the world's attention and resources, awareness and protection of marine life along the continent's coastal areas are “completely overlooked,” said Nicky Parazzi, a founder of Local Ocean, which was previously called Watamu Turtle Watch.

“What turtles need for their survival, we need for our enjoyment and survival as well. They represent the health of the ocean,” she said. “They are the canaries of the ocean.”

One bright spot is the decline of poaching in the Watamu region, despite the big profit fishermen can make from selling oil and meat. A large female green turtle can yield up to 170 pounds of meat and up to 45 pounds of fat. Such a turtle can fetch \$500 to \$600 — a hefty sum considering the average fisherman here makes about \$150 a month.

Turtle oil sells on the black market for 2,000 shillings (\$20) per bottle and is falsely believed to boost strength and immunity, cure asthma and serve as an aphrodisiac.

Local Ocean staff members meet regularly with hundreds of fishermen to build trust and good relationships with the community. “We’ve been with them 20 years now,” Ms. Parazzi said. “We’re not fair weather friends, we’re not going anywhere.”

Community liaison officers offer practical advice about sustainable fishing, which helps reduce poaching and encourages fishermen to participate in returning turtles accidentally caught back to the sea. They dissuade people from using illegal means to fish, such as mosquito nets, poison and spear guns that kill the largest fish carrying vital eggs. The organization also promotes small businesses like raising chickens, cultivating moringa plants and other agricultural products as part of its effort to reduce the area's dependency on fishing.

One spring morning, the fisherman Kai Shoka waited on a crescent-shaped beach here for Fikiri Kiponda, a turtle watch coordinator, after accidentally catching a juvenile hawksbill. On the beach, Mr. Kiponda measured and weighed the creature, and put metal identification tags on his flippers.

Although hawksbill meat is poisonous, the turtles are prized for the painterly, amber patterns of their shells. Carapaces are made into “tortoiseshell” jewelry and trinkets, although trade is illegal under endangered species and Kenyan laws.

Released soon afterward, this hawksbill crawled tentatively on the sand toward waves lapping the beach. Once in the water, the turtle flapped his flippers powerfully, becoming a rippling blur as he disappeared into the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean.

The conservation group rewards fishermen for reporting any turtle bycatch: 300 shillings (\$3) for small turtles and 1,000 shillings (\$10) for large ones.

Casper van de Geer, the organization’s manager, described the token amounts not as payments but as a way of compensating the fishermen for their time, or expenses like phone calls and transportation. “This is a small difference, but it has created a totally different attitude amongst the participants,” Mr. van de Geer said.

While paying fishermen might seem to be an incentive for them to catch turtles, most fish by setting nets and waiting, making it unlikely that turtles are targeted for capture.

Mr. Shoka, 40, said fishermen like him used to slaughter and eat turtles, but he considers the bycatch program worthwhile. “It’s illegal to possess turtle products,” he said. “You might be fined 20 million shillings. I don’t think selling the turtle is the proper thing.”

The next morning, Mr. Kiponda drove to a village of thatch-roofed homes to pick up a 20-pound green turtle caught a day earlier by Mark Katama, 22, who had carried it home. “It’s a lot of effort because it’s struggling,” he said. “You have to be strong.” He received a \$3 remuneration.

With the turtle in a large box in the back of his jeep, Mr. Kiponda drove out of the village on muddy roads rutted by the country’s torrential spring rains. A former accountant, Mr. Kiponda reflected on his nine years as a conservationist with Local Ocean, and how the bycatch program has changed fishing practices in the area. He gets calls from fishermen nearly every day, but doubted that the program would be as popular if they didn’t get some reward.

Given the financial difficulties that fishermen face, Mr. Kiponda speculated that without compensation, they “would go back to the tradition of eating them.”

Poaching certainly still occurs, and there is little to stop it outside the Watamu area.

A few days later, four people from Local Ocean using a harness strained to carry a massive green turtle — caught earlier by a fisherman — across the beach. Weighing 180 pounds, she exuded an all-knowing aura with her unblinking eyes set on a distinguished face. Set down on the white sand, the turtle used her foot-long, mosaic-patterned flippers to heave herself into the sea’s frothy waves, seemingly eager for another chance to live a long life that could last up to 80 years.

In the late 1980s, Ms. Parazzi and a friend began patrolling the beach at night by flashlight, at a time when turtle and egg poaching was rampant in Watamu. “To see a turtle was quite unusual,” recalled Ms. Parazzi, who runs a crafts business.

“We were just two housewives,” she said. “We didn’t know anything scientific whatsoever.”


They sought out international turtle experts by email, asking such basic questions as what to do with a turtle nest.

As their knowledge grew, the two women expanded their mission beyond the beach, and Local Ocean expanded to include a variety of programs, including mangrove reforestation, community economic development, outreach and education.

“Our mandate is the environment,” Ms. Parazzi said. “We don’t believe in single-species conservation. It’s a fat lot trying to save the turtle if they have nowhere to nest.”

The organization now employs about 20 Kenyans, with beach patrollers monitoring and protecting turtles during the nesting season. It also visits schools, offering education programs to thousands of students.

At a beachfront apartment where Zachary Kibugu works as a security guard, a green turtle crawled into a cove choked with seaweed and an obstacle course of plastic garbage: sachets of juice and hair conditioner, old flip-flops, battered tubes of sunscreen, ubiquitous bottles and a medley of caps. The marine reptile dug a deep hole in the sand and laid 128 eggs, scraping sand with her flippers over the nest to hide it, and she lumbered back to the sea.



Another security guard recognized the turtle's telltale tracks and marked the nesting spot with sticks before the tide could erase it. Mr. Kibugu alerted Local Ocean, which had introduced him to sea turtles when the organization visited his high school several years ago.

Later that morning, conservationists carefully dug up the trove of luminous white eggs the size of Ping-Pong balls. They would soon be reburied on a safer, cleaner beach where the nests could be monitored.

As the staff members gingerly stacked the eggs into a plastic bucket, Mr. Kibugu remembered a Local Ocean field trip eight years ago when his class had released a rescued turtle back into the sea. The young man smiled brightly at the memory of giving the creature another chance.

*A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 16, 2018, Section D, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Rescuing Imperiled Sea Turtles.*

**DIYA KOHLI (INDIA)**

## **WHAT'S BREWING IN ARAKU VALLEY**



Diya Kohli is managing editor at Conde Nast Traveller India. In her previous stints she has worked as a writer and editor with Mint Lounge, National Geographic Traveller India and The New Indian Express. Her work focuses on food, travel, books and their various intersections with history, culture, politics and the environment.

# WHAT'S BREWING IN ARAKU VALLEY

*By Diya Kohli*

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- A hot air ballooning festival is changing tourism in the Araku Valley and a speciality coffee brand is taking stories of Araku to the world
- Niche initiatives in Araku Valley are scripting a new narrative for socio-economic development of the local Adivasi community

From a giant wicker basket floating 1,000ft above the ground, Araku Valley resembles a frieze of Earth. The distant hills are lush green folds of squat bushes of coffee. The ground below is a chequerboard of paddy fields that follows an entire spectrum of colour, from dazzling emerald to burnt umber. There are occasional plots of symmetrical silver oaks amid sections of hills denuded by aggressive *jhum* (slash and burn) cultivation.

Located at about 1,200m above sea level, the valley, tucked away in the north-eastern corner of Andhra Pradesh, shares a border with Odisha. For guests and participants at the Araku Balloon Festival (ABF), held between 18-20 January this year, this is sightseeing like nothing else.

Hot-air balloons almost never land in the same place they take off from, even if they are flown by the most experienced pilots, like our flying Dutchman—Wout Bakker from the Netherlands, who has been a pilot for 25 years. We descend within a few feet of a rather wet rice field and Bakker's team uses long ropes to pull us to a drier patch. Close on our heels is another balloon, shaped like a giant honeybee, complete with a pointy



sting sticking out of its posterior. As we gently bump over the different levels of terraced fields, hovering a few feet above the ground, an entire train of people follows our descent. Skirting its way around the perimeter of the field, the line extends as people from the neighbouring village follow the landing path of the two balloons, a sight that is obviously surreal in a place where some villages still remain miles away from the nearest motorable road.

This was the second edition of the ABF, an initiative of Andhra Pradesh Tourism in association with events company E Factor, a festival primed to provide a new spin on the area's development story with its eco-friendly promise and involvement with the local community. While the balloons have temporarily rendered us interesting, it is the valley itself that is filled with all manner of fascinating stories.

Apart from the right wind conditions for hot-air ballooning, the region's superb microclimate and terrain also offer the perfect environment for growing coffee, a fact that the British took note of, setting up the first plantations in the 1900s. Post-independence, it was a combination of intrepid Bengali tourists, with their penchant for hill stations, and weekend revellers from the port town of Visakhapatnam, that kept the area's economy functioning. This apart, Araku remained little more than an exotically named pit stop on two local train routes. The occasional newspaper mention of Naxal-related shootings and attacks on government officials did little to recommend the place to the average traveller. Araku Valley remained outside *Incredible India* tourism initiatives and continued to be a minor hill station where people would arrive, eat the regional speciality—bamboo chicken—take a few photographs at strategic viewpoints, and return after a day or two.

Now, something is changing. The balloon festival is bringing the world to the valley and a small artisanal coffee brand is taking the stories of Araku to the world outside. While the ABF has grown much larger than its first edition with 20 balloons from around the world, Araku Coffee has just launched its India operations. And although both brands are niche, they have the potential to provide an entirely new narrative for development in this once forgotten valley.

Araku Valley is one of 11 *mandals* which make up the Paderu Tribal Agency (PTA), one of the many designated Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDA) in the

area which work under the state government for socioeconomic development of the Adivasi communities. The PTA covers 2,312 revenue villages and 3,574 tribal habitations.

The next day, as we make our way to far-flung coffee estates, our drive takes us through the five northern *mandals* of Ananthagiri, Dumbbriguda, Hukumpeta, Munchingi Puttu and Araku Valley. Although the coffee is called Araku, it grows in estates across the PTA—the name was chosen simply because it sounded poetic. This time, the view is from the ground level but it is as impressive as the one from above—the landscape changes from densely forested hills to sweeping valleys and terrace farms surrounding occasional village clusters. Although these *mandals* are a little over 100km from Visakhapatnam, they exist on an entirely different index of development. Part of the infamous Red Corridor, which includes tracts of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, among others, the region has been plagued equally by government negligence and Naxal insurgency since the 1960s. Consequently, it remained politically fraught and economically marginalized.

Until a few years ago, a single arterial road traversed the entire PTA and access to clean drinking water and education was limited. Maternal and child mortality, sanitation, public health and unsustainable agricultural practices were all matters of concern. For Manoj Kumar, CEO of the Hyderabad-based NGO Naandi Foundation, these challenges made Araku Valley the perfect site for its inaugural large-scale project for furthering socioeconomic development in the region. “We wanted something that would be our own legacy. At the same time, it was so large and so difficult that even if we failed trying to implement it, we believed that the nation would forgive us,” says Kumar.

“Some of the habitations in this area comprise as little as two or three homes and are so remote that it takes over a day’s trek to get to the main motorable road. How far you are from this single arterial road is what determines the level of development or government intervention. The more remote villages still believe in local witch doctors and the Naxals meet there regularly. It is an entirely different world,” says Kumar.

“When we entered Araku Valley in 2000, we pretty much started at ground zero and the only job that our early recruits had was to walk to the different villages, make friends with the Adivasis, listen to them, and find out about their life and problems,” he says. While they began work in the fields of education and healthcare, it was the development of the Araku Coffee brand, owned by an Adivasi cooperative, that put this valley on the global map. From hipster cafés in Berlin to a chic store in Paris’ Marais area, this small brand of Adivasi-grown coffee has won awards and received high ratings from professional cuppers. The brand is now launching in India with an online retail format. There are plans to open the first Araku Café later this year in Bengaluru, followed by other metros. Gradually, it is becoming a brand ambassador of both the valley and its people.

### ***Araku Coffee: From Sapling to Cup***

Two days before we landed in Araku, we heard its stories over a sensory evaluation of coffee at Masque, a fine-dining restaurant in Mumbai.

Eight aroma vials and a slice of tangerine and dragonfruit were placed before each person at the cupping session, to introduce Araku Coffee in India. We uncapped each vial, acclimatizing our olfactory senses to the concentrated perfumes of tropical fruits, vanilla, berries, almonds and citrus flavours—it was a preamble to the actual tasting. Andrew Delgado, an award-winning brewer from Honduras and Araku Coffee’s chief roaster in India, brewed four different varieties of Araku Coffee—Signature, Selection, Micro Climate and Grande Reserve—in different coffee makers. “Tell me what it tastes like and say the first thing that comes to your mind,” said Delgado, as he handed out tiny cups of the brew. The answers ranged from peaches to new shoes to wet earth and tobacco.

Araku Coffee has consistently won high ratings from professional cuppers, many of whom are associated with the highly regarded Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA). There are varieties that have got ratings as high as 90 out of 100, a first for any coffee from India. The gold medal for the best coffee pod in the 2018 Prix Epicures OR in Paris was yet another achievement for the brand whose Signature variety was awarded in this competition, which featured speciality coffees from around the world.

The journey of Araku Coffee from a livelihood initiative by the Naandi Foundation to a globally appreciated product has been in the making for over a decade. It is also intrinsically tied to the history of how coffee arrived in this valley.

It was a British civil servant, N.S. Brodie, who introduced coffee to these hill tracts in 1898. After independence, the British-owned coffee plantations were taken over by the Andhra Pradesh forest department (APFD). The state government also established the Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC) in 1956 to create livelihoods for the Adivasis. They wanted to engage them in coffee planting in order to take them away from the environmentally damaging jhum cultivation. In 1975, the plantations were handed over to the Andhra Pradesh State Forest Development Corp. (APFDC), which, together with the GCC and the Indian Coffee Board tried to expand its cultivation. They handed out free coffee and silver oak saplings (silver oak functions both as a shade tree and a cash crop) and even set up demonstration plots for research and development. All this, however, failed to get the Adivasis excited about the project. They would occasionally work on the state-owned coffee farms during harvest season. For the rest of the year, the estates were largely abandoned. Coffee of varied quality continues to be produced all over the PTA.

Land in this area is protected by the Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation Act 1 of 1970, which does not allow the sale or transfer of tribal land to non-tribal people. The Adivasis have the first right to all forest land, for both habitation and agriculture. While all these factors should have provided ideal farming conditions, nothing is that simple in the Araku Valley. Apart from obvious loopholes in the laws and a failure of proper investment in agriculture, the lack of access to institutional credit, the tyranny of middle men and small lenders have created wide gaps. This lack of agricultural development was capitalized on by Naxals whose armed struggles in this region are centred on land reforms and better rights for the Adivasis. Until five-six years ago, the coffee plantations owned by the APFDC were often taken over by Naxals, deterring government officials from undertaking field visits. "From time to time, we would hear news that a group of Naxals had arrived on a coffee plantation owned by the APFDC and had fired their guns in the air and then stuck up a notice saying they had redistributed the land to local Adivasi families. They also declared to the local authorities that if anyone went against them, they would have only 24 hours to survive," says Kumar.

But, while this redistribution of property transferred the land, it did not necessarily aid the production of quality coffee. Lack of proper training yielded low-grade cherries and coffee beans. The consequent lack of buyers and low prices in the market left the farmers demotivated, unwilling to invest time and effort in tending to the coffee farms.

These circumstances provided an entry point for Naandi Foundation. After healthcare and education, the next step was to improve farmer livelihoods. The Adivasi farmers already had access to land. Now, they even had free coffee bushes and silver oak saplings from the government. All that was required was direction and motivation. “And so we started off in 2001 with 1,000 families and 1,000 acres where we would grow coffee,” says Kumar.

Apart from teaching farmers to grow coffee in accordance with best practices, the foundation worked to change mindsets. “To get them to understand city-bred notions of competition or capitalism was pointless. The sense of equity and equality is so entrenched—they wanted their whole village to get the same price for the coffee cherries irrespective of the quality or ripeness,” says Kumar. He adds that the farmers were happy growing small amounts of coffee on their one-acre plots which they could look after as a single family. “Even when professional cuppers would come for visits and try to explain the economics of larger estates, they would staunchly refuse, saying they could only look after a certain number of plants between a single family. And the concept of hiring labour was entirely alien. As a result, our coffee is grown across hundreds of plantations ranging in size from 0.5–2.5 acres,” says Kumar. While this is logistically complicated, the micro estates and diversity of terroirs provide a unique signature to the coffees.

The Andhra Pradesh government’s Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Act of 1995 helped enable Naandi Foundation’s Araku Organic Coffee Project. They formed the SAMTFMACS (Small and Marginal Tribal Farmers Mutually Aided Cooperative Society) in 2007—one of the largest fair trade and organic certified coffee cooperatives in the world comprising nearly 11,000 Adivasi farmers. All the assets belong to the cooperative and decisions are taken by the board, whose members are nominated and elected from the farmer communities. The endeavour has also found backing through investments from prominent corporate personalities, including Anand Mahindra, chairman of the Mahindra Group, and Kris Gopalakrishnan, co-founder of Infosys.

Naandi enlisted the help of coffee experts from India and abroad, all of whom came on board as consultants, inspired by the story of Araku and its coffee growers. These included David Hogg, an agriculture and biodynamics expert from New Zealand; Sunalini Menon, India's first professional coffee cupper and former director of quality control at the India Coffee Board; Hippolyte Courty, one of France's top coffee experts; and the Honduran Delgado, as well as a dedicated bunch of local development experts and field researchers.

The setting up of a central processing unit in 2007 was the next step. "We realized that the Adivasis would grow the coffee as long as we did all the other work," says Kumar. So all they had to do was grow and harvest and segregate the cherries and the rest was done by the Naandi Foundation. "The final price we offered was much higher than anything offered in the market for a kilo of clean coffee (approximately 6kg of cherries are processed to make a kilo of roast-ready clean coffee beans). The government offered about ₹80 per kg, while the moneylenders paid between ₹40-90 and we paid ₹270 per kg," says Kumar, admitting losses had to be incurred to get the farmers to follow best practices.

Today, Araku Coffee is a brand that works with 517 villages and 10,986 farmers, all of whom are estate owners and entrepreneurs with a stake in the business. The reason the coffee is of such high quality is that it follows the best practices of biodynamic farming by creating an interconnected and symbiotic ecosystem. The soil is enriched through composting and a variety of shade trees are planted, including cash-yielding fruit trees like mango and jackfruit. Terroirs are assessed and careful standard operating procedures are put in place from "sapling to savouring", which ensures healthier plants and sweeter cherries and eventually a far superior coffee aroma and flavour.

The day after the balloon festival, we head to the tiny village of Kabada Boddaput in Dumbriguda *mandal*, accompanied by Hogg and Prakash Babu, who is a senior manager with the Naandi Foundation. He analyses the terroir of the different coffee estates and also handles census numbers. Kabada Boddaput comprises 31 households and 52 coffee farmers and is known for its high-quality cherries. The average yield, 330kg per acre, makes this a very high performing village. Despite some damage due to rain and landslides, the plantations look like they are thriving. Men and women are hard at work harvesting cherries and the sheer number of dark red cherries on

bushes suggest it's going to be a good year. The sun throws its dappled light through fruit trees intertwined with pepper vines and a group of women comes down the hill path carrying baskets filled with cherries. Babu is our guide and translator for the day. He points out that while men do the pruning and composting, women are the more meticulous pluckers. As we admire the nose pins, Babu also points out the other gold jewellery, such as necklaces and earrings that the women wear as they go about their daily chores on the plantations and fields. Jewellery is clearly a weak spot, and the women joke that the prosperity brought in by the coffee has, among other things, helped fund their indulgence. Depending on the number of years they have been associated with the program and the quality of cherries, farmers can make anything from ₹17,500 to ₹230,000 annually from a single acre estate. Although it might sound like a small amount, since the coffee requires no monetary investment from the farmers' end, it brings in a neat profit to the families involved in its cultivation.

The next day we visit Cheravupakalu, part of the Munchingi Puttu *mandal*. It is harvest season and procurement trucks from the Naandi Foundation are parked on the road adjoining the village. We see household after household bringing baskets of cherries, adding to a profusion of perfectly ripened fruit.

### ***How Do You Become the Best Coffee Grower in the World?***

Gunta Harichandrudu holds up his large presentation cheque of ₹20,000 with a wide smile. He has been awarded the best coffee farmer three times at the annual Gems of Araku festival organized by the Naandi Foundation. He is a man that all the coffee farmers of the village of Cheravupakalu look up to. His 2.5 acre plot is his pride and joy. "He has implemented all the techniques of biodynamic farming and all of these make his coffee bushes really healthy and his coffee cherries of a very high quality," says Venkata Rao R., senior manager and head of community connect for the Naandi Foundation.

As we trek to Harichandrudu's farm in the hills, the path winds past paddy fields and forests of silver oak. The wild undergrowth gives way to a stone boundary wall. Beyond lies a neat and well-kept coffee plantation where bushes are planted in symmetrical rows, bursting with red cherries. The fact that Harichandrudu spends a lot of time here

is evident from the fact that he has a small pot and a cooking set-up in a small clearing.

Although some parts of his farm, like others in the area, were damaged by the cyclone Hudhud in 2014, his farming practices helped him out. The fact that he had diverse shade trees rather than the more fragile silver oaks alone ensured that fewer trees were uprooted, destroying the coffee bushes. His composting had enriched the soil and the new bushes that he planted also grew back faster. These factors have caused his yield to return to its earlier numbers. Today, this septuagenarian farmer has provided almost 200kg of dark red cherries from his farm and there is plenty more to be harvested. His prosperity is evident in the two auto rickshaws he has bought for his sons, to supplement the family's farming income. And the gleaming trophies that occupy pride of place in his house are a daily validation of his hard work.

Harichandrudu is also one of the many farmer-educators who make up Naandi's on-ground team for Araku Coffee. "We developed champion farmers who took an interest and went from village to village and shared their knowledge and skills about growing better-quality coffee," says Hogg.

Ensuring that the farmers of both Cheravupakalu and Kabada Boddaput only pluck the best cherries has taken some effort. Although Naandi's core team comprises less than a dozen members, they have a number of Adivasis who work as their representatives. "It was important to train the farmers to handpick cherries at the right stage of maturity, which is indicated by their crimson-red colour," says Babu.

To incentivize the process, the foundation came up with the red truck concept. The villages which provide the best-quality ripe cherries get a higher price and a red truck for pick-ups over those who have a more mixed yield of green and red cherries. The prospect of achieving red-truck status has encouraged a sense of ownership—production and collective pride have both increased.

The foundation hopes to befriend more farmers, scale up operations and increase the number of red-truck villages. The Gems of Araku festival, started in 2009, was another boost for coffee growers, with cuppers from around the world invited to rate Araku Coffee and thereby create brand value and ensure higher prices. The annual festival held in March-April also hosts an awards ceremony that gives out prizes to the best coffee grower and the best biodynamic farming village.



## ***Coming Home to Araku***


Spurred by state initiatives, a terroir suited to both balloon flights and quality beans, a clutch of enterprising farmers and an NGO that refused to quit, Araku Valley's coming out story follows an unusual trajectory.

The tourism department hopes that the balloon festival will provide a much needed boost to the region's economy by offering a specialized experience beyond the standard package of two-night hotel stay plus sightseeing. It hopes to throw a spotlight on Araku Valley's potential as a coffee destination as the festival also offers excursions to nearby plantations run by Adivasi farmers.

So, while Araku Coffee's output might be tiny, (the brand procures approximately 100 metric tonnes of clean coffee annually) when compared to the entire coffee production in the Paderu Agency (last year approximately 1,400 metric tonnes of clean coffee was procured from the region), it punches way above its weight. Araku's organically certified, fair trade coffee sells for up to ₹6,500 per kg in foreign markets.

There is another rather curious ambassador of the coffee in this area—The Araku Coffee House and Coffee Museum. Prakasa Rao was a migrant who arrived in the area sometime in the 1930s and set up a catering business for tourists. He saw the potential of the coffee business and opened up a coffee house followed by a museum in the 1950s. While the displays might be less than adequate, with tableaux featuring dressed-up dolls that have seen better days and an odd collection of attractions (including a mechanical bull) that give it a fun house feel, the place has such an odd allure that you just can't ignore it. It is also the only café in the area where you can have a cup of good filter coffee.

As we make our back to Visakhapatnam airport, we hear a train whistling in the distance and I think of our first evening in the valley. At dusk, a train had chugged past the balloon festival campsite, silhouetted against the setting sun. As the DJ tested out his rock 'n' roll set and fairy lights came on, we had to remind ourselves that we were camping out in the middle of nowhere. We were ensconced at a luxurious campsite, complete with plumbing, heated blankets and four-poster beds, in the middle of a breathtakingly beautiful valley fringed by spindly silver oak. As the night lengthened, the on-site bar kept the drinks flowing and Freddie Mercury's voice poured out of the



speakers. Within the perimeter patrolled by uniformed AK-47 toting Greyhounds—a special forces unit of the Andhra Pradesh police specializing in anti-Naxal operations—men, women, children, balloonists and paragliders sang around a bonfire and danced the night away. And next morning, there was another hot air balloon ride to go on and yet another world in this valley, waiting to be discovered.

**FADI AL HASANI (PALESTINE)**

**INVESTIGATION:  
IRRIGATION AND FERTILIZATION  
OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS IN  
KHUZA'A WITH SEWAGE WATER**



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# INVESTIGATION: IRRIGATION AND FERTILIZATION OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS IN KHUZA'A WITH SEWAGE WATER

*By Fadi Al Hasani  
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Abdullah Muhammad (a pseudonym), a farmer in his forties, used to fertilize his 25-dunum field, located to the east of the town of Khuza'a, adjacent to the southeastern border with Israel, with sewage prior to its cultivation. He claims there is shortage in water of irrigation.

Abdulla, the farmer, relies on the drivers of Khuza'a's municipal waste water transport vehicles and other private sector vehicles to deliver the water to the field prior to the process of plowing the soil for dismantling soil, in order to sow it with "peas, beans and lentils" and has no idea whether what he is doing is against the law.

Abdullah is not the only the one who is doing this; in fact, other farmers in his hometown do the same thing with the complicity of the drivers of the wastewater trucks, amid a complete absence of oversight that several governmental bodies are supposed to be responsible for.

According to the General Directorate of Planning and Policies at the Ministry of Agriculture, the town of Khuza'a (4,000 dunums) produces 30% of the agricultural production of Khanyounis governorate which is 141 thousand tons annually.

### ***Legal Contravention:***

Farmers and drivers of public or private wastewater are not allowed to pump their cargo into agricultural land (wheat, olive, okra, watermelon), which is a legal violation committed in broad daylight. That contradicts the System of the Health Hazards (2013) Issued by the Minister of Local Government in the Gaza Strip, which stipulates for “the prohibition of unloading or dumping the contents of the drilling or sewage tanks in places other than the ones primarily established for them, or leave them flowing in any form”.

Furthermore, it goes against the Article 24 of the Agriculture Law, which stipulates that “human waste or any compost or liquid or solid waste mixed with or derived from them can be used to fertilize plantations unless treated according to the approved standards”. Besides, the Article (55) states that unless the wastewater treated according to national standards approved by the accredited technical authorities, it can not be used to irrigate the agricultural.

The Public Health Law No. (20) of 2004, which stipulates in Article 43, prohibits the use of sewage for the purpose of fertilizing agricultural land or irrigating field crops, except in accordance with the conditions and controls determined by the Ministry in coordination with the concerned authorities.

On the other hand, the drivers make this violation openly, avoiding the difficulty of moving to pre-defined areas, sometimes at the request of the owners of those lands. That's for irrigation and also taking advantage of the nutrients carried by the water.

Both of farmers and drivers invest the morning in the summer to pump sewage into agricultural fields.

On the morning of 13-16 September 2017, the investigator was able to document the violations of the farmers and wastewater truck drivers in rainfed areas by a video camera. Some photographs of the same operation were taken at least one year ago in olive fields.

During a research period led by the investigator for two years, none of the residents of the agricultural area have tolerated these violations, even though the wastewater

trucks pass by them on their way to the farms, while no one knows if that happens as a result of ignorance of the truth or for other purposes.

The instructions for the reuse of treated wastewater in agricultural use, attached to the Agriculture Law No. (2) of 2003 and its amendments, in item (7), stipulate that “the wastewater for irrigation purposes shall be treated as well as this wastewater shall be transferred through closed pipes which are painted in violet and the word “treated wastewater” is written on, in a good and clear line on both sides.

Ironically, the trucks transporting untreated wastewater are oil-colored trucks with governmental license plates and belong to the municipality of Khuza’a, which is legally authorized to dispose this wastewater and transfer it to the areas allocated. That is especially since the town of Khuza’a lacks the proper infrastructure where its residents relies on cesspits in their way to dispose the raw wastewater.

Sewage networks cover 60% of the Gaza Strip, while the remaining area lacks infrastructure. There are no wastewater treatment plants, including the town of Khuza’a and the eastern villages of Khanyounis according to the Water Authority.

### ***Water-related Diseases***

“Wastewater contains bacteria, pathogens and pathogenic parasites”, say health and environmental specialists, where it is difficult to get rid of parasites their eggs in the treatment process, which causes an enormous number of gastrointestinal infectious diseases.

Wastewater-dependent crops end up in multiple markets within the Gaza Strip, and this is where the real big danger lies.

However, farmer Sami Khalil (a pseudonym) defended his act saying: “This water is used only to dismantle the soil and has no effect on plants in any way”.

Khalil, who we met sitting under the roof of a tin room by the edge of a field adjacent to the barbed wire fence between the Gaza Strip and the occupied territories in 1948, denied his use of wastewater as an alternative to irrigation water during the farming season, although he had complained of water scarcity in that border area.

“All farmers use this water in Khuza’a,” he said. “No one asks, no one cares”.

No any violation of the law has been written against land owners who use wastewater to irrigate their crops or the drivers of either governmental or private wastewater transport trucks according to the mayor of Khuza’a, Shehdeh Abu Rock.

“If we found out that the driver of the sewer trucks had done this, we would deduct three working days from his salary,” Abu Rock said, “but it did not happen over and over again by our drivers.”

“When we discovered that some farmers are asking drivers to transfer wastewater to their lands, we told the drivers of the wastewater trucks not to do so. However, there are private trucks that can pump wastewater in agricultural lands at the request of farmers,” he continued explaining.

“We have prevented our truck drivers from doing this, and we warned the farmers of the danger coming out of this on their crops and land. We will not allow this practice though this happened when the water was scarce when the occupation was putting harsh pressure on the entire water system, but this is no longer there,” he added.

### ***Saving Expenses***

Mohammed Khalil (a pseudonym), a farmer who has cultivated wheat on a land more than three dunams, openly says: “We take advantage of the sewage which saves us purchasing treated water, particularly under the scarcity of water, as well as the purchase of fertilizers”.

However, he lately denied using it for more than one crop. He said: “It was the first and last time that the wastewater was used. Later on the ground, tents were set up for Marches of Return, so I had to stop planting them.”

There is no shortage of water in Khuza’a. The water is available to the farmers. “There is no room to complain about the shortage. If a farmer makes a personal request to get the wastewater, that is on his own. After all, It is not logical farmers use wastewater once water is available,” Mayor of Khuza’a stated.

At the outset of his response to the question of the investigator: If water is available to farmers, why is wastewater used in irrigation or soil dismantling? He said: “I don’t

know. This is a danger to agriculture and land, and we supervise and prevent the sewage trucks from emptying their cargo in agricultural land.”

“We rented an empty land close to the border line where sewage is emptied, but it is not used for agriculture,” Abu Rock said.

Another farmer from the same area, who declined to be identified, said: “We all here practice this act, the water here is very scarce and the people rely on the sewage to irrigate their crops for a long time, especially the olive crop.”

The farmer denied that anyone had questioned them as a result of this act, which he does not know whether it is legal or meets the health standards or not. He stressed that the process of attracting wastewater trucks and paying them to pump their cargoes into the land by farmers does not need any effort or concealment, it is done in broad daylight.

### ***Analysis of Samples***

To prove this reality, the investigator, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, took a risk with a accompanying laboratory examination team. They took soil samples from an area located in front of the Israeli military observation towers. To avoid firing, they put on phosphorous.

The team was able to obtain sporadic samples from different areas of the soil which are grown (okra, watermelon, olives and wheat). These samples were checked for safety purposes.

The results of the examinations were completely contrary to health standards. They contain high concentration of arsenic, phosphorus, fecal coliform bacteria and other minerals.

The Director of Birzeit Laboratory for Environmental Analysis, Dr. Ahmed Al-Maghari, expressed his concern about the fact that there are high levels of toxic elements in the soil samples of the town of Khuza'a.

“The results show that there are some toxic metal ratios, which are higher than the normal rate, as well as a high percentage of fecal coliform bacteria which is significant



and indicative of a source of contamination from wastewater,” Al-Maghari said, who supervised the examination of the target area whose soil has been analyzed.

He stressed that there are some indicators of soil properties which show that there are sources of external pollution are not normal, such as high phosphorus total 350 mg per liter, while the allowable is 10-15 mg per liter. “That indicates that an external source feeds the soil with these elements,” he continued.

He pointed to the increase of the proportions of organic material, heavy metals, and arsenic element which is highly toxic to the soil and human, animal and plant. He emphasized that if this reached to animals through the food chain, this will certainly reach the human being.

Practically speaking, both farmers and the wastewater truck drivers are taking advantage of the absence of supervision of several government parties, including the Ministries of Agriculture, Ministry of Health and Water Authority, even they even go further in their violation.

### ***Surprise!***

When the investigator confronted the Ministry of Agriculture with the matter, they expressed surprise at this violation. The director general of soil and irrigation in the ministry, Engineer Jamal Abed said, “for the first time as an official to listen to this subject! It’s actually forbidden unless it is treated water, whether used to irrigate olive trees or any other type of trees”.

Abed continued: “If a person is caught red handed, he is fined and referred to the prosecution because they pose a danger to public health and the environment at the same time. However, no one has been caught, but this may have occurred outside the framework (after the supervisors finish their work.”

He continued, “If it is proven that the municipality works in this way, it is a criminal, and it must be penalized because it knows very well the seriousness of this matter.” He also confirmed that, “according to sanitary standards, around 50 meter area must segregate between the lands where the treated wastewater used and those irrigated with

ordinary irrigation water, in order to avoid the process of pollution through air.” “Just imagine what this wastewater would do if pumped without treatment,” he wonders.

The Director General of Soil and Irrigation in the Ministry of Agriculture tried to diagnose the scene rather than to treat it. He considered that the violation represented a danger and caused the spread of epidemics that harm human health and create environmental pollution which in turn will result in desertification in the area.

He continued, “We do not give up our responsibility, but we have not received any complaint in this regard, nor even a telltale revealed to us, so we can not judge. However, if there is, there will be intervention to stop planting the land for a certain period and force farmers to plant their lands with trees.”

### ***Weak Control***

In this regard, it was necessary to confront other parties related to the failure to perform proper control, especially the Ministry of Health, in accordance with the Public Health Law No. (20) of 2004, which stipulates in Article 43, the prohibition of the use of sewage for the purposes of fertilizing agricultural land, or irrigation of field crops, except in accordance with the conditions and controls determined by the Ministry in coordination with the concerned authorities.

However, from his side, Khaled Al-Tibi, an engineer with commission for supervising the quality of water in the Ministry of Health, said, “We have a control and an environmental department in Khayounis governorate. If any complaints about the unloading of wastewater are found in other places than the one allocated, we will not be complacent in this matter. To ensure that such water is only allowed to be disposed in the designated areas, the supervisors of the Ministry of Health are informed to check the matter in coordination with other parties to form a joint committee that in turn take an effective decision.”

He added, “I do not know that there are shortcomings. Everyone is working with all his capabilities, but if there are shortcomings, I think that it is not by the teams, but perhaps by other parties, or because of the siege conditions which has weakened the ability of the monitoring surveying system, especially at the times of the unavailability of fuel,

cars and some equipment for inspection and sampling for examination. In spite of that, everyone works hard in light of the available possibilities, and no one in this system can see something wrong and stand still”.

The water control official in the Ministry of Health stressed his ignorance of the act of unloading wastewater in the agricultural lands, and he said: “If this happens, the inspection teams of the Environmental Health Department in Khanyounis will deal with the issue and prevent dumping in areas that are not allocated, because it negatively affects health.”

Al-Tibi added, “we will not tolerate this issue if it is discovered, and the plants will be damaged and the drivers of the wastewater trucks will be punished, but in fact we have not received any such information, and if there is a complaint, we will head to the area and follow up”.


He also stressed that the unloading is prohibited “in agricultural places or even in the sides of roads far from planting.”

He emphasized that any party that violates the instructions will be seized, and take legal action against them by the regulatory system, including the health, municipal and water authorities “because if there is no impact on agriculture, there is an impact on the groundwater reservoir, and if it does not affect the groundwater reservoir will affect the health of the society,” he explained.

### ***The Reservoir and the People***

However, the Water Authority in the Gaza Strip denied that there was a leakage of wastewater into the underground wells, since the soil of the eastern area of Khanyounis is clay soil. Thus, it believes that the greatest damage is to human beings, despite their total denial of any information they have about the issue of irrigating and fertilizing agricultural lands with crude raw water.

“We have no information on this issue,” said Mazen al-Banna, deputy head of the Water Authority. “It is not conventional to use raw wastewater for irrigation because it is difficult and can lead to problems,” he continued, “this is the first time I ever hear about this issue.”



Al-Banna held a number of parties, mainly the Ministry of Agriculture, responsible for this violation. He said, “the supervisory role falls first on the Ministry of Agriculture which has directorates in different parts of the Gaza Strip, which are supposed to follow up with the farmers regularly”.

He continued, “As a water authority, we do not know anything about this. There are small particles that I do not know about, so I can not comment, but I can answer that if a citizen or farmer deals with this type of water, they will endanger themselves. I am here as a specialist and this affects the health of humans, as well as the soil, while the groundwater tank is not affected because the surface layer of soil in the eastern areas of the province of Khanyounis, clay and does not allow leakage.”

The deputy head of the Water Authority stressed the need for all relevant government agencies to stand directly at their responsibility, including the Ministry of Health, Agriculture, Local Government and Water Authority. “If we are talking about human health, we must question the Ministry of Health,” he declared.

Eventually, this is the result of this investigation in the midst of a state of conflict between the charges and attempts to evade the responsibilities of the various government parties or recognition of default. In addition, if this violation continues without putting an end to it, it will increase the risks to human health, and will make the region vulnerable and more exposed to desertification.

## **GUILHERME RUSSO (BRASIL)**

### **MEET THE FOREST GROWERS**



Guilherme Russo works as journalist since 2004. In São Paulo, over a period of more than seven years, worked as City Desk reporter for two major newspapers, a tier-one magazine and a TV network.

Over the following five years, worked as reporter and assistant editor for the International Desk of 'O Estado de S.Paulo', one of the main media groups in Brazil. Travelled as correspondent to 11 countries.

As documentarist, the main production became the story about the Forest Growers, that was shortlisted as finalist of Fetisov Journalism Awards 2019.

Still contributing to news outlets, currently works as contributing reporter of UOL, the main news website in Brazil.

# MEET THE FOREST GROWERS

**By Guilherme Russo**

***National Geographic Brazil magazine - January 11, 2019***

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*The Atlantic Forest, known locally as Mata Atlântica, is Brazil's richest and most threatened forest land. At the Mantiqueira Mountains (Serra da Mantiqueira), not far from the country's largest urban centres, some are leading by example and getting their hands dirty to restore the past and sow the seeds of the future.*

By Guilherme Russo

Photographs by Renato Stockler

Before human activity picked up in the Mantiqueira Mountains, one would struggle to find a spot in the range where the sound of flowing water was out of reach, amid the symphony of the winds and the fauna from the native forest – high-altitude Atlantic Forest. After more than three centuries of predatory exploitation of noble woods, fires to make room for grazing land and farming, the range's outlook has changed – and the water that would once spout from the natural springs is merely a fraction of what it was; the flow is visibly diminished, or even vanished.

Mantiqueira is a word originating from the tupi language, meaning “drop of rain” or “the place where the waters spring”. Poetic souls would call it “the weeping mountain range”. Behind it all is the fact that these mountains – the range stretches through the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro – are responsible for supplying water to some 25 million people and their daily needs, according to data from ICMBio, the Brazilian government's environmental agency. This supply is crucial to countless cities in the country's three most developed states. Nested between the biggest Brazilian urban centres, the range's strategic significance is also an important gauge of Atlantic Forest conservation. “We are now at the threshold of failure for the forest. There's very little left, and the consequences are already evident to society, as seen in the reservoir

crisis,” says Ricardo Cardim, botanist and author of newly-released *Remanescentes de Mata Atlântica: as Grandes Árvores da Floresta Original e Seus Vestígios* [Remains of the Atlantic Forest: larger trees of the original forest and their traces].

Throughout the decades, but especially in the 20th century, the task of cutting down the forest to make room for farmland or cities was considered a noble one – a triumph of man over nature, allowing for progress. In Southeastern Brazil, where the Mantiqueira is located, new roads built for transporting wood – used in urban buildings and furniture – facilitated this process. According to ecologists’ estimates, only 12.4% of the original forest remains from the time of the first settlers (see map above). A patchwork of 17 public conservation areas helps in preserving the range, which “comprises some 15% of the remaining areas of Atlantic Forest, somewhat higher than expected for the biome,” said Marcia Hirota, chief executive of the Fundação SOS Mata Atlântica. However, 80% of total forest conservation areas are in private properties – in the Mantiqueira alone there are 62 private reserves of national heritage (RPPNs). “Today we find the biome shredded in 245 thousand fragments throughout the country,” Cardim said. “And forest restoration is crucial in linking these fragments together.”

**YES, THERE ARE PEOPLE COMMITTED TO FOREST GROWING.** In the Bocaina de Minas municipality – located partly inside the Itatiaia National Park, the first of its kind in Brazil, created in 1937 – there are at least three distinct initiatives of forest regrowth that resulted in verifiable outcomes for the restoration of wildlife and the natural springs. Environmentalist Lino Matheus de Sá Pereira, 74, is a forest grower. He estimates having planted 56 of the 82 hectares he preserves in the Vale das Flores since 1977, when he arrived in the region to live in Boa Vista Farm, formerly a cattle ranch.

It is calculated that a hundred years are necessary for the full regeneration of deforested areas after reforestation. But the forest Pereira has grown already has lush trees – he began transforming the grazing lands of Boa Vista as soon as the last payment for the property was made. “The end of the burn cycle used by previous farmers in the region was just as important,” he said. A third of his land was taken by capoeiras – the name given to regenerating woods in the Mantiqueira – that remained untouched in the first few years. Half the land was used for grazing. A pocket of native forest inside the farm became the source of seeds that Pereira turned into seedlings that grew stronger before

being planted. According to the environmentalist, the region's favorable humidity conditions – annual precipitation is over 1,600 mm – are a contributing factor driving regeneration. Another such factor is the terrain: because logging areas are hard to reach and there's little commercial interest in sloping lands for farming, part of the forest was preserved, allowing the wind, the bees, birds and bats to spread seeds and pollen. The water springing from his farm had a 30% increase in flow after the forest was restored.

While planting his trees, Pereira and other locals have been fighting for the forest in different fronts. In 1978 he created the Associação dos Protetores da Natureza dos Vales da Bocaina (Aprobo, Association of Nature Guardians of the Bocaina Valleys). At the time, he helped in reporting wood thieves and the illegal opening of roads into the Itatiaia park. He also noted that power lines to be installed in Bocaina de Minas would cross riparian lands, requiring deforestation – the proposed path of the power lines was subsequently altered. Amidst the dispute, he was sued – and acquitted – on charges of illegal logging and hunting. “I told the judge I’m a vegetarian!,” he recalls, jokingly.

In the following years, Pereira was a militant against a project that would build a dam flooding parts of the Mantiqueira and became an advocate of the management plan for the Environmental Protection Area (Área de Proteção Ambiental, APA) of the Serra da Mantiqueira. When he felt the first tremors from Parkinson's, he withdrew to the routine of his property and his many books, while the forest he planted continued to grow. His farm became a reference for environmentalists and hosts research and other alternative projects. On social media, Pereira still reports activity he sees as detrimental to nature.

“LANDOWNERS ARE VERY IMPORTANT FOR REFORESTATION,” said Marcia Hirota. “Restoration is only possible when there are areas available for planting, and that requires the owners’ authorization and their interest in taking part in such projects.” In the projects promoted by SOS Mata Atlântica, landowners make their lands available and the non-profit's partners are tasked with planting new seedlings of native species. “There's mutual interest in the initiative. The greatest beneficiary is society as a whole.” Some of the tales highlighting the dream of forest recovery are love stories. Artist and organic farmer Margarete Nogalis, 62, and musician Lucia



Mugia, 58, both teachers, met each other in 1985, in São Paulo. Seven years later, they developed a steady relationship – their dream became one and the same, and they were off to the mountains where they live happily to this day.

The land they bought, encompassing 39 sloping hectares isolated from the road by a steep ravine, was taken by native vegetation and was used by locals for logging and hunting. The two will never forget the date of September 19th, 2007. As they woke up that morning, they saw the property engulfed in smoke. A neighbor started to burn the forest in his property to make room for eucalyptus. The flames spread out. It was late dry season in the Mantiqueira, and the rains were still absent.

The fire burned at least 10 hectares of their property. Two days after it started, the region got its first rain of the season, putting out the flames. Nogalis and Mugia made the neighbor agree to provide them with 3 thousand seedlings of native species as compensation, and they soon began the reforestation effort. They also started a seedling production of their own, resorting to donation initiatives to amass more seedlings. “We counted all the way up to 8,742 trees successfully planted; after that, we stopped keeping track. I’m positive we’re over 10 thousand now,” said a proud Nogalis.

Tasked with protecting an area of 129,4 hectares located in Bocaina de Minas, the non-profit Associação Ave Lavrinha, for which Nogalis and Mugia work, has changed the outlook of farmer Vicente de Paula Costa, 58, from exploiting the land to restoring the forest. Since 1987, Costa has been responsible for planting 16,1 hectares of forest, according to the organization’s records.

Luciano Jardim, 47, manages a plant nursery in Visconde de Mauá. According to his estimates, the facility produces something between 2 thousand and 3 thousand trees per year. This forestry engineer said that anything he doesn’t sell ends up planted somewhere anyway – whether at the side of the road or at his family’s property of 10 hectares.

Jardim dedicates his time to planning and carrying out reforestation activities in properties and farms belonging to outsiders looking to enjoy the mountains’ nature. He says the best regeneration outcomes are reached when using seeds from around the area to be restored. “The seedlings are made from seeds genetically adapted to the local soil,” he said. “These individual forest restoration initiatives are an example of people’s

awareness of their role in society,” concludes Marcia Hirota. “It’s not about merely supporting the fauna and flora, but ensuring future generations can have a quality life.”

When it comes to restoring the forest of new lands, forestry engineer Luciano Jardim, 47, is quick to spot where the water is located. “Water is always on my mind,” he says, taking particular care with the reforestation of springs and riparian lands. He estimates he’s planted over 50 thousand trees.

When he took over the Boa Vista Farm, in 1979, Pereira began replacing the grazing grounds with species from the native flora. In the 30 years that followed, he estimates having planted some 20 thousand trees, of which 15 thousand are developing fully – there are some 2 thousand araucárias among them.


Owner of a vast library, the environmentalist is a sort of intellectual ambassador of the Mantiqueira. During the Rio 92 climate summit, he invited representatives from environmental entities from around the world to hop on a bus and go plant trees. The so-called Bosque das Nações [Grove of Nations] is alive and growing.

Margarete Nogalis and Lucia Mugia were introduced to the Mantiqueira in the 1980s, in the wake of friends that wanted to buy some land to live in a commune. The two were the only ones who carried on with that dream to the end. Their land, with three natural springs, is now a private reserve of national heritage called Morro do Elefante, giving the place permanent preservation status.

Cattle raising is still an important industry in the Mantiqueira, even as wildlife makes a return. With their motion-activated photo machine, Nogalis and Mugia have documented five onçaspardas (jaguars) that share their property, as well as other large and medium-sized mammals.

As a simple man of “very little” schooling who can barely read and write, farmer Vicente de Paula Costa has set many fires to the Mantiqueira forest, like so many other traditional local farmers, as a means of making room for crops and cattle. “Cambará, candeia, jacarandá, quaresmeira, araucária. I have planted pretty much everything,” he said.

The Atlantic Forest is one of the world’s richest and most threatened forests – there’s little more than 12% of its original vegetation (above). Its biome comprises an area



equivalent to 15% of the total Brazilian territory stretching through 17 states, of which 14 are coastal. It hosts some 72% of Brazil's population, seven of the country's nine largest drainage basins and three of the largest urban centres in South America. And it allows for activities crucial to our economy, such as agriculture, fishing, power generation, tourism and leisure.

**HENRIK KAUFHOLZ (DENMARK)**

## **SHIPWORMS ARE EATING OUR HERITAGE**



Henrik Kaufholz has been with the Danish daily Politiken for more than 40 years. Here he has been foreign correspondent in Germany and Russia, Readers' Editor and has covered different beats as environment, economy, the wars in the Balkans 1991-95 and Eastern Europe. Kaufholz has also been active in the Danish Union of Journalists as shop steward at Politiken and he served 4 years as member of Politiken's board of directors representing his colleagues. 1989 he was one of the founding members of the Danish Association for Investigative Journalism and from 2003 he was cofounder of the support structure 'Scoop', which over the years has funded app. 1.000 journalistic investigations in the Balkans, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Caucasus and Russia. Presently he is chair of the executive board of ECPMF – European Center for Press and Media Freedom.

# SHIPWORMS ARE EATING OUR HERITAGE

*By Henrik Kaufholz  
Politiken, Denmark - February 10, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
[https://www.submariner-network.eu/images/  
projects/BalticRIM/12\\_BalticRIM\\_in\\_Danish\\_news.pdf](https://www.submariner-network.eu/images/projects/BalticRIM/12_BalticRIM_in_Danish_news.pdf)*

*In Danish waters there is only metal left of the many ship wrecks. All wooden material has been eaten by 'the termites of the sea', which due to climate change are spreading eastwards along the German coast in the Baltic Sea. 100,000 well preserved ship wrecks are located here, and marine archaeologists are in despair: Shipworms have no natural enemies and the use of pesticides is prohibited.*

The summer of 2018 was exceptionally hot at the Baltic Sea. Hundreds of thousands of Germans, Swedes and Danes enjoyed bathing in the warm sea at all holiday resorts.

Also enjoying the warm water were shipworms, which over the past decades have spread slowly but relentlessly eastwards along the German coast.

Shipworms are also labelled 'termites of the sea' because they eat all wooden material they can find: bathing jetties, piers, groynes and last but not least ship wrecks.

This is of major concern for archaeologists and historians because at the bottom of the Baltic Sea there are approximately 100,000 well preserved wooden ship wrecks from the time of the Vikings to the present:

"This is an invaluable treasure of heritage from which we can learn a lot about trade, war, shipbuilding, daily life on board and a lot of other things from many centuries," says the world-famous marine archaeologist, David Gregory, from the Danish National Museum's department of conservation in Brede north of Copenhagen.

Till now this treasure of wrecks of which probably 6,000 are of special interest to scientists have been lying peacefully at the bottom of the sea with no shipworms in sight. Shipworms are only able to live and reproduce in warm and salty water, where they also have enough oxygen. So, the Eastern part of the Baltic Sea has until now never seen attacks of shipworms - the water is simply too fresh, i.e. not salty enough.

### ***Warmer and Warmer***

But this is changing. Shipworms of the very aggressive species *Terodo navalis* are currently thriving in the saltier part of Danish, German and Swedish waters and are spreading eastwards. According to new scientific research the reason is climate change, concludes the German biologist. Dr. Heike Lippert from the University of Rostock.

Dr. Lippert is the only scientist in the whole Baltic region who is monitoring shipworms systematically. Her research is financed by the German State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The State has a long coastline and over the last decades, it has renewed and repaired groynes at a cost of more than 33 million dollars.

According to Dr. Lippert's monitoring, the water at the German coast in the Baltic Sea in 2018 was warmer than ever registered before - 20.4 degrees centigrade. The water was almost as warm two summers earlier, in 2016, when she also registered a sudden growth in the population of shipworms.

"Our theory is that the shipworms are spreading eastwards because of the rising temperature of the sea water, and because of climate change this is a phenomenon we have to face and live with," says Heike Lippert.

"Over the last three years we have observed shipworms reproducing east of the island of Hiddensee, and they were found for first time along the island of Rugen in 2016. They have not yet reached the more eastward located island of Usedom, where we are also monitoring for shipworms."

"From time to time we find pieces of wood infested by shipworms far east of Rugen, but the water there is too fresh and cold for them to settle there on a permanent basis. So, they will die before they can do any harm."

## *Easy to Find*

In the German monitoring programme the scientists place small pieces of wood in 8 permanent monitoring stations. If a shipworm passes by it will certainly settle and eat of the wood pieces, and all the biologists have to do is count the holes where the worms are living.

At 3 stations the biologists are also registering the temperature of the water and its salinity. Especially the latter requires a lot of work and checking because algae and other living organisms settle on the instruments and so they must be cleaned every week.

“The salinity varies a little during the summer, but the temperature-which is one of the three most important living conditions for shipworms - is what is really changing at this time,” says Heike Lippert. She adds that the marine environment changes quickly and because of that it is not possible to mark exactly how far east in the Baltic Sea the shipworms are now living.

“This depends on currents, salinity and temperature. But the trend over the last decade is quite clear: They are moving eastwards.”

## *An Old Enemy*

Shipworms are an old problem. Both the ancient Egyptians and Greeks - shipworms are mentioned by both Aristotle and Ovid - were fighting shipworms of which there are many different species in all oceans.

According to new Swedish archaeological findings, the Vikings produced tar and used it to protect their famous longships against shipworms.

During Columbus' fourth expedition 1502-03 the shipworms literally ate the frames away under the feet of the crews of the ships 'Gallega' and 'Vizcaina' and in the beginning of the 1730'ies they had pierced Dutch sea dikes, piers and lock gates to such an extent that they collapsed during floods and high tides. Several hundred people lost their lives.

A particularly violent attack happened almost 100 years ago in the USA. On a peaceful day in the autumn of 1920, the piers of the shipbuilding company Benica in San

San Francisco began to sway. Suddenly they collapsed. Trucks, equipment and building materials fell into the water. Finally, a customs Office also collapsed.

The shipbuilders were at a loss, because the collapse was not caused by one of the frequent earthquakes. But then what? In the following weeks more piers and ferry berths collapsed.

Chemists, biologists and engineers did find an explanation. The very solid wooden structures were pierced by shipworms. The barks were suddenly so soft that you could sink your nails into them, but the holes left by the shipworms are very small and you have to look very carefully to see them. So, nobody had noticed. The costs of repair works amounted to what would in our time be 15 billion dollars.

The bay at San Francisco was considered free of shipworms because of very low salinity. It was precisely for that reason that commander John Sloat of the US Navy decided to place a new base for his warships here “safe from wind, waves, the enemy and marine worms” as he stated in his order.

Commander Sloat feared the Pacific species of shipworms, *Bankia setacea*, which can only live in very salty waters. But the American navy officer did not take the cousin of *Bankia*, *Teredo navalis*, into account. *Teredo* is the most aggressive of all the species and has been found in all seven seas. And so, most of his port collapsed.

## ***Wrecks Are Reburied***

The Danish veteran diver Gert Normann Andersen who runs the company JD-Contractor and has also established the Sea War Museum in the town of Thyborøn knows first-hand how shipworms cause havoc: “When we dive in the North Sea, Skagerrak or Kattegat we find only the metal parts of the ships—all wooden material is gone. Every part made of wood has been eaten away unless it has been covered by sediment.”

“When we find ships built of iron there are no decks, no doors, no lifeboats left. When we find new wooden wrecks there is usually only the engine, the anchor and other technical equipment left. The shipworms really finish their meal.”



A few years ago the Swedish biologist Christin Appelqvist estimated that approximately 100 ship wrecks have been attacked by shipworms in the area between the German island of Rugen and the small Swedish town of Klagshamn in Scania, where shipworms have been registered in recent years.

This is of specific concern to Jens Auer, who is head of the marine archaeological department of the government of the State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and follows the monitoring done by Dr. Lippert closely:

“We have a lot of wrecks along the coasts worthy of preservation and some of them lie exactly east of Rugen, where Lippert is working. The shipworms have no natural enemies, so our only option is to bury the wrecks, cover them with tarpaulins and gravel and thus see that there is no oxygen for the shipworms. Without oxygen the shipworms will die,” says Jens Auer who earlier in his career was associate professor at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense.

His colleague in the State of Schleswig-Holstein, Daniel Zwick, is also advocating the method of covering the wrecks and he is also active in the BalticRIM-project, which is working to improve planning procedures in coastal regions:

“But for covering to succeed you need fairly calm currents and wind conditions. My State also has a coastline in the North Sea, and there we really face the extreme powers of the weather and sea. A wreck can lie deep under the bottom of the sea for many years and then suddenly appear after a storm,” he says and points to the Hornum-wreck from 1690.

“Here the strong erosion is a much bigger problem for us than shipworms. In the year after the Hornum-wreck rose to the surface, we could follow how the sea ate its way 10 meters into the coast in just two months. Because of that the wreck was splintered by the waves and spread by the tide. We had no other option than to just look at what happened.”

### ***Expensive to Raise the Wrecks***

In Denmark the Agency for Palaces and Culture is responsible for underwater heritage in the seas around the kingdom, and the consultant working with the subject, Torben

Malm, is also advocating the method of covering the wrecks to protect them against shipworms and general decay:

“This is not just about ship wrecks. We must also protect several valuable settlements from the stone age, which are today under water. In our waters, we really do have a lot of valuable heritage to protect against shipworms. We cannot take this heritage for granted any longer.”

It is of course possible to save smaller parts of the wrecks, but “it would be almost prohibitive from a financial point of view to raise the wrecks and exhibit the wrecks as we have done at the Viking Ships Museum in Roskilde and the Vasa museum in Stockholm,” Malm says.

Some ship wrecks and old settlements have been covered with a carpet of sand and gravel - a layer of between 1 and 2 meters.

“But we do not have money for diving to keep an eye on the situation of each ship or settlement. For this we have to rely on sports divers with whom we have developed a fairly good cooperation.”

When unknown wrecks suddenly appear during construction of new ports, tunnels or bridges the agency sees that they are registered, examined and filmed. After that they are reburied. The cost of just one of these fairly simple operations runs into millions of dollars:

“This is a clear message about the financial dimensions of the management of the heritage at the bottom of the sea. Nobody advocates to raise just a few of the most valuable wrecks and UNESCO also recommends this so-called ‘in situ’ method of preservation,” Malm says.

### ***Not a Worm at All***

The shipworm, *Teredo navalis*, is actually not a worm at all, but a mussel or mollusk-a drilling one. And it is also not eating the wood itself.

“It is difficult to get shipworms out of the wood alive, so there is a lot we do not know about *Teredo navalis* yet,” explains Heike Lippert.

“For one thing we do not know the origin. Nor do we know why they are more aggressive in some years than in others.”

Shipworms - as they are still called by sailors and engineers - live in wood - the softer the better. Every individual lays from 50,000 to 2 million eggs. The larvae swim or are transported by currents for 30 days and are spread around in this way. When their threads feel wood the larvae at once fasten themselves and start drilling.

In Northern European waters they will usually grow to 20-30 centimeters long and 9-10 millimeters thick, but much larger individuals have been found in the Pacific Ocean.

The shipworm or drilling clam insulates its narrow corridor with chalk and is also able to shut the corridor to survive sudden changes of the environment-lack of oxygen or pollution-for 5 to 6 weeks. The drilling holes are tiny and as wooden piers and other wooden structures in seawater are covered by other organisms such as algae and seaweed, the attacks are usually not noticed until it is too late.

It drills its corridors with two small sharp plates which are also the classical way of identifying the species. The drilled material is turned into sugar by enzymes. These enzymes are produced by bacteria that live symbiotically with the mussel - they are not an organic part of the *Teredo navalis* itself.

### ***Put a Shipworm in Your Tank***

At the US government's research facility Ocean Genome Legacy Center of New England Biolabs scientists have for years explored the digestion system of commander Sloat's enemy, *Bankia setacea*.

In a telephone interview the director of the center, Daniel Distel, tells Politiken “that here we have found a quite new way of breaking down biological material with a huge potential for the production of bio fuel.”

“Most animals, including people, have beneficial bacteria in their digestive system to help them digest food and would quickly become sick and malnourished without them. But shipworms have no bacteria in the part of the gut where their food is digested.

instead, they house symbiotic bacteria inside specialized cells in their gills, a location far removed from the gut,” explains director Distel.

“No other animal in the world is known to rely on bacteria outside of its digestive system to produce its digestive enzymes and no other intracellular bacterium is known to produce enzymes that function in the outside world of the host. This discovery can be used on an industrial scale, but we have not been able to find money for more research.”

### ***“Getting Worse”***

Shipworms have no natural enemies -other than man. Authorities in Denmark, Germany and Sweden cannot do much about these small drilling mussels but repair the damage. Clearly a Sisyphean task.

In Gothenburg in Sweden deputy manager Anders Soderberg from Grefab, which is managing all marinas in the region, estimates that his company is spending 35,000 dollars every year to replace posts damaged by shipworms.

“We have also tried to use Steel posts, but wooden posts are simply more appropriate in marinas,” he explains in an e-mail.

Danish marinas have also learned a lesson or two. “Almost every Danish marina is reporting attacks by shipworms,” says director Jesper Højenvang from the Organization of Danish Marinas. “We have no scientific research but judging by the reports from our members the attacks by shipworms are getting worse and worse.”

It is a major problem for the port authorities that for the moment there are no approved pesticides to fight or protect against shipworms.

“The procedure to get a new remedy approved is very expensive and we very often get the explanation that the market for this is too small,” says consultant Søren Bank-Achton from the Danish Technological Institute.

“I have not heard of any firms which have products ready for the approval procedure.”

“So, for the moment we recommend the use of tropical wood. We now know that shipworms find it very, very difficult to drill and live in tropical types of wood. But even if you use wood with certificates of sustainability, you must ask yourself if this is a good idea - just look at the carbon footprint of this wood. We have to import it from the other side of the globe. On top of this tropical wood comes in many different qualities.”

### ***More Bad News***

In the Netherlands where shipworms 300 years ago took hundreds of lives, the biologist Peter Paalvast from the Consulting company Ecoconsult has tried to look into the future. He does not like what he sees.

“New threats from an old enemy” is the headline of his report about the consequences of climate change for the Port of Rotterdam - the largest port in Europe.

“We have to expect that shipworms will swim 25 kilometers further up the Rhine than today. The reason is that with the rising sea levels more salty water than today will flow up the river. Also, we will have less rainfall in the hinterland due to higher temperatures,” he says.

“As a consequence of climate change this problem will also hit other Northern European ports situated at rivers. According to brand new calculations this will be even worse in Southern Europe.”


Captions, pages 21-22

**Wormhunting.** The German biologist Heike Lippert catch the ‘termites of the sea’ in traps, which she installs every year along the coast.

**Favorite food.** These small plates of wood is the favorite food of shipworms. Its therefore easy for the biologists to find out if there is attack of shipworms.

Captions, pages 23-24

**Replacing.** The Swedish city of Gothenburg has to use 35,000 dollars every year to replace wood attacked by shipworms.



**Sharp jaws.** The shipworms look innocent, but they are able to penetrate and spoil solid wood structures in a few years.

The map:

### **Treasure at the bottom**

Approximately 100.000 well preserved ship wrecks are lying at the bottom of the Baltic Sea. Shipworms eating all wooden material on their way can due to climate change now spread to areas where used to die because of lack of oxygen.

Red dots: registered ship wrecks

**LAURIE GOERING, CLAUDIO ACCHERI  
(UNITED KINGDOM)**

## **RUNNING DRY: COMPETING FOR WATER ON A THIRSTY PLANET**



Laurie Goering since 2009 has edited the Thomson Reuters Foundation's award-winning daily news website on the human impacts of climate change. Previously she was a Chicago Tribune correspondent based in New Delhi, Johannesburg, Havana, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro and London.



Claudio Accheri, originally from Sardinia, is an award-winning journalist, filmmaker and photographer focused on digital storytelling.

# RUNNING DRY: COMPETING FOR WATER ON A THIRSTY PLANET

*By Laurie Goering and Claudio Accheri  
Thomson Reuters Foundation - May 31st, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://packages.trust.org/running-dry/index.html>*

In India's 'Silicon Valley' tech hub of Bangalore, where gleaming office complexes and apartment blocks have sprouted faster than the plumbing to serve them, only 60% of the water the city needs each day arrives through its water pipes.

Much of the rest is pumped from groundwater wells and delivered to homes and offices by a fleet of private tanker trucks that growl through the city of 12 million's streets.

But Bangalore's groundwater is running dry. A government think tank last year predicted the city - like others in India, including New Delhi - could run out of usable groundwater as early as 2020 as aquifers deplete.


By 2030, half of India's population - now about 1.4 billion people - may lack enough drinking water, the report predicted.

Around the world, fresh water is fast becoming a dangerously scarce resource, driving a surge in fights to secure supplies and fears over rising numbers of deaths in water conflicts.

## Water Conflict

Growing populations, more farming and economic growth, climate change and a rush of people to cities all are increasing pressure on the world's limited water supplies, researchers say.





U.N. data shows 2 billion people - a quarter of the world's population - now are using water much faster than natural sources, such as groundwater, can be replenished.

In 2015, the United Nations' 193 members agreed a new set of global development goals, including one to give everyone access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030.

But in places from Africa to the Middle East, "big rivers are drying out, the population is increasing, demand is piling up and we can't supply (people) with water and food", warned General Tom Middendorp, a former Dutch defence chief.

Globally, the number of conflicts related to water scarcity has risen from roughly 16 in the 1990s to about 73 in the past five years, according to a chronology maintained by the Pacific Institute, which tracks freshwater security issues.

In the 1990s, conflicts driven by water scarcity led to about 350 deaths, in places from Yemen to Nigeria, according to the chronology based on news reports and other sources.

But in the last five years, at least 3,000 people - and perhaps more than 10 times that many, if estimates of refugee deaths by Medicins Sans Frontieres are included - have died in clashes related to water in a huge range of countries, it noted.

"We see conflicts over water, unfortunately, almost everywhere around the world now as competition grows over the scarce resource," said Peter Gleick, co-founder of the California-based Pacific Institute.

"If you look at the number of conflicts over water in the past few decades, it's going up exponentially."

Water shortages are likely to lead to a growing death toll in coming decades, as farmers struggle to access enough water to grow crops and families turn to riskier water sources to slake their thirst, researchers say.

So far, "with very rare exceptions, no one dies of literal thirst", Gleick said. "But more and more people die from contaminated water or conflicts over access to water".

Besides fuelling conflict, increased water scarcity is also beginning to spark widespread reassessment of how water is captured, managed, shared and used around the world.

In the American West, legal challenges - including by Native American tribes - may reshape old water rights systems that give farmers or cities with “senior” rights as much water as they like, leaving others and natural ecosystems increasingly dry.

The West needs rules “reflective of modern needs and desires, rather than the rules we’ve had for 150 years and have had to stick by”, said Bob Anderson, director of the Native American Law Center at the University of Washington.

Thirsty cities from Singapore to Los Angeles, worried their supplies of water may fall short, are trying innovative ideas to cut water demand and find new sources of the precious liquid.

Singapore, for instance, has thrown a wall across a seafront bay, gradually turning what once was saltwater into a huge new freshwater reservoir for the city-state, which today relies on neighboring Malaysia for much of its water.

“It is crucial to be water-independent,” said Adam Reutens-Tan, a Singapore resident whose family has slashed its water use, through measures from serving one-pot meals to save on dish-washing to taking five-minute showers.

Los Angeles, which built its growth on water sucked from the distant Owens and Colorado rivers, is looking to capture stormwater and more rain to recharge its own aquifers as climate change and competition threaten its old supplies.

It is also stepping up conservation - including paying residents \$3 per square foot to shrink or get rid of water-demanding green lawns.

“As we looked at the future and where we were going to get water reliably, sustainably, we were really looking within,” said Rich Harasick, senior assistant general manager for the city’s Department of Water and Power.

In increasingly parched southern Africa, worsening water shortages in 2017 led South Africa’s Cape Town to launch a public countdown to “Day Zero” when it feared the city’s taps would run dry.

That threat was averted after residents joined a successful drive to slash the city’s water use. Now city officials are restructuring where the city will get its water in the future, including from more wells and desalination plants.

But in rural areas of South Africa, water shortages are also driving villagers to experiment with new drought-hardy crops, and new ways of capturing, sharing and conserving water.

In the village of KwaMusi and others nearby, drought-hardy beans and amaranth - grown in fields snaked through with water-sipping drip irrigation hoses - are showing up on plates once filled mainly with maize porridge, the region's old staple.

Rainwater harvesting tanks, to catch the runoff from tin roofs, also are being installed, and irrigation pumps purchased, on a continent with one of the world's lowest irrigation rates.

"These small changes mean the community will have something to eat and sell when water becomes more scarce," said Brandon Nthianandham, a rural worker for a food security trust helping farmers in the region.

But in many water-short areas, conflict over limited supplies is growing, particularly as dry conditions set in again this year.

"Sometimes if you go to a nearby water source, other communities are standing guard at the water. They will beat you if you come near it," said Talent Zuma, a resident of Nxamalala, a village in KwaZulu-Natal province.

"People say the next war will be over water, but here it feels like it has already begun."

One problem facing efforts to resolve worsening water disputes is that many of them are not taking place between countries, where water-sharing rules may already be in place, but between counties, adjoining villages or even neighbours.

"The tools of international agreements do not apply in these kinds of conflicts," Gleick said. "We have far fewer tools to address violent conflicts between neighbours, between ethnic groups, between farmers or pastoralists."

Water conflicts between countries may grow as well, with only about 60% of transboundary water sources covered by international agreements as of 2017, according to a 2018 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) report that looked at 62 of 153 countries that share water sources.

To deal with rising pressure on limited water supplies, finding ways to grow more food with less water is particularly important, analysts say.

About 70% of freshwater used each year around the world goes to agriculture, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

As the world's population continues to expand, finding ways to reduce farming's share of the world's water, while still growing more food, will be crucial to prevent worsening hunger, including in fast-growing cities, food experts say.

Global trade in food - which is effectively trade in the water used to produce it - may also need reconsideration.

In Chile's Petorca province, a three-hour drive north of Santiago, expansive avocado fields make Chile the world's third largest exporter of the wildly popular fruit, dubbed "green gold".

But as big corporate avocado farms have stepped up production, climate change has brought more unreliable rainfall to the region, driving more severe droughts.


That combination has led to increasingly problematic water shortages in Petorca, forcing some residents to rely on trucked-in drinking water - and raising questions about whether avocados for export should remain the region's priority.

"There are people here who water their avocado plants every day, and we have to drink water from trucks that we don't even know is safe," said Catalina Espinoza, who lives on the edge of thousands of hectares of avocado plantations.

The biggest problem facing efforts to reshape water use in an era of climate change, population growth and fiercer competition is inertia - a reluctance to abandon old ways of doing things, Gleick said.

"It's the idea that there's always another river out there, there's always another groundwater well we can sink," he said. "That's the way we thought about water ... in the 20th century."

But providing enough food and water in the future - and finding ways to head off rising conflict - will require much smarter and more efficient use of the limited resource.



“We’re going to have to do things differently ... and we have to move toward that more sustainable future faster than we are moving today,” Gleick said.

Likith R., who runs a shop that manufactures the tanks needed for water deliveries in Bangalore, agrees. With tap water perpetually short in the megacity, his business is booming, he said.

“But as a citizen I’m really petrified about the water situation here,” he admitted.

“It’s scary to think about, because I don’t really know what the future holds for our children.”

# MINORITY VOICES: VITAL TO STRONG JOURNALISM

Good journalism is more than bare facts, official statements and the opinions of those who speak the loudest. It is also the story of those most affected, whose voices are too often not heard.

Minority voices are vital to telling the full impact of a story. It is their civil rights that are most often violated. It is they who are most affected by climate change and environmental disaster. A society's treatment of minority groups is the best measure of it as a just society.

The stories that set themselves apart seek out such voices and put a real and human face to the importance of the issue being explored.

By giving voice to those too often excluded from discourse, whether through gender, race, religion, disability, geography or any other factor, we give voice to the most affected by the injustice in our society. Recognizing the ways multiple minority identities might intersect adds depth to a story.

In the case of the winning civil rights story on justice, for instance, the underlying injustice explored was a result of people brought before the courts in a remote area in Canada's north, far from the metropolitan centres of government and justice.

Many were also members of indigenous communities, a population disproportionately targeted by Canada's justice system, as well as the target of deep and systemic racism.

Giving them voice uncovered an important story, and helped make it clear to a wider audience, ultimately helping bring about the change needed. Such stories can only be truly told by including diverse voices.

**STUART LAIDLAW**

*National representative – Communications, UNIFOR, Canada*



# **CONTRIBUTION TO CIVIL RIGHTS**

# CONTRIBUTION TO CIVIL RIGHTS

This category, in which eight entries made the shortlist, put the focus on stories of people trapped by social and economic conditions, and on the suffering of minorities caught up in events beyond their control, as well as instances of justice denied.

Two reports on the shortlist highlighted innovative ways of confronting a denial of political rights. One focused on actions to assist visually impaired voters in Nigeria and a second, well-written and perceptive, reflected on how art and theatre can become a vehicle for political action in India.

The issue of migration provided the grim background for another entry, which revealed how hospitals on the Colombia-Venezuelan border have become deathtraps for migrants, and yet another focused on the personal suffering of a victim of domestic abuse. Although more questions needed to be asked, this report hinted at how cultural conditions add to the pain of abuse.


The judges also considered two illuminating reports on the plight of women caught up in the shadows of society in very different situations. From the United Kingdom was a story looking at the lives of sex workers in a suburb of London and from the Philippines a report on the ordeal of women living in a society where abortion is illegal and cultural pressures exist on all sides, and where women trying to take control of their own bodies often pay a heavy price.

A further story that was considered dealt with the plight of a journalist targeted and locked up in Nigeria for two years without trial.

While all of the shortlisted entries had merit, the judges found themselves unable to identify three clear winners from the shortlist, although they did recognize the excellence and relevance of the story selected to receive the third prize - **Katie May** (Canada) for her report *Remote Life, Rough Justice*.

This story explained how justice is delayed for many residents of northern Manitoba in Canada - people who are caught in an overburdened legal system that is starved of resources.





In this sparsely populated area the justice system struggles to uphold rights most Canadians would take for granted. Overwhelming poverty, addiction and intergenerational trauma feed locally into some of the highest violent crime rates in the country. Court sessions are often snowed under - figuratively and literally - by the task of delivering justice across a vast geographical area with grossly inadequate resources, and where systemic racism thrives.

The judges recognized a theme here which is true in many parts of the world, but rarely makes the headlines – how geography leads to a denial of justice. Although this was a surprising situation to emerge in an economically developed country, the report underlined the importance of public interest journalism and how resourceful and committed journalism can bring about change.

# THIRD PRIZE WINNER

**KATIE MAY (CANADA)**

**REMOTE LIFE,  
ROUGH JUSTICE**



*Photo by Ruth Bonneville/  
Winnipeg Free Press*

Katie May is a Canadian journalist based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has been working in journalism for more than a decade, working to shed light on often-overlooked parts of society. She has spent much of her career in small newsrooms, starting out as a high-school student at her hometown daily newspaper, and has chased stories in various parts of the country, from southern Ontario to the Arctic. She is passionate about all kinds of news reporting, with a focus on human rights and systemic policy issues.

# PART 1

## REMOTE LIFE, ROUGH JUSTICE

*By Katie May*  
*Winnipeg Free Press – April 18, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*  
<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/contempt-for-courtremote-life-rough-justice-508757542.html>

**Justice delayed is the reality for many northern Manitoba residents caught in an overburdened legal system starved for resources.**

Thompson — In the basement of a government building, a small black-and-white sign points around a corner to Manitoba's northernmost law courts.

Through an unsecured, 1970s-era lobby that serves as a public waiting room and makeshift lawyer workspace, a set of double wood doors opens into a beige, 48-seat courtroom. Here, atop a wood-panelled dais, a judge is drawing the line.

"I can't, in good conscience," Thompson provincial court Judge Todd Rambow said on this Thursday in December.

"As regrettable as it is, I can't have a further matter proceed before the court," he continued, looking out at the lawyers and at the courtroom gallery, empty except for sheriff's officers and one reporter.

His seat overlooks the podiums of an on-duty defence lawyer and a provincial Crown attorney — who aired her exasperation 30 minutes earlier when the clock ticked past 5 p.m. and Rambow asked if they could work late.

"I've had a really long week. I'm at my end's wit," the Crown said.

Two court clerks, already resigned to the approaching hours of overtime — "We'll be here quite late doing paperwork anyway," one told the judge — exchanged hesitant

glances and agreed to press on. But now it's almost 5:30, and Rambow is faced with presiding over a contested bail hearing.

Sheriff's officers then ushered a 27-year-old man into the prisoner's box for his first court appearance on two counts of assault and a breach of probation. He'd been in RCMP cells for two days and wanted to apply for bail. Instead, he got an apology from the judge. It's too late in the day.

Although the man doesn't consent to the delay — “so noted,” Rambow responded when a Legal Aid articling student pointed that out for the record — his case is bumped to the next bail docket, four days away. The sheriffs will have to drive him 400 kilometres southwest to the nearest jail, in The Pas, and he'll be first in line to make an appearance by video when Thompson's in-custody court resumes Monday afternoon.

By the time he gets his first chance to hear any details of the prosecution's case against him and ask a judge to release him, the man will have spent seven days in jail.

“I always agonize over these situations, because I don't want anybody to not have their bail hearing in a timely fashion, but the simple fact is, I just can't do it today,” Rambow said.

This is the norm in northern Manitoba, where the justice system struggles to uphold rights most Canadians would take for granted. Overwhelming poverty, addiction and intergenerational trauma feed into some of the highest violent-crime rates in the country. Court sessions are often snowed under — figuratively and literally — by the task of delivering justice across vast geography with grossly inadequate resources. And systemic racism thrives.

Thompson, the largest city in northern Manitoba, is also the judicial centre of the North. Its basement court office is the hub for anyone arrested within a 400-kilometre radius. Its judges, lawyers and court staff travel to circuit courts in 15 different communities on any given day of the week. There is no jail or remand centre — everyone held in custody has to be shipped to jails located at least four hours south. Timely access to bail hearings is just one of many challenges facing the northern court.

The *Free Press* is focusing primarily on bail-related problems in the first of a three-part series looking at access to justice in northern Manitoba.

In remote communities, it's common for people who've been arrested to wait anywhere from a few days to a week before they get a chance to ask a judge to release them on bail. It's a right that can be exercised seven days a week in Winnipeg, but only 2 1/2 days a week for anyone arrested in Manitoba's northernmost communities.

After their arrest, they'll be offered perfunctory phone calls with an on-duty lawyer and a justice of the peace, and they'll be advised to wait until they see a judge to apply for bail. In order to do that, they all have to be flown or driven to Thompson, where bail hearings take place Monday afternoons and Tuesdays and Thursdays, alongside all kinds of other in-custody cases squeezed onto the same docket.

The right not to be denied reasonable bail without just cause is enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Under federal law, bail hearings must occur within 24 hours after arrest, but the Criminal Code says if a judge or justice of the peace is not available within 24 hours, the accused must see one "as soon as possible." In northern Manitoba, lawyers say, timely bail hearings are the exception, not the rule.

The denial of timely bail and other systemic rights abuses on display in northern courts have caught the attention of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, which has vowed to take legal action against what it calls the "unconstitutional design" of northern courts in Manitoba and other provinces.

"The problem is that literally innocent people who have not been tried are spending time in jail in a way that should never happen," Michael Bryant, the Toronto-based executive director of the CCLA, told the *Free Press*.

"The constitution applies everywhere in Canada, and the remote communities need to tailor their bail system to the constitution, not to their fiscal challenges."

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Over the course of a week in Thompson in December, the *Free Press* observed in-custody court sessions in the three-courtroom basement facility that serves as the judicial centre of the North and deals with a per capita caseload roughly 14 times the size of Winnipeg's provincial court.

During those court sessions, people charged with crimes who were there to apply for bail regularly ran out of time. The majority of successful bail applications were cases in

which the Crown agreed the accused should be released, raising questions about why they were held in custody in the first place.

Even after release had been granted, some people had to wait in jail because they either couldn't afford the court-ordered cash bail or they didn't have anyone who could travel to pick them up. A youth had to be taken into care of a child-welfare agency in order to be released back to his home community, because no adult could travel to court to get him. Or the docket was simply too long to get to everyone, even though family members were present to sign on as sureties.

In other cases observed by the *Free Press*, some accused had their next court dates set weeks away on the first appearance, as per court policy, while a man pleaded guilty to a criminal breach charge because he couldn't afford the plane ticket required to get to a previous court appearance.

In one case, a Winnipeg Court of Queen's Bench judge crafted a sentence specifically so a man would be kept in jail "through the very darkest, dreariest days" of winter that awaited him at home in a remote First Nations community. In other cases, judges tasked with protecting victims in small communities ordered offenders to live elsewhere.

## **SENTENCE TARGETS 'DARKNESS'**

Sandwiched between two sheriffs, he kept his head down, looking toward his leg irons and black running shoes. The courtroom, decorated with bright blue paint, bold orange chairs and beige carpet, was small enough that they all sat sideways, shoulders facing the front of the room as the Winnipeg judge spoke.

Desmond Osborne, 42, was found guilty in spring 2018 of drunkenly raping a woman on a porch after a party that featured too much homebrew. He'd switched off the exterior light so no one could see them, so no one would stop him. At his trial, the alcoholic since childhood testified his perception of consent was different after he'd been drinking. He was convicted of sexual assault, and on a Monday morning in December, he'd been brought in to one of Thompson's three courtrooms to find out what his punishment would be.

Court of Queen's Bench Justice Sheldon Lanchbery told him he'd been thinking a lot about the sentence he'd impose. Osborne had already spent a year-and-a-half in jail — with time-and-a-half credit, it worked out to almost 2 1/2 years. The Crown asked for a 3 1/2-year sentence, and his defence lawyer countered with a request for a maximum of 30 months, saying Osborne had been a "model inmate" while in jail, and requested that he be placed on probation going forward.

After hearing arguments from both lawyers, Lanchbery asked a question. "Is there any point," he wondered out loud, in sending Osborne back to his home in Shamattawa, a remote fly-in community of about 1,000 in northern Manitoba, at this time of year, when it is "dark and cold" and there's not much to do?

Deciding against it, Lanchbery came up with a sentence designed to keep Osborne, a Cree man, behind bars during the winter. Instead of ordering a specific number of days in jail going forward, Lanchbery worked backwards from the date he had already decided Osborne should be released: March 15, in time for spring.

"As you heard me say, I'm doing that to keep you in through the very darkest, dreariest days that Shamattawa has to offer, and so that you may be out in time to participate in the caribou hunt. As well, I'm doing that so that you can plan to be out on a very specific day. You can take steps to ensure there are people in Shamattawa on your release that are not going to be those people who drag you into their circumstances, but people who will support you," Lanchbery told Osborne.

As he imposed a sentence that suggested jail would be preferable to spending winter in an isolated First Nations community, Lanchbery told Osborne he understood the traumatic effects of colonization, residential schools and Osborne's own family history of abuse, neglect and drug addiction.

"Although the white man such as myself can speak of reconciliation, it is not ours to give. It is ours only to offer. We must be seen as being cognizant of our responsibilities, but it will be for the Indigenous community to tell the white man, tell me, if we are successful in our offerings," he said.

"Cree people are honourable people. Their heritage is wonderful and rich. When you don't follow the teachings of the Cree people, just like the white man who doesn't

follow the Christian teachings, gets themselves in trouble. There's a baseline there that's important for you to consider."

— *Katie May*

Some of the very same practices were examined during Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry 28 years ago, only to be raised and brushed off many times since.

As the provincial government undergoes an internal review of courts on its northern circuit, promises technology upgrades and pushes for greater "efficiency," according to Manitoba's justice minister, it appears a group of northern lawyers has had enough. They have signed on to a charter challenge that awaits a hearing in the Court of Queen's Bench this spring. A desperate and ongoing lack of resources for the North is their common refrain.

"Under-resourcing leads to miscarriages of justice," said Thompson defence lawyer Meagan Jemmett.

"I think the individual people in the system are, by and large, really disturbed by the things that they see happen. It's just a resource issue."

Despite decades of pleading for help to fix a broken system — via internal court committees, meetings with government officials, requests for a stand-alone bail court and even higher-court rulings decrying practices that stack the system against people who are already marginalized — very little has changed in northern Manitoba.

The chronically overburdened and understaffed provincial court office in Thompson has seen people spend a month or more behind bars before they get a meaningful court appearance, having had little, if any, contact with lawyers, their families or the outside world.

Though less common, those cases have become cautionary examples of what happens when people who haven't been proven guilty get lost in the justice system. The phrase "falling through the cracks" is repeated over and over when northern judges and lawyers talk about extreme cases on the official court record. They've been left to wonder whether anyone is listening, whether anyone in the south even cares.



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In an unprecedented move, 10 lawyers who have worked in Thompson are lending their names to a constitutional challenge that calls for criminal charges to be dropped in two cases because the accused couldn't get timely bail hearings.

"As a Crown attorney in Thompson between June of 2014 and June of 2017, I witnessed thousands of accused be practically denied the right to reasonable bail due to this crippling lack of resources," Jacqueline Halliburn wrote in her affidavit.

## ***BUSY DAYS***

The day-to-day operation of the criminal justice system in northern Manitoba depends on relatively new lawyers.

Of the 27 lawyers practising in Thompson, 12 of them were called to the bar within the past five years. Two articling students for Legal Aid Manitoba regularly take on duty counsel duties for that office, which, along with the Crown's office, has seen high turnover and problems with keeping staff in recent years.

Many of the junior lawyers who spoke to the Free Press said working in the north gave them the chance to get much more experience on serious criminal cases than they would if they started their careers in an urban area.

Concerns "that they needed a little bit more help" made their way to the Law Society of Manitoba, which has started a volunteer mentorship program, says Winnipeg lawyer Roberta Campbell, who served on the Law Society committee that came up with the idea. She is one of five Winnipeg lawyers who signed on in December. They distributed their cell phone numbers to northern defence lawyers and encouraged them to call.

"They are junior, and they face some serious issues in the North. They certainly need some guidance on how to deal with some of those issues," says Campbell, who has been a lawyer for 25 years and has worked in the north.

Court dockets in northern Manitoba, she says, are "horrendously busy."

“When I used to go up to the north regularly, it was astounding the volume that they had to deal with, and now, we’re dealing with that volume with relatively junior lawyers,” Campbell says.

There is a larger concern about a dearth of data on the supply and demand of legal services in Manitoba, says Allison Fenske of the Public Interest Law Centre.

“There is a perception that often, justice depends on where you live or your ability to access justice depends on where you live, and that there are serious geographic disparities in terms of the services that are offered and the services that people have access to,” Fenske says, but there is a lack of standardized data.

To tackle the issue would require more investment in the North, she says.

“When we talk about potential solutions, we can’t focus simply on solving the issue in Winnipeg. We have to look outside of the perimeter, and to look at places where the needs are arguably greater in terms of communities that don’t have the base-level of services that folks in Winnipeg enjoy and are able to access,” Fenske says.

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A national court ruling could be what’s necessary to force the justice system to improve access to justice in remote communities, a criminologist says.

The Supreme Court could cause a reckoning with bail practices the same way it cracked down on widespread court delays in its 2016 Jordan decision, says Prof. Nicole Myers, a criminologist in the sociology department at Queen’s University who has studied pre-trial detention in Canada.

“Maybe we need a case about rural people and their access to technology and access to bail in a meaningful way... we need a decision that comes from the Supreme Court before we’re going to get to a place where we start taking this as the very real and serious concern that it is,” she said.

“Something needs to be done, because nobody should be denied their bail hearing when they’re ready for it. If the issue is that they’re not ready to proceed, fine. But otherwise, you have the right to have your bail hearing without delay.”

As reverberations from a recent groundbreaking Supreme Court ruling to curtail pre-trial custody make their way to courts across Canada, Myers says it will be interesting to see how the justice system responds.

In late March, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that people who are in jail awaiting their trials must be brought back to court at least every 90 days. The decision aims to stop people from languishing in custody if they have been denied bail or haven't had a bail hearing while they wait for their charges to be dealt with in court.

— **Katie May**

Halliburn declined a *Free Press* request for comment, as did other lawyers reluctant to speak publicly about the challenge. She said the written statement speaks for itself.

In other affidavits filed in court as part of the case, the lawyers draw attention to the court's systemic failures, including a severe lack of court time for bail hearings, problems with receiving police disclosures, and delays in approving legal aid applications. They point out problems with provincial policies that mandate court proceedings be shut down by 5 p.m. every day and require court dates to be set four weeks away, even on an accused's first appearance, because the court is too busy to have people appear before a judge in the early stages of their cases.

"In some instances, a lawyer has not yet been assigned to the accused by the remand date," states a joint affidavit from a group of defence lawyers.

A measure once considered an innovative solution to curb court delays in the North has become another way for people to slip through the cracks while waiting for their cases to be dealt with.

The custody co-ordinator's docket, as it's called, has been used in Thompson since April 2013, according to documents obtained by the *Free Press*. It was designed to be an on-paper parking spot to prevent needless in-person or video appearances that waste valuable court time in the stretched-thin system.

The idea, developed by an internal Justice Innovation committee, is that an accused's next court date will be set a month down the line so they'll have time to get a lawyer, who

can bring the case back to court anytime. But in some cases, as noted in the affidavit and described by several lawyers who spoke to the *Free Press*, people weren't being pulled out of the parking spot and brought back to court — they stayed in jail for weeks.

In recent months, the court has kept a closer eye on that docket, reminding lawyers weekly about clients who are on it. Some northern lawyers said it's a good system — when it's working properly. Others described it as a way to push those accused of crimes in the North “out of sight, out of mind.”

“All of us bear a responsibility for ensuring that an individual doesn't sit in a four-week abyss. It's just a state of limbo,” said Rohit Gupta, the lawyer at the helm of the constitutional challenge.

“What you tend to find is, after an individual spends a good month in jail, they're essentially ready to capitulate to any sort of guilty plea that would get them out of there.”

Before he was called to the bar last year, Gupta worked as an articling student in Thompson. He's looked upon as a “junior nobody,” he said, acknowledging his approach has made him unpopular among some in the legal community.

“Every issue that I started raising, it was essentially, ‘This is the way that things have always been done,’” he said.

The charter challenge is still before the court, and Gupta declined to comment on it. Both of his clients named in the motion no longer face criminal charges; a man from Split Lake was acquitted by a judge and a woman from Norway House had her charges stayed by the Crown.

The systemic issues the challenge brings up are set to be argued in a Court of Queen's Bench hearing in Thompson next month.

“I'm going to continue on raising issues with respect to bail,” he said. “My hope is that eventually something is going to change.”

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On a fall weekend about 18 years ago, a planeload of newly arrested residents from Shamattawa First Nation was flown into Thompson for their first court appearances.

The number of prisoners was more than twice the capacity of RCMP and sheriffs' cells. Previous complaints about overcrowded conditions in Thompson's holding cells had already made their way to the provincial government, and those in charge wanted to avoid future grievances.

That's when David Gray's phone started ringing.

Passed down the chain from a senior official in the provincial attorney general's office, the message was clear: fix it.

Gray, then the supervising Crown attorney heading up Thompson's provincial prosecutions office, spent six months working on a plan he figured would save the province a half-million dollars in prisoner transport costs that year.

"I imposed a rule in the Thompson office effective immediately. The sheriffs were instructed by the Crown that absent my permission, we were not opposed to release. That is, there would be no justification for returning them to custody," Gray said. "The police across the North were told that, and there was some considerable resistance."

It was a stance aimed at making sure the only people locked up were the ones who really needed to be.

Gray's vision for the Northern Bail Program would have seen the province hire a bail worker to set up bail plans for people so they wouldn't have to be detained in custody, cutting down on overcrowding. The work could be done by someone from Legal Aid, or from an Indigenous justice committee, at a fraction of what it costs to ship people from jail to court and back again, he proposed.

It never happened.

Instead, Crown attorneys in the Thompson office worked after hours and on weekends to field calls from RCMP, authorizing the detention of certain individuals and ordering the release of others on certain conditions. Last May, after Gray retired from prosecutions and began practising as a defence lawyer, that work was centralized in Winnipeg.

Now, it's up to city prosecutors to decide who will stay in jail after they're arrested in a northern community, even though they may not be familiar with the North or

the travel distances required. Some may not realize that being arrested in a remote community often means being locked in an RCMP cell for days before getting a chance to obtain bail.

“Every single Crown I’ve talked to has complained about the fact that their colleagues in Winnipeg have remanded people in custody inappropriately,” Gray said.

Many arrested in the North don’t have family members or friends the court considers qualified to vouch for them as sureties; steady jobs, property ownership and the absence of a criminal record may be required. So some judges have gotten used to ordering people to pay hundreds of dollars in cash before they can be released on bail.

It’s an extra layer of security for the court to try to make sure those who’ve been charged with crimes will show up to court, but it often means people sit in jail on remand unnecessarily — sometimes for months — simply because they can’t scrape the money together.

“When cash bail is ordered, the amount must not be set so high that it effectively amounts to a detention order,” the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 2017.

“The judge is under a positive obligation to inquire into the ability of the accused to pay.”

### ***UNABLE TO PAY, FORCED TO STAY***

“I felt like giving up,” Shayna Kelly-White said over the phone from her placement at Winnipeg’s Elizabeth Fry Society

“I was willing to plead out to these charges — they made me feel like I wasn’t going to get out anyway.”

The 26-year-old spent more than six months in jail after a Crown attorney agreed she could be released on bail. She stayed behind bars only because she couldn’t pay the \$500 the court imposed as part of her bail plan. A self-described former drug addict, Kelly-White had an addictions treatment bed waiting for her at Winnipeg’s Behavioural Health Foundation last summer. But a provincial court judge in

Thompson wouldn't agree to release her to the treatment centre and Kelly-White couldn't raise the cash before her spot was given away.

"I felt like there was nothing I could do. I felt like my life was in their hands and, like, they're the ones who were saying 'if you can't come up with this, then you're going to stay there,'" she said.

Her case made its way to Manitoba's Court of Queen's Bench, where a Winnipeg judge ordered her release in late December 2018 and declared it was illegal to impose cash bail on someone who couldn't afford to pay. It's believed to be the first Manitoba court decision that affirms the Supreme Court's vision for cash bail in Canada.

"When cash bail is ordered, the amount must not be set so high that it effectively amounts to a detention order," the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 2017.

"The judge is under a positive obligation to inquire into the ability of the accused to pay."

Court of Queen's Bench Justice Jeffrey Harris decided the judge who doubled down on the cash-bail requirement for Kelly-White was wrong to ignore her defence lawyer when he told the court she couldn't afford \$500.

Kelly-White was part of Elizabeth Fry's bail supervision program when she spoke to the *Free Press* in February, shortly after Harris released his written reasons in her case. She was awaiting trial on drug charges after she was arrested in Norway House in May 2018. Police pulled over the car she was in and allegedly found 40 rocks of crack cocaine.

Kelly-White said she battled drug addiction for years but had been sober for 10 months and was participating in counselling programs. She said she didn't want to go back to jail.

"That's the only thing that runs through my head nowadays, like if I go back in, I'm stuck back in there, and I don't want to be, because I've come so far in being sober and doing these programs and trying to prove a point to my friends that are sitting in there, that there's more to it than this," she said.

“That’s my biggest goal in life right now, that I can sit there and look at people and be like, hey, there’s more to than just sitting here and trying to get your next fix all the time. I’ve been at the bottom a lot in my life, but this is probably the lowest I’ve felt right now, how the justice system actually made me feel like that.”

— *Katie May*

Yet, in northern courts, a class system is part of the everyday process, said Gray, who has recently fought cases on behalf of northern residents who were granted bail but couldn’t get out because they didn’t have enough money.

“People believe that the system isn’t racist. Because it’s true — it didn’t matter to me if the person in front of me was Indigenous or white or a recent immigrant, it didn’t matter. I’d prosecute more or less the same way and I did try to take into account the special circumstances of all of the individual offenders,” he said.

“The people in the system are, for the most part, fair in that sense. But the system is designed in a way that is inherently racist... and will create disparities between non-Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal communities.”

When asked if the government was aware of the long-standing concerns surrounding bail, Justice Minister Cliff Cullen said he knows there are ongoing “challenges” in northern Manitoba.

“We want to make sure that everyone has timely access to justice, particularly in Thompson and northern Manitoba,” he said in an interview with the *Free Press* after he visited the Thompson court facility for the first time as justice minister earlier this year.

The province is responding by trying to fill vacancies, promising better wireless Internet and video conferencing, pricing out court renovations and looking for ways to “streamline” the prisoner transportation system, he said.

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Obtaining timely bail hearings is just one of many problems with access to justice in northern Manitoba, largely stemming from the poverty and isolation of many remote communities and allowed to snowball through the criminal justice system.



“They all come from the same problem of ‘how do you bring justice to a place, what kind of resources do you need to bring the same level of justice that you would get in the city to a remote place?’ And all of the struggles that the system has had creates more problems,” said defence lawyer Chris Sigurdson, who has worked in circuit courts north of Winnipeg for about 20 years.

“The system is stretched thin. Perhaps throwing resources at it may not assist. Certainly, there has to be greater understanding of those problems and more of an awareness of those problems from people in the capital.

“There are people within the system who are trying hard and doing what they can, but they’re doing it on their own. There needs to be more of an overarching direction to it. Because there isn’t a political will to push for it.”

For years, those working in the justice system have complained that the official hub of northern Manitoba doesn’t get its fair share of judges, justices of the peace, court clerks, Crown attorneys, defence lawyers or sheriffs.

Court staff from Winnipeg are routinely sent north to try to make up for shortages, prompting concerns from the provincial government employees’ union. Recruitment and retention of clerks and prosecutors is a priority for the province, Cullen said.

But it’s nothing new. The inadequacy of staffing in Thompson’s court office — and the lack of space in the office itself — has been brought up repeatedly in the provincial court’s own annual reports dating back to 2006.

“We don’t do things the same way as Winnipeg because we can’t do things the same way as Winnipeg, partially because we don’t have the staffing resources,” said Thompson defence lawyer Serena Puranen.

More resources for northern courts was top of mind for Chief Judge Margaret Wiebe when she was heading into her first full year as head of the provincial court.

“For me, focusing on the north is a very big priority. We need to get more judicial resources in the north to be able to deal with matters up there in a more timely way and that is an issue that I’m very focused on,” Wiebe told the *Free Press* in early 2017.

*A Free Press* request to interview Wiebe recently was declined with an explanation that she can't speak publicly about challenges facing northern courts while cases involving those issues are being appealed in Manitoba's Court of Queen's Bench.

"The chief judge is open to these discussions at some point down the road, but it (would) not be appropriate at this time," a court spokeswoman wrote in an email, citing the ongoing legal action.

In sheer numbers, the caseload in Thompson provincial court is second to Winnipeg's. But Thompson's population — about 12,500 — is 64 times smaller than the capital's.

With its three full-time judges and two justices of the peace, Thompson's provincial court office completed 6,927 cases in 2017-18, according to the most recent provincial court data. In Winnipeg, where there are 40 provincial court judges and 16 justices of the peace, 31,776 cases were completed.

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It's been nearly two years since Joyce McIvor was talking to prisoners over the phone in Thompson's court office, but she's been told it still rings for her.

Now, the calls come in on her personal cellphone, or via social-media messages from friends of friends and their families who ask for her tips on navigating the criminal-justice system.

"All the time," she said.

The Thompson resident has no legal training, but when she worked for Manitoba Justice as an Aboriginal court worker from January 2016 to June 2017, she thought she'd seen it all. Her position — a bridge between Indigenous accused and the justice system — has been vacant since she left.

"I know — not even being in school for law — with the justice system you can see clearly who's favouring and who's not being favoured. And why are our people overpopulated in the jails?"

As a Cree woman, she saw the answer was right there in court, day in and day out. She heard it on the other end of the phone line from men in custody on remand who told

her they hadn't been able to contact their lawyer for weeks. Or they couldn't get out on bail because they didn't have cash to post. Or they would do anything to get back to their families.

"They would say, 'Well, I think I'm just going to plead guilty on that just so I can get out of here.' And I'm going, 'And then you're going to have a record! This is going to stay with you! Why do you want to do that?'" McIvor said.

The response, too many times, was, "I need to get out!"

"I'm sick of it, I need to go home, I need to go home and help my wife or help my girlfriend and the kids, that's what most of them are saying," she recalled.

When a guilty plea means getting out on time served and waiting for a trial means spending many more months behind bars, it's easy to see why some people, particularly those who've already amassed long criminal records, would think, "what's one more?" defence lawyer Jemmett said.

"When you're a criminal lawyer, the No. 1 question that people ask you is 'how do you represent people who are guilty but want to go to trial?'" she says.

"The far more common ethical problem happens when someone who credibly tells you that they are innocent wants to plead guilty."

Many people in the north bristle at southerners' attempts to tell them what to do without putting up the proper support to make it happen. The justice system is no exception — directives from Winnipeg can be met with a raised eyebrow, an eyeroll, a knowing chuckle.

But dozens interviewed agreed: when access to justice varies this much from place to place within Manitoba, it's everyone's problem.

"It doesn't contribute to any sense of fairness, acceptance, respect for the system," said Puranen. "It only further marginalizes them, fosters disrespect for the system, it gives people grudges and chips on their shoulders. It makes problems worse."

## PART 2

# THE HIGH PRICE OF INJUSTICE

*By Katie May*  
*Winnipeg Free Press – April 22, 2019*

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/the-high-price-of-injustice-508919932.html>

## PART 3

# JUSTICE BY GEOGRAPHY

*By Katie May*  
*Winnipeg Free Press – April 24, 2019*

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/justice-by-geography-509025612.html>



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**AFEEZ HANAFI (NIGERIA)**

## **'BLIND VOTES': THE FRUSTRATION OF VISUALLY-IMPAIRED VOTERS WHO DEPEND ON OTHERS TO MAKE THEIR CHOICE**



Afeez Hanafi is a graduate of English from the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. He joined Punch Newspaper in May 2014. A versatile journalist with interest in community, crime and environmental reporting, Hanafi has covered issues focusing on human right abuse, disaster management and climate change. He has a penchant for telling stories that engender positive impact on the lives of the people, especially the voiceless among the populace. Hanafi has won awards within and outside Nigeria and aspires to be a journalist of global reckoning.

# 'BLIND VOTES': THE FRUSTRATION OF VISUALLY-IMPAIRED VOTERS WHO DEPEND ON OTHERS TO MAKE THEIR CHOICE

*By Afeez Hanafi  
Punch Nigeria Limited - March 2, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://punchng.com/blind-votes-frustration-of-visually-impaired-citizens-who-rely-on-others-to-make-their-choice/>*

*While millions of sighted citizens were able to cast their votes in support of their preferred candidates during last weekend's elections by secret ballot, for those with visual impairment from across the country, who spoke to Saturday PUNCH, it was a different story, writes AFEEZ HANAFI.*

Bayode Olufemi had been led to the polling unit twice, in 2011 and 2015 general elections. On each occasion, his will to vote for the party of his choice depended on the people around him. For him, it was never a secret ballot system which the poll is meant to be. The fulfillment that should come with exercising one's civic right was a rarity for the 35-year-old teacher as he was not sure he, indeed, voted for his preferred candidates. But when the Independent National Electoral Commission announced last year that a braille ballot guide would be available for visually impaired eligible voters during the 2019 general elections, excitement swept through his veins. He and thousands of voters with visual impairment across the country basked in joy, thinking their years of casting votes without knowing for sure who they are voting for, would soon be over.

## *Dashed Hopes*

On Saturday, February 23, 2019, when the nation held Presidential and National Assembly elections, Olufemi revisited his polling unit on Idowu Martins Street, Victoria Island, Lagos, in company with his brother. This time round, he exuded confidence that a new dawn had come when – like millions of sighted Nigerians – he would have monopoly of privacy to determine who to vote for. Sadly, he was confronted with the stark reality that his hope was a mere illusion on their arrival at the voting point.

“When I asked for the braille ballot guide from the INEC officials at the unit, it sounded strange to them. They eventually told me it was not available,” Olufemi said with a note of disappointment.

After complaining bitterly without getting any redress, he had to settle for the old way.

“I am disturbed about the failure of INEC in fulfilling its promise to voters with visual impairment. INEC had promised to make provision for the braille ballot guide, but there was nothing like that at my polling unit – 035 – Idowu Martins Street, where I voted.

“I asked my friends within and outside the state, who are also visually impaired, if they were given the guide in their polling units, they said no. There was also no provision for E41 Form for us to make complaints so that amendment can be made in the subsequent elections.

“Voting is supposed to be a secret ballot, but people like me have to depend on people to cast their votes. The challenge is that the people assisting us may not like the party we want to vote and they may ensure our thumbprints are for their own party. That means our votes do not represent our will as blind voters.”

Olufemi, a special teacher at King’s College, Lagos, appealed to the commission to make provision for visually impaired voters ahead of the March 9 governorship and House of Assembly elections.

“At the point of registration, INEC should capture details of persons with disabilities so that it will be easy to provide adequate special voting materials for them,” he added.



The braille ballot guide is an envelope-like leaflet with tactile features that enable people with visual impairment to vote independently. It is of the same size as the ballot paper. Once the ballot paper is inserted into it, the voter would be able to identify all the names of the political parties listed therein. They can then proceed to vote for the party of their choice using their thumbprint and the ink will automatically fall on their chosen party in the ballot paper.

In May 2018, INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, assured persons living with disabilities of equal access to voting process during elections.

Yakubu, at a campus outreach programme on Continuous Voter Registration held at the University of Abuja on May 3, 2018, promised that the commission would produce ballot papers in braille to allow visually impaired persons above the age of 18 to vote unaided in the 2019 general elections.

“For visually impaired persons, we can provide ballot papers printed in braille; for the albinos, we have started the use of magnifying glasses in Anambra, and for the other physically challenged people, we will be deploying wheelchairs,” he had said.

Keneth Echiche hoped to see Yakubu’s promise come to fruition when he arrived at his polling unit in Aleyita Primary School, Airport Road, Abuja, but he was greeted with disappointment instead. Until the reality dawned on him that Saturday morning, the 34-year-old man, like Olufemi, had revelled in the aura of independence that came with the news of the braille ballot guide.

Expressing his displeasure during an interview with *Saturday PUNCH*, Echiche said it was worrisome that the commission’s electoral process did not give the visually impaired community a fair deal that would allow them vote like their sighted counterparts.

He stated, “The INEC officials claimed to be ignorant of the braille ballot guide when I asked them. They said they were not aware of anything like that. As a leader of a political group, my members from across the country called me to complain that they could not access the ballot guide.

“We are not satisfied with the so-called inclusive programme of INEC with respect to persons living with disabilities. It was just on paper, but we saw nothing in reality. When INEC made the announcement, we thought it was an improvement and an

opportunity for us to have confidence in our voting, but unfortunately our hopes were dashed. We expected something better after the 2015 general elections.

“INEC must be sincere and serious about it. They need to involve us right from the embryonic stage of the policy for visually impaired persons. They must have spent millions of naira on the project, yet there was no result.”

Opeyemi Daudu could not conceal his frustration while speaking to our correspondent earlier in the week. For the native of Owo in Ondo State, the failure of INEC to keep to its promise came with many disheartening memories.

About three months ago when he learnt about the commission’s plan to deploy the braille ballot guide during the elections, he boasted among his sighted peers in the neighbourhood that a positive leveller was in the offing. His hope was very high that he would soon enjoy the opportunity of having an exclusive decision to choose his preferred candidates through the ballot as his friends, with whom he shared different political interest.

To his dismay, the promise made by INEC turned out to be an empty one on getting to his polling unit at Igboroko in Owo.

“I voted at Ward 2, Unit 6, Igboroko. I was unable to vote by myself until I called on one of the party agents to help press my hand on the party logo of the candidates of my choice,” he stated, sounding unfulfilled.

“Even though I asked somebody to press my hand on the logo of the party, how sure am I that the person actually did my wish? But if the braille ballot guide was provided, I would vote the candidates of my choice by myself,” he added.

Last Saturday would have made it the third time Bisade Adejoro would partake in the elections as a voter. But she had already made up her mind not to participate again after her nasty experience in the last two outings. The 30-year-old woman was always in doubt about pleasing her conscience after casting her votes at Community Grammar School, Onwena, Ondo East.

She said, “I have been voting before now. Somebody would just press my finger on the ballot paper having told them the party I wanted to vote. But I was never sure they did

the right thing. After the 2015 elections, I promised not to vote again if there was no improvement in the voting system.”

However, she rescinded her decision this year when she heard that INEC wanted to deploy the braille ballot guide across the country during the 2019 elections as it did in the last governorship poll in Osun and Ekiti states.

“When I learnt that the braille ballot guide would be available during the 2019 general elections, I was hopeful again. Unfortunately, I realised on the day of the elections that it was an empty promise and I did not vote. I felt sad, but I didn’t want somebody to use my thumbprint for a party I didn’t want to vote. I felt the best way to avoid such was not to vote at all. I also know of three other visually impaired persons in our community who did not vote.”

Peter Bulus is a 300 level student at University of Jos, in the North-Central of Nigeria, where he studies special education. Since he knew of the plan to deploy the braille ballot guide in the 2019 general elections, freedom had assumed more positive meanings for him. For somebody like him who had been voting without complete fulfillment, the guide was a true messiah.

He was radiant with happiness, smiling all the way as he was led to the polling unit on the premises of Nukunya Primary School in Taraba State last Saturday. But the moment he met with the presiding officer at the unit, his zest faded away.

“I voted, but not as INEC promised us. They told us that they would introduce the braille ballot guide for persons with visual impairment to enable us to vote on our own. Unfortunately, I couldn’t get the guide in my polling unit. When I requested from the officials there, they said they were not given.

“INEC told us that they had adopted the system in Osun and Ekiti states and assured us that they would adopt it during the general elections. Unfortunately, that did not happen. Almost all the time, our wishes as visually impaired voters are ignored. I felt glad when I learnt there was a plan to solve that problem. Sadly it did not work out and at the end of the day, I was led to vote, unsure of whether I actually voted for the candidates I wanted or not. Even though I was led by somebody I trust, I think one

cannot trust human beings 100 per cent. I contacted my friends from other parts of the state, Plateau, and Benue, they shared the same experience.”

Bulus said preparatory to the elections, Nigeria Association of the Blind, Taraba State branch, had embarked on orientation in some parts of the state to enlighten people on how to vote with the braille ballot guide.

Among the list of thousands of visually impaired Nigerians who felt short-changed in the last Saturday polls was Zainab Sule, a postgraduate student at the University of Jos, Plateau State. Sule, while speaking to *Saturday PUNCH*, said she went to vote in anticipation of the fair deal that the braille ballot guide seeks to offer.

“I voted at GRA, Ankpa Local Government Area of Kogi State. That was the first time I would vote. I went to vote with a sighted guide and was hopeful to do so with the aid of the braille ballot guide which INEC had promised to provide, but it was a lie,” she said.

Adeola Aina works with a braille press organisation on Victoria Island, Lagos, and was involved in the printing of braille documents and flyers sponsored by INEC to educate visually impaired voters on the electoral process. Being aware of the commission’s plan to deploy the braille ballot guide to polling units across the country, he went to his polling unit on Agege Motor Road, Alakara in the Mushin area of Lagos with the expectation of accessing it.

He recalled, “I have been voting since 1999 and I have always been assisted to vote. Although I always go with somebody I trust, I cannot be sure that I always vote for the candidates I want. It is one thing to trust somebody but it is another thing for the person to be trusted. I went to the polling unit last Saturday with the hope that I would be able to vote independently because of the information that had been dished out by INEC as regards the braille ballot guide. I am a stakeholder in the blind persons’ inclusiveness. INEC printed so many braille flyers to educate visually impaired persons on voting process and the use of the braille ballot guide.

“At the point of voting, I asked for the braille guide, but to my dismay, the officials asked me what I meant by that. I explained to them; yet they said they did not understand and that there was no provision for that. They gave me normal ballot papers and my wife guided me to vote. I protested that my voting was not a secret ballot. They pleaded that I should bear with them.

“INEC had said that if we could not find the braille ballot guide at polling units, we should request Form EC 41 to make complaints. I asked for the form, but they said they were not given. At a point, they felt I was too inquisitive and they were becoming emotional. INEC has to do something about it. We cannot continue to vote without being sure of the party we vote.”

“INEC should make samples of the braille ballot guide available before the governorship and House of Assembly elections so that we can properly educate our people on how to use it,” Aina said.

Etim Okon, a master’s degree holder in special education, told Saturday PUNCH that the narrative was not different at the polling unit on Edgeli Street, Calabar, Cross River State, where he voted. He explained that the feedback he got from other visually impaired voters within the state showed they also voted without the braille ballot guide.

### ***Our Sensitisation Programme Was a Waste – NGO***

The Zonal Coordinator of Access Nigeria campaign, a coalition on election matters, Mr Aliyu Muhammad, said members of the movement commended the INEC’s braille ballot guide initiative and embarked on sensitisation of visually impaired voters ahead of the polls.

Muhammad, who was in charge of Adamawa, Taraba, Borno and Yobe states, said he was disappointed that the poor deployment of the braille ballot guide by the commission made a mockery of the sensitisation programme.

He said, “I went to Abuja to do training with Access Nigeria campaign in partnership with Inclusive Friends Association around December last year. I was the only person invited from the North-East. Afterwards, I mobilised to sensitise some visually impaired persons in Taraba State.

“Unfortunately on Election Day, I was the only visually impaired person who was able to use the braille ballot guide for the Presidential election in the whole of the Jalingo Local Government, where I voted. I mounted a lot of pressure on the presiding officer before he rushed to their office to get it for me. I was guided to thumbprint on ballot papers for the National Assembly poll because there were no enough copies of

the guide. All my members in the state were unable to access the guide for reasons best known to INEC. That is the only means visually impaired persons can properly perform their civic right.”

The President, Nigeria Association of the Blind, Ishiyaku Gombe, said the report he received from members of the group across the 36 states of the federation as regards the deployment of the braille ballot guide was horrible.

He lamented that apart from one Muhammad in Taraba State, he was not aware of any other visually impaired person who voted with the aid of the braille guide.

Ishiyaku said, “When INEC officially adopted the use of the braille ballot guide in the 2019 general elections, we appreciated the commission and called for a wide voter education among our people. Unfortunately, there was no voter education by INEC to sensitise the blind people to the use of the braille ballot guide.

“So many members of the association and I only saw samples of the braille ballot guide few hours to the elections. INEC is supposed to use this organisation to reach out to the visually impaired voters. It was much later they got across to me and I gave them many contacts of visually impaired persons they could send the samples of the braille ballot guide to.

“On Election Day, the guide was absent in almost all the polling units. In fact, it was only one person from Taraba (Muhammad) that confirmed to me he got it. Even those that sent their names and polling units to INEC ahead of the elections could not get it.

“INEC spent a lot of money to produce election guidelines and flyers in braille; yet they were not distributed. In my state (Gombe), for instance, an INEC official called me that there were braille materials in their office and they didn’t know what to do with them. I had to go get them almost 24 hours to the election and start distributing them to our members in the state. There are so many braille electoral materials that are not being used and wasting across all the states of the federation.”

The president, however, commended INEC for giving preferential treatment to visually impaired persons to vote on arrival at the polling booths instead of asking them to be in a queue.

The Head of Marketing and Communications, Federal Nigeria Society for the Blind, Demimade Lewis, frowned on what she described as indignant treatment of visually impaired voters.

She said non-provision of the braille ballot guide disenfranchised many voters who did not want to vote without being sure of who they were voting for.

She said, “One of the major issues our trainees who were taken to vote had, was the lack of braille voting paper. One of our staff members had to accompany them to their polling booth and help them cast their votes. That itself should make anyone indignant. It is demeaning, especially when we know voting should be confidential.


“Why should a visually impaired person be accompanied to a polling booth when there are simple ways to support their independence and voter’s rights? Many of our other trainees didn’t bother voting as they left in disappointment at having been disenfranchised once more by their country.

“How can we empower our citizens when millions of them are not represented? How many visually impaired persons voted? How many persons with hearing impairment voted? How can persons living with disabilities feel represented when they didn’t get a chance to exercise their basic rights? It is evident that negligence by those in charge of the voting process is to blame for no representation for persons with visual impairment.”

The Executive Director, Inclusive Friends Association, Grace Jerry, however, said the braille ballot guide was deployed in about 47 per cent of the polling units across the country, noting that the inability of the INEC ad hoc staff to administer it made a mess of the initiative.

She said, “INEC actually deployed the braille ballot guide nationwide, but it was done based on a random sampling of polling units because of lack of data. INEC did not have the data of all persons living with disabilities. Their focus generally was special schools and community of persons with visual impairment.

“Based on our data gathering, INEC deployed the guide in about 47 per cent of the polling units, but unfortunately it was not all the visually impaired people that got to use it. Another setback is that, it was deployed but the INEC ad hoc staff did not



administer it. Most of them did not know it was braille ballot guide. I knew this because I observed the election. I had to call their attention to it. They said they were not told what to do with it. Overall, INEC tried, but they need to improve on the training of their staff. They also need to improve on voter education.”

In a terse response to an enquiry on the issue on Wednesday, Rotimi Oyekanmi, the Chief Press Secretary to INEC Chairman, said the commission provided “copies of the ballot guide for visually impaired voters.”

He said he would speak with the National Commissioner in charge of the items for specific details and revert to our correspondent. He also asked for the details of the affected voters, which were sent to him.

Oyekanmi had, however, yet to get back to *Saturday PUNCH* with update as of the press time.



# DESPITE OUR CRIES, INEC REFUSED TO MAKE PROVISION FOR US - VISUALLY-IMPAIRED VOTERS

*By Afeez Hanafi  
Punch Nigeria Limited - March 16, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://punchng.com/despite-our-cries-inec-refused-to-make-provision-for-us-visually-impaired-voters/>*

*In this second segment of a two-part report, AFEEZ HANAFI examines why the Independent National Electoral Commission failed visually impaired voters, who could not vote unaided, despite budgeting a whopping N150m for them during the elections*

When Brandon Sanderson, an American fiction writer said “expectations were like fine pottery; the harder you held them, the more likely they were to crack,” he seemed to have a whole lot of visually impaired Nigerian voters in mind. But beyond Sanderson’s analogy, the consequence was direr for the special voters. Their expectations – like the fragile clay pots – were shattered by the Independent National Electoral Commission in the 2019 general elections.

After the presidential and National Assembly elections held about three weeks ago, a cross-section of visually impaired voters spoke to *Saturday PUNCH* on their disappointment over the non-provision of braille ballot guide which the commission had promised to make available so they could cast their votes independently without being guided.

The affected voters had cried out with the hope that they would find succour in the last Saturday governorship and state House of Assembly elections. Their expectation got higher when a civil society organisation, Inclusive Friends Association, which worked with INEC on the arrangement for the braille ballot guide, said the jacket-like tools

had been deployed in about 47 per cent of the polling units across the nation, but were not administered due to the lack of education on the part of the electoral officials.

“We appreciate *Saturday PUNCH*’s publication, but the same old story still repeated itself,” one of the affected voters, Adeola Aina, told our correspondent during the week while commenting on the March 9 elections.

Aina, a worker at a braille press centre on Victoria Island, Lagos, said the INEC ad hoc officials at his polling unit on Agege Motor Road, Alakara in the Mushin area of the state confronted him with the same story that dashed his hope three weeks earlier.

He recalled, “Some days to the March 9 elections, some people from INEC called some of us and I told our members to send their voter card numbers, their polling units and the areas where their polling units are located to the numbers that the INEC officials made available to us. Many of us did, but we still went to vote last Saturday only to witness the same thing that happened during the presidential and National Assembly elections. When I got to my polling unit, I asked for the braille ballot guide from the electoral officials. They said they were not given. But they said they had conveyed my complaints to INEC after the February 23 polls.”

The same disappointing story was what Gboyega Afolabi got last Saturday when he went back to Ward 9, Unit 008 in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State to vote in the state House of Assembly election that held in the state.

He had left his house located some metres away with a guide whom he thought would only lead him to the voting centre and back home. But on arrival at the polling unit, the guide assumed a more critical role because the braille ballot paper was not available. At that moment, Afolabi’s choice of candidate to vote for in the election was dependent on the decision of the guide who helped him use his thumbprint on the ballot paper.

“I was left with no option but to be led to the cubicle by the fellow who assisted me in putting my thumbprint on the ballot papers, which was actually a dependant voting system. Even though I trust him, I cannot verify that I actually voted for the candidate of my choice,” Afolabi lamented.

He went on, “It was quite unfortunate that the braille ballot guide was not made available anywhere in Ekiti State during the elections. We have advocated over time that

such system should be eradicated. A former INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner in Ekiti State had promised us that they would make it available at centres for persons with visual impairment. But the information I gathered from my friends in those centres revealed that the ballot guide was not available there.

“I felt, perhaps, INEC does not have the wherewithal or the political will to provide it or it is just one of those bogus promises. Before the elections, they requested our voting centres and we submitted the list through a non-governmental organisation. Can we then conclude that there is no visually impaired voter in Ekiti State? It shows that INEC does not recognise us.

“There is a popular centre in Ikire-Ekiti, where a number of visually impaired persons are. Even politicians are aware of that centre; they go there to campaign. A single braille ballot paper was not there.”

In August 2018, the National Assembly Joint Committee on INEC approved N143bn for the commission for the 2019 general elections.

INEC had budgeted N150m for the “pilot deployment of braille/assistive tactile balloting instruments and voting cubicles for physically challenged voters,” which did not have any impact on voters like Aina, Afolabi and other thousands of visually impaired voters nationwide.

After casting his vote with the help of his relative at State Senior Grammar School (Special) on Itolo Street, Surulere, Lagos, last Saturday, Mr. Hamzat Kamarudeen, a civil servant, protested against INEC’s failed promise to make braille ballot guide available for him and other voters with visual impairment.

He said, “That is how those of us who are visually impaired have been managing. INEC has yet to introduce braille ballot papers, so I had to tell somebody to help me out. They put my finger on the card reader and put it where I told them to put it on the ballot paper.

“Things can be made better for us, as is the case with persons like me in developed countries. They should give us braille ballot papers in subsequent elections and with that, our voting can be secret.”

A visually impaired voter at the Training Centre for the Blind in Ogbomoso, Oyo State,

Joseph Alabi, was bitter about the failure of the commission to provide the braille ballot guide, describing it as “alienation of the blind community.”

He complained that the voting process was not convenient for blind people because the commission refused to provide braille ballot papers, adding that they would have been able to vote the parties of their choice without any aid if the materials were provided.

“Voters with visual impairment received assistance and guidance from sighted people during the accreditation and voting at Unit 13, Ward 9, Ogbomoso North, where I voted. INEC should have provided us with the braille ballot guide which was used in the Osun State governorship election last year.

“If we had the same thing in Oyo State here, it would have made the voting process easy for us, and there wouldn’t be a need for anyone to hold our thumbs,” Alabi stated.

Bayode Olufemi, a special teacher at King’s College, Lagos, had been voting since 2011 with the help of his brother, who always acted as his guide. When the much-expected braille ballot guide INEC promised to provide was not made available to him in the February 23 elections, he had to again trust his brother as he had always done. “But last Saturday I did not vote because my brother was not around. He travelled,” he told *Saturday PUNCH*.

“Enquiries I made from other visually impaired voters showed that the braille ballot guide was not available and a colleague in my school confirmed it. If INEC actually wanted to make it available to us, they would have advertised it in the media. There was no sensitisation and it was disappointing. I believe that with the introduction of the disability law, something better will surely come. But we won’t stop talking about it,” Olufemi added.

Like Olufemi, Bisade Adejoro from Owena, Ondo State, did not participate in the state House of Assembly polls last Saturday. But unlike the special teacher, the 30-year-old woman had a guide to lead her to her polling unit at Community Grammar School, Owena.

She said, “I am tired of asking people to place my finger on the party logo of my

preferred candidate. I did not vote that day, but I am aware that those (visually impaired persons) that voted were not provided with the ballot guide.”

President, Nigeria Association of the Blind, Ishiyaku Gombe, who had earlier expressed his frustration at the plight of the visually impaired voters to our correspondent, said nothing had changed after the publication.

He blamed the non-provision of the braille ballot guide on the lack of organisation on the part of INEC and urged the commission to work things out before the next general elections.


He said, “From my findings so far, there was no braille ballot guide in virtually all the polling units across the country. For visually impaired voters in Nigeria, we won’t call the election a secret ballot because we had to rely on somebody to vote, which is not safe.

“So as far as we are concerned, the process is not a secret ballot system, which is one of the basic tenets of democracy. For me I may have a trusted guide, but what of other people who may not have? I think the lack of organisation in INEC was responsible for it. INEC has already spent a lot of money. They produced braille flyers and other election materials, but they wasted them. They did not cooperate with the association. Instead they worked with some organisations that do not have any connection with people that have visual impairment or know where our people live.

“Apart from ours, there are so many established organisations for the visually impaired persons across the country. I have the contacts of all the chairmen of our association in the 36 states of the federation. I can easily call them so that we can get data for INEC. That way, we could get the data of 70 to 80 per cent of blind voters across the country because we have network in all local government areas. These are issues I believe are responsible for the non-provision of the Braille ballot guide.”

The National Officer and Chairman, Voter Education Committee, Mr Festus Okoye, said the braille ballot guide was produced in form of braille jackets and were deployed in polling units. He, however, admitted that the commission had problem in getting the locations of the visually impaired persons and other voters living with disabilities.

He said, “Braille jackets were provided, but the challenge is that we are still getting the



places where persons living with disabilities are in terms of their spread. What we did was experimental. That was why we provided Form EC40 H so that we could get the number of persons living with disabilities in each polling unit, the type of disability they have, to help us know whether we would deploy braille jackets, magnifying glasses or whether we were going to canvas for the relocation of the polling unit itself. We are still experimenting.”

When told of the visually impaired persons’ complaints that they were not provided with the form EC40 H at the polling units, Okoye blamed the problem on the attitude of the ad hoc officials, noting that some of them were reluctant to give out the form.

He added, “They thought they were doing the people with disability a favour. The forms were designed and deployed in polling units. It was just the fault of the presiding officials who did not give them to use. I appeal that we are still experimenting and I have a belief that in the subsequent elections, we will be able to get it right with persons with disabilities. When we have a retreat after these elections, it is one of the things we are going to discuss. The braille jackets were printed and we also procured magnifying glasses. We will find out why they were not deployed appropriately and take remedial actions.”

**ANUJA JAIMAN (INDIA)**

## **UNDER MODI, HINDU HARDLINERS TURN INDIAN THEATRE INTO A BATTLEGROUND**



Anuja Jaiman is a Delhi based journalist and actor. Originally from Dehradun, she has worked as a journalist for 14 years in Delhi and Mumbai. She is a multimedia producer with Thomson Reuters presently, and pursues theatrical storytelling in various formats outside of her work. In line with the vision of Octave Foundation's Wari - a storytelling series, of which she is the co-founder, Anuja wishes to use theatre and storytelling as a conversation starter about human rights issues to reach people of all age groups.

# UNDER MODI, HINDU HARDLINERS TURN INDIAN THEATRE INTO A BATTLEGROUND

*By Anuja Jaiman  
Thomson Reuters - May 16, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://in.reuters.com/article/india-election-artists/under-modi-hindu-hardliners-turn-indian-theatre-into-a-battleground-idINKCN1SM0N0>*

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Five days after a suicide bomber killed 40 CRPF personnel in February in the Kashmir Valley, playwright and director Abhishek Majumdar was forced to cancel a play looking at the behaviour of Indian security forces in the disputed region.

The play, which was scheduled to be staged on February 19 in Jaipur, was stopped by police but if they hadn't stepped in, hardline Hindu activists had made it clear they would have physically forced it off the stage. The activists said Majumdar was "anti-national" or unpatriotic.

Hours before the show was due to start, the crew said they were forced to escape the venue as a mob had gathered. They said they ran down back alleys and had to take side roads to avoid being attacked on a main road.

"It wasn't that people didn't like our play, expressed their dismay and left. No. We were being hunted across the city," said Ashwath Bhatt, an actor in the play.

Several playwrights, filmmakers, musicians, and comedians say their work has been censored or cancelled following pressure, sometimes backed up by physical threats, from Hindu hardline groups that have multiplied since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014.



Many of these artists say they fear that if Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are elected to a second term in the current general election it will lead to further restraints on freedom of expression. Most political strategists say they expect Modi to be in a position to form the next government when votes are counted on May 23.

Reuters interviewed 21 actors, playwrights, musicians and comedians for this story and found out that at least 15 of them have been subjected to questioning by event organizers or the authorities if their works explored contentious issues, such as secularism and religious intolerance, or ridiculed Modi's decisions.

BJP leaders have dismissed allegations that the party is intolerant of dissent.

In Jaipur, Reuters spoke to three police officers who went to the venue, and all three said they just didn't feel the timing was right to show Majumdar's play, which deals with the mental state of civilians and security forces after years of unrest in Kashmir. None of the three had read the script.

"We were informed of possible violence. So to avoid any violence and any harm from happening, we took action," said sub-inspector Mukesh Kumar.

### ***"What a Liar"***

Hindu activist Suraj Soni said he filed a police complaint against the play and joined the protests because it was "mocking" and "insulting" the nation's armed forces at a time when India was mourning those killed in the suicide attack.

"We told them the evening before to not go ahead with it since the country's sentiments are on a boil. Majumdar ji didn't want to listen to us," Soni said, using an honorific to describe the playwright.

Majumdar said he had never met Soni. "What a liar," the 38-year-old playwright said. "He is part of a larger nexus of the disease that the BJP has spread in our country."

Lalitha Kumaramangalam, a BJP leader, said the allegations by artists that the government and the ruling party were clamping down on free speech were "all in their mind".

The number of verbal attacks on the BJP and its allies was illustrative of how much freedom the critics had, she said. Kumaramangalam compared it with India's 21-month state of emergency in 1975-77 when then prime minister Indira Gandhi suspended civil liberties. Hundreds of journalists, artists and intellectuals were among those arrested at the time.

"That was real censorship. I don't think anyone has come anywhere near that. You wouldn't even be talking to me about it if there was real curtailment right now," Kumaramangalam said.

Clearly the Hindu groups aren't the only restraint on freedom of expression in often ultra-conservative India. Hardly a month goes by without a movie being challenged because a plotline offends one religion, ethnic group, caste, or another.

But it is the intensity of the attacks on anything that challenges the Modi government or the Indian military's view of the world that is frightening artists. And more direct involvement of local police in deciding whether a performance can continue is adding to those concerns.

"There is a kind of legitimacy this government has provided to violence. It is okay to attack artists these days, only because their work does not suit the narrative being peddled for electoral gains," said Majumdar.

## ***Music Stopped***

In January when a Tamil-language band 'The Casteless Collective' sang in Chennai, a police officer stopped the band soon after it started playing.

"In the first line of the song the words 'Modi Mastan' were heard, and a panicked cop came running to me to stop the show," said Carnatic singer T.M. Krishna, an organiser of the festival. The words roughly mean 'mystical fraudster' in Tamil language slang and do not necessarily refer to the prime minister.

Police Sub-Inspector A. Selvakumar, who was on duty at the beach festival, denied in a phone interview that the band was interrupted because of the lyrics, saying his superior had told him the performance had exceeded its time limit and had to be stopped.

Actor-director Amol Palekar was interrupted during a speech at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in Mumbai in February this year by the institution's officials. He was speaking about government interference in art and attacks on freedom of expression and had to wind up abruptly.

"The NGMA episode was despicable and was representative of the gagging that has spread over all fields of expression," Palekar said in an e-mail response to questions.

Soon after that, more than 800 writers and artists from across the country protested and signed the 'Artists Unite' declaration to register concern against hate and intolerance.

Moloyashree Hashmi, an actor for more than four decades, says while groups have been physically attacked, there was also a hidden clampdown on dissent.

"It is the unstated, not being able to perform ... that is far more insidious and all pervasive," she said.

Her husband Safdar Hashmi, a playwright and a member of the Communist Party (Marxist), was killed while performing a street play in a village outside Delhi in 1989. Ten people, including a member of the then ruling Congress party, were convicted for the killing.

"It has increased over the years. Continuously increased," Moloyashree Hashmi said of the attacks. "They let loose goons. And the authorities will just not do anything."

*Additional reporting by Rupam Jain; Editing by Martin Howell and Raju Gopalakrishnan*

**ELLENA CRUSE (UNITED KINGDOM)**

## **MEET THE SEX WORKERS OF ILFORD LANE**

**A series**



Ellena is an award-winning journalist from London. Passionate and curious about different people's experiences she joined human rights projects as a teen before eventually becoming involved with a UN child violence study. After speaking to young people from around the world she knew she wanted to give others a voice. Ellena worked on a local paper for four years covering crime, community, prostitution and regeneration. She won Young Journalist of the Year for exposing how the London Bridge terrorists radicalised primary school pupils and content of the year for sensitive coverage of a young father's murder. Slightly "old school" you will find her speaking to people in real life rather than on Twitter.

# MEET THE SEX WORKERS OF ILFORD LANE

*By Ellena Cruse  
Ilford Recorder - August 17, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/sex-workers-of-ilford-1-5657572>*

As she showed me photos of her little boy you could almost believe she was happy.

But as soon as she put away pictures of her cherubic son, with tufts of brown curls, her face transformed into a blank canvas- despite the layers of lipstick and foundation.

I was standing in a harshly lit alley way in the back end of Ilford, sharing toddler stories with a sex worker.

I couldn't think of a more contrasting location to speak about something as innocent and wholesome as children, yet the conversation flowed despite the slight language barrier.

Redbridge police have invited me on a night shift with them as they tackle antisocial behaviour, including prostitution.

So far we had driven down the notorious "Ilford Lane strip" and spotted 13 sex workers in the space of a couple of minutes.

As we inspected a side road on foot we caught a women and a man engaged in a sexual act behind a wheelie bin and as officers approach she hastily pulled up her jeans.

The woman agrees to speak to me and said no woman she has ever met does this by choice.

"I do this for a job, two or three days often at the weekend," she said, eyes staring at the ground.

“I don’t like it, I hate it, but I send the money home to my family to look after my son.

“It is normal for girls to come over and work and send money back. There are no jobs, this is what we do.”

Sergeant Lee Wilkinson, of Ilford town centre and Loxford ward police said it is the story he hears a lot.

After handing the pair a antisocial behaviour order, banning them from the area for 48 hours, he said the majority of women come from Romania

“Demand for it is huge and there are always people willing to do it - we are tackling supply and demand,” he said

“Some are doing it by their own choice, some don’t intend to go into it but end up in it and others are trafficked - There is an element of organisation to it.

“It can be hard to see who is part of organised crime and who isn’t and when you ask them they say ‘no I am doing it for myself’. - it’s very difficult to differentiate.”

“You do see some Caucasian women doing it to feed a habit but you don’t see many of these in Ilford Lane and whereas the Romanians can earn £1,000 a week, they often charge £10 a time – I feel really sorry for them.”

The sergeant said he wished he could refer all them to services where they will get accommodation and a job away from the street, but the women have to consent and a lot of them unfortunately don’t.

We bump into a few more Romanian women who speak of disliking their profession but need to provide for their children- often after relationships break down.

They said the police “don’t get their situation” and move them on.

The sex workers often give the same addresses or hotels as places of residence and officers said they will be checking out premises in Barking and Ilford as a result.

“Ilford Lane is not filled with Starsky and Hutch 70s style pimps in coats getting out of expensive cars - that is a common misconception,” said Sergeant Wilkinson.

“Residents often get it wrong about who these so called pimps are.

“We have a high number of Romanian males in Ilford, especially by the betting shop just hanging out with friends and people think they are involved with the sex workers but they are often not. However there are handlers, and some of the girls get picked up at the end of the night and dropped off.”

“You do what you can to protect them but there comes a time when you have to enforce it. We have to balance the needs of the sex workers, some of who can be trafficked with the needs of the local residents.

Before the shift is over we meet a “higher end” street sex worker who charges more for services.

The woman, in her 30s, is more confident than the other girls I spoke to and while she does not like her job she has less feeling about it and says she does it to earn rent and pay for her lifestyle.

I am not sure if this is bravado on her part, or she deals with what she does by cutting off her feelings, but the woman of the night is well known to the police and even engages in friendly banter with them.

During the last check of the night we circle the back roads and come cross a steamy car in a well-known residential car park.

After a tap on the window the occupants, two British women and a man- get out and are searched.

They said they were just chatting but police pull condoms out of the women’s pockets and they find drug paraphernalia in the car.

A lady in her 40s who is a methadone user said she hasn’t worked on the street in six years and only came out for the night as her disabled partner’s universal credit was not being paid and she had to get money for food and electricity.

She said she didn’t like working on the street and had previously been raped at knifepoint.

The friend she was with said she has been threatened with a gun while offering her services to men, with one putting a firearm in her mouth “for kicks”.



The women's details are put through the computer and one of them is on remand for a crime.

She is handcuffed and her evening ends with a night in a cell, while the officers head back to fill out paper work and clock off.

There was great sadness around most of the women I met on my shift and I came away feeling overwhelmed about how the situation can be made better.

The police are working hard but I feel there needs to be a sustained multi-agency approach and more resources given to officers to make a long-lasting affect.

An assigned Romanian interpreter would make a massive difference to their operation, but this is not in the control of the frontline officers battling it out on the beat.

I might have gone home for the night but the officers and the sex workers, will go through the same rigmarole tomorrow.



# 'PROSTITUTE TRIPADVISOR': CAMPAIGN TO CLOSE DOWN WEBSITE IN WHICH PUNTERS RATE AND REVIEW ILFORD, GOODMAYES AND SOUTH WOODFORD SEX WORKERS

*By Ellena Cruse  
Ilford Recorder - October 3, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/prostitute-tripadvisor-campaign-to-close-down-website-in-which-punters-rate-and-review-ilford-goodmayes-and-south-woodford-sex-workers-1-5721992>*

*With comments such as “house is on a quiet street of Cranbrook Road” and “interior is nicely done” I could almost be reading the review section of Airbnb.*

But as my cursor scrolls down the page, it becomes abundantly clear with every click, that the subject of the feedback is of a somewhat more insalubrious nature.

Women's figures, sexual techniques and even dispositions are rated and reviewed on Punternet UK – an escort review website.

Sex workers from all corners of the borough, including Ilford, South Woodford and Goodmayes are analysed and compared in detailed accounts.

Ricocheting between obscenely graphic descriptions of sexual acts and almost superfluous, clinical overviews, the women are seen as disposal playthings – there to perform and meet the most nichest of requests.

Sam - not his real name- has been using the services of prostitutes since his nine-year relationship broke down.

The office worker, who lives in Redbridge, said at first the liaisons were a comfort or “intimacy replacement” but it soon became an addiction.

“I was broken, the person I thought I was going to marry left me,” he said.

“I was so lost and didn’t leave my flat for six months, apart from going to work.

“One day I just decided to do it and it was such a release with no emotional baggage - it was an escape from hurting and it made me feel good.”

Sam started making regular bookings and before he knew it had spent thousands of pounds on liasons and on call lines.

“It’s a good thing that sexual addiction has been classified as a mental health problem,” he added.

“People think it is seedy and it’s just that you have a high libido or hate women and they don’t realise it can be a symptom of something else.

“I realise this now and I am working towards meeting someone new and building a healthy relationship.

One review, that I had to make myself read, complained that one particular woman didn’t want to perform and tried to pull away.

In language that can’t be repeated in a family paper, unconcerned for her welfare the client made sure to finish the job to get what he had paid for.

It is accounts like this that inspired Trishna Datta, 27, of Newbury Park, to launch a petition to have the website taken down.

She performed outreach work in Ilford Lane and witnessed first hand the violence and harassment some of the women received.

She said she respects the right for women to work how they want, but Punternet is not set up by the sex workers and lacks significant safety measures.

“It is unlike other sexual service providers because prostitutes are not advertising their services,” she said.

“Punters are advertising them and the telephone number and locations of girls – putting them in direct danger.”

Trishna said that punters use aliases and in many posts the things they describe could be “equivalent to sexual assault” in any other setting.

“Punternet acts as a safe cyberspace for punters to share alarming experiences,” she added.

“The men that use the website openly act out behaviours and share attitudes towards women which would probably lead to criminal charges if carried out in a different context.”

One sex worker, who wants to remain anonymous, said she finds the website really demeaning and degrading.

“The girls that get the best reviews are the girls who will do absolutely anything for money,” she said.

“If you refuse to do stuff, they’ll go on and slate you and you get a bad review – your working career is done.”


However, another sex worker, based in Ilford, said she likes the website and it generates lots of bookings.

“This is my job, it is a business and like any other service you need promotion,” she explained.

“I get free publicity and have got some regular clients through it.”

A spokesman from Punternet said the website does not treat women like commodities and objects, however the service <sup>[T]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> the ladies provide is a commodity.

He added that like a hotel or restaurant being reviewed on Tripadvisor, if the sex worker’s service is given a positive review, the woman who received the review enjoys the benefit of increased contacts and custom as a result.



“Contrary to what certain ill-informed people would have you think, the women who advertise and are reviewed here are, for the most part, pretty savvy business people,” he said.

“They know that good reviews are key to growing their business – getting a good review makes their phones ring and generates income.

“We pride ourselves on treating everyone with the decency and respect that every human deserves and unlike most other sex worker review sites, we allow the ladies to submit a rebuttal to be added to any review with which they disagree so that readers can get both sides of the story.

“We will also remove reviews if it appears that they were deliberately malicious or intended to be hurtful, or if the lady simply notifies us that she is retiring from the business and does not want those reviews to be found in the future.”

# REDBRIDGE FIRST BOROUGH IN THE UK TO FINE PEOPLE FOR SLEEPING WITH PROSTITUTES AND IT HAS BROUGHT ABOUT 22 PROSECUTIONS SINCE SCHEME WAS LAUNCHED THREE WEEKS AGO

*By Ellena Cruse  
Ilford Recorder - September 25, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/crime-court/redbridge-first-borough-in-the-uk-to-fine-people-for-sleeping-with-prostitutes-and-has-brought-about-22-prosecutions-since-scheme-was-launched-three-weeks-ago-1-5710289>*

*If you thought those little yellow tickets were just used for parking fines, think again.*

Redbridge is the first borough in the country to issue fines for sleeping with a prostitute after a historic problem with sex workers in Ilford Lane.

Three weeks since the launch of the Prostitution Public Space Protection Order (PSPPO) police officers have issued 22 prosecutions, 81 dispersal notices, 14 prostitute cautions and eight arrests,

Police sergeant, Lee Wilkinson of Ilford Town Centre & Loxford ward said prostitution is made worse by some residents creating a demand for sex workers.

“The introduction of the new Prostitution Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) has been very successful to date,” he said.

“In three weeks we, along with Redbridge enforcement officers, have prosecuted 22 people for breaching it.

“We fully intend on enforcing this PSPO as much as we can to reduce the impact of prostitution on the community.

“Unfortunately the issue of prostitution is made worse by some local residents who create the demand for sex workers in Ilford Lane.

“Community leaders can help police and the local authority tackle prostitution by highlighting the PSPO and the risk of prosecution if residents are caught engaging with sex workers.”

Councillor Kam Rai, deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for finance and resources said the local authority is taking a “zero tolerance approach”.

“We are really proud that we are able to go after men who take advantage of these vulnerable women on the spot, and not just the prostitutes,” he said.

“Families should feel safe, walking though Ilford Lane without feeling harassed.”

It is not the first time that the council has been inventive in a bid to make the environment better for residents and it won an interim injunction banning illegal Traveller encampments across the borough in June this year.

“We are always working on new and innovative ways, through legal processes and partners such as the police, to make a positive difference for our borough,” he added.

“We know that the police are stretched and we are always looking to make their life easier and make changes for the benefit of our residents.”

# 'SEX WORKERS DIE AS A RESULT OF INEFFECTIVE POLICY': CAMPAIGN GROUP SLAMS REDBRIDGE COUNCIL'S PUNTER FINE

*By Ellena Cruse and Alice Richardson  
Ilford Recorder - October 1, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/crime-court/campaign-group-slam-redbridge-council-s-puter-fines-1-5717275>*

*The policy of fining punters who engage in sexual activity with prostitutes has been slammed by a campaign group.*

*Redbridge Council is the first borough in the UK to allow police and enforcement officers to issue on the spot penalties for soliciting sex on the streets.*

Organisation National Ugly Mugs (NUM), whose mission is to end violence against sex workers said the tactic will ultimately hurt these already vulnerable women.

"We feel that such action could lead to sex workers being displaced and working in areas in which it is less safe for them to do so," said Del Campbell, policy, police and training lead at NUM.

"This increased vulnerability means that sex workers are more likely to fall victim to dangerous offenders, as was Mariana Popa - a 24-year-old woman who worked in the borough and was murdered in 2014 during a period of similar heavy enforcement from police.

“Following this tragedy the police and council were keen to build trust with sex workers and adopted a model which reflected this - encouraging them to report and linking them in with support services where necessary.

“However in 2018, under pressure from vocal members of the community, local policing has again taken a heavy enforcement approach resulting in the current Public Space Protection Order (PSPOs) that allows both police and council enforcement officers powers to issue on the spot fines to those soliciting sex workers on the borough’s streets.”

The organisation is concerned that PSPOs will undermine the trust which has been built between the police and sex workers and cause a decrease in the reporting of crime committed against sex workers which is already very low in Redbridge and nationally.

“NUM is concerned that it would take another murder or high-profile violent incident to see policing shift back to a victim-centred approach.

“We are therefore keen to work with the police and the council (as we have done previously) to ensure that all voices and views on this complex issue are heard, especially the often silenced voices of sex workers themselves.”

“We need to learn from the past do everything in our powers to ensure that no more lives are lost as a result of heavy enforcement policies, and we invite all parties to engage with NUM to develop less harmful strategies that benefit not just sex workers but their entire communities.

“Sex workers die as a result of stigma, displacement, criminalization and ineffective policy.”

Council leader, Councillor Jas Athwal, said, prostitution in Ilford lane has been a problem for the last 20 years and it is unacceptable for residents to be propositioned multiple times when they walk down the street in the evening.

He takes exception to anyone accusing the council of being insensitive when they don’t have the “hard facts” in front of them.



“These people are not aware of how hard the council is working behind the scenes to find these women a safe route out of sex work and making sure that these women are thought of first,” he said.

“People are saying ‘this model doesn’t work, that model doesn’t work,’ - this is real life, this isn’t a model.

“We are trying to give the vibrant community of Loxford a good name again and that should be applauded. We are leaving no stone unturned to ensure a safe environment for residents, which is what they are asking us to do.”

He added that Redbridge Council is taking a multipronged approach to tackling prostitution “on our doorstep”

“We’re working closely with other agencies to help provide support to sex workers and create more accessible routes out of sex work, whilst also going after the kerb crawlers and men who take advantage of vulnerable sex workers,” he added.

“I am determined to make our streets safe, making sure residents don’t feel uncomfortable or intimidated when leaving their houses.

“The police are responsible for preventing criminal behaviour and protecting these women and we want to help them by providing as many tools as possible to target the users of sex workers.”

# LONGER READ: SUN, SANDALS AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION? CHILDREN GROOMED IN VALENTINES PARK, ILFORD, DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

*By Ellena Cruse  
Ilford Recorder - November 29, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
[https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/crime-court/  
children-give-sexual-favours-for-gifts-in-ilford-1-5799419](https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/crime-court/children-give-sexual-favours-for-gifts-in-ilford-1-5799419)*

*As summers go, Redbridge was blessed with a good one.*

Sunseekers in their droves lazed about in Valentines Park hoping to soak up some rays while the heatwave lasted. For the majority of residents, those care-free days have been reduced to a golden-tinged montage. But for a group of young people who were groomed and made to perform sexual acts within the gates of the park, the summer of 2018 changed their lives forever.

After being tipped off by Redbridge police, the Met's child sexual exploitation (CSE) unit closely observed Ilford over the holidays.

They built up a comprehensive intelligence picture and discovered that a number of secondary school-aged children were being plied with gifts including trainers, jewellery, alcohol and drugs in return for sexual favours both in the park and in the road near Ilford Station.

What was so despicable about the situation, as if it wasn't horrendous enough, was that often the groomers were young men who promised the girls they loved them.

One police officer said the victims were "brainwashed" and would do anything for the groomers as they believed they cared.

He explained that the crime could pass over most residents' heads, as walking down the street the pair wouldn't look too out of place compared to the "stereotypical image in most people's minds of an older man grooming a young girl".

"The victims are diverse, you get girls and sometimes boys from good backgrounds and from middle-class families," he said.

"The groomers brainwash them and often have a few girls on the go, so when one of them is busy with mum or dad or doing homework, they will switch to another one – of course, the girls don't realise they are not the only one."

The officers launched an operation to cause "maximum disrupting" to the trend, which culminated in a two-day initiative last week in Ilford.

The Recorder joined about 100 police officers, charity workers and immigration personnel and saw the team arrest 15 people in connection with CSE on November 22 and 23.

"CSE is not an exclusive issue to Ilford but we did identify recurring trends there," said Det Insp Laura Hillier who was running the operation on the ground.

Warning signs that something may not be right

- Going missing from home or staying out late
- Unexplained gifts
- Having an older boyfriend/girlfriend
- Truanting from school
- Needing regular treatment for sexually transmitted infections or getting pregnant
- New friends/engaging less with their usual friends
- Involvement in offending, drugs or alcohol
- Spending a lot of time online or appearing to be controlled by their phone
- Sudden changes in their appearance and wearing more revealing clothes

“Ilford has good transport links and you get young people travelling in from Essex and other areas.

“Valentines Park is a big draw, particularly in the summer months and young people gravitate towards it.

“The change from primary to secondary is a particularly high risk time for children.”

As I jump in the car and am driven round key Ilford spots it isn’t long before we spy a group of police officers arresting a man by the Exchange.

They also approach clusters of young people in the High Road, especially when there is one girl and lots of boys, to check it out.

The operation is co-ordinated from both the police station and Redbridge Council’s CCTV room in Ley Street, where staff monitor multiple screens recording footage across the borough.

“We take a multi-agency, multi-pronged approach to tackle this,” added Det Insp Hillier.

“As well as causing maximum disruption to CSE we try to engage with the public and raise awareness about what is going on and the signs to look out for – that is why we brought the police horses out as it is a good way to break the ice.


“We also carried out a two-day victim approach day with charity the Children’s Society and they made up canvas bags to give you, with things like lip gloss and headphones, as an icebreaker to engage with children.

“We explained to them what child exploitation is and encourage them to flag up anything going on.”

After a victim has reported an incident the individual and their family are supported by multiple agencies from the police to social services and charities.

Some families in the borough moved areas to ensure their children escaped from the groomers’ clutches.

“We aren’t complacent, we are working with partner agencies and taking a hardline approach – the overarching thing is safeguarding these children,” added Det Insp Hillier.



“Yes it is happening in Ilford and we are dealing with it, but I would encourage the public to report things that don’t feel right to 101 – often the public can feel like something isn’t right but they are not quite sure what has gone on.”

Natasha Chopra, service manager at The Children’s Society said the charity supported the police by engaging with young people at locations such as the library, takeaways and bus stops about the risk of CSE.

“This horrific crime can happen to any child in any community, so we asked about any concerns they had and explained how children can be targeted and groomed,” she said.

“Perpetrators can be really manipulative and some young people may not realise that they are victims of exploitation.

“It’s therefore really important that not only children but anyone who encounters children in their daily lives is aware of the warning signs that something isn’t right. We highlighted some of these and offered advice on staying safe.

“It’s vital that all young people know that they are not alone and there is support out there for them, and we explained how they can access help from organisations including The Children’s Society.”

# SCHOOL CHILDREN GROOMED WITH GIFTS FOR SEX IN ILFORD, POLICE CONFIRM

*By Ellena Cruse  
Ilford Recorder - November 29, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/crime-court/police-run-operation-in-ilford-to-target-sexual-exploitation-1-5799405>*

*Children have been performing sexual favours in return for new trainers, gifts and alcohol, Ilford police confirm.*

Around 100 Met officers along with outreach workers and immigration officials descended on Ilford town centre last week to disrupt criminal activity and raise awareness about sexual exploitation.

The victims are from diverse backgrounds, including middle-class families and children in the care system and some residents have moved neighbourhoods to remove their children from the exploiters clutches.

Det Insp Laura Hillier said there is a preconception that older males are targeting younger girls, but in Valentines Park and roads surrounding the station a lot of the time it was “peer on peer or a large group of boys with one girl”.

“It is happening in Ilford but we are dealing with it,” she said.

“We have a three-pronged approach - maximum disruption, zero tolerance and engaging with young people. We really need the public to be aware, they need to understand the signs and symptoms and lift their eyes and see what young people are doing in the area.”

Anyone with concerns about a young person should call the police on 101.

Find out more about what the police are doing to tackle grooming in the borough in our Longer reads article, airing at 7.30am.

**MEGAN JANETSKY (COLOMBIA)**

## **HOSPITALS ARE TURNING INTO 'CEMETERIES FOR MIGRANTS' ON COLOMBIA-VENEZUELA BORDER**



Megan Janetsky is a Colombia-based freelance journalist and photographer. She covers migration, human rights and women's issues across Latin America and has worked in Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, on the Venezuela border and the U.S.-Mexico border.

She is a stringer for USA Today and has worked with The New York Times, BBC, Al Jazeera, The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, The Atlantic, Foreign Policy, VICE, Public Radio International, Poynter, Christian Science Monitor, The New Republic, Atlas Obscura and more. She grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, where she first began reporting.

# HOSPITALS ARE TURNING INTO 'CEMETERIES FOR MIGRANTS' ON COLOMBIA-VENEZUELA BORDER

*By Megan Janetsky*  
*PRI's The World - May 29, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*  
<https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-05-29/hospitals-are-turning-cemeteries-migrants-colombia-venezuela-border>

*When 19-year-old Emily Semplu was about to give birth to her first child, she knew it was time to leave Venezuela.*

The day before she went into labor, she fled to neighboring Colombia by night through trochas, illegal dirt pathways along the border run by dangerous armed groups. The next morning, she was alone, writhing and drenched in sweat at Hospital San José, the only public hospital in the northern border city of Maicao, Colombia.

"I'm here because there [in Venezuela], you can't get anything," she said. "If you give birth there, you have to buy everything for them to take care of you."

As her doctor implored her to push, Semplu's hands locked around the side of her bed and she bit down on the faded blue rag crammed in her mouth.

Without an epidural available and sparse medical supplies, it was all Semplu could do to stop herself from biting her tongue or screaming.

Semplu is one of a growing mass of Venezuelans streaming into Colombia for health services as Venezuela's health system collapses from the economic crisis and devastating blackouts. Over 3.4 million migrants have fled to neighboring countries since 2015.

Colombia — a country that has received more Venezuelan migrants than any other — remains startlingly unprepared to take on that mass migration.



The city of Maicao, once a trade hub, lies in the La Guajira desert of northern Colombia and is home to the Wayuu people. The area, which already suffers from poverty, is also one of the hardest hit by Venezuela's migrant crisis. Today, entire migrant families live on the streets under the blazing sun. The number of Venezuelans who appear at Hospital San José suffering from infectious diseases, malnutrition and violent injuries has surged in the last year alone.

Overall mortality rates in Maicao are on course to more than double, possibly triple, in 2019 from the previous year, according to Maicao's Secretary of Health office. If the crisis continues to deepen, health officials say they're headed for a "collapse of the general health system," which could happen as early as October.

"The hospitals are turning into cemeteries of the migrant population," said Carlos Sánchez, assistant director of Hospital San José. "More complex cases that we aren't prepared to attend to arrive every day."

## *A Medical Spiral*

When Venezuela began its free fall in 2015 and 2016, migrants arriving to Maicao were young and healthy, seeking basic care like vaccines. But that changed in the coming years, especially in 2019, with country-wide blackouts all but devastated Venezuela's failing health system.

"This most recent group of immigrants right now don't arrive with the flu, with pain, with diarrhea," Sánchez said. "They arrive with cancer, with chronic kidney disease, with HIV, and always with high-risk pregnancies."

Leonardo Pérez, a Venezuelan obstetric gynecologist working both in his country and on the Colombian border, said he's watched Venezuela's medical system crumble, often having to deliver babies without light or life-saving medical equipment.

"The situation there [in Venezuela] is very critical," he said. "They lack supplies, they lack personnel, who have immigrated because of the same crisis. ... In hospitals, the operating rooms aren't working, intensive units aren't working."

Now, instead of seeking care in Venezuela's medical institutions, patients in increasingly dire situations cross to Colombia, hoping to receive free care from aid organizations and public hospitals.

Crises have emerged across Venezuela's borders. Brazil suffers from outbreaks in measles and diphtheria and other parts of the Colombian border have seen similar surges in maternal mortalities and infectious diseases.

But in Maicao, the situation has grown even more dire.

Between 2016 and 2018, cases of primary and urgent care provided to Venezuelans jumped from 632 to 34,570 — a more than 5,350% increase — according to the Maicao's Secretary of Health Hernando Salom Brito. By the end of 2019, the city is slated to care for around 60,000 Venezuelans.

That is if the health system hasn't collapsed by then.

Since the crisis began, the municipality has reported spikes in cases of congenital and gestational syphilis, measles, cancer, malaria, deaths from malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, dengue, acute malnutrition in children under the age of five, maternal mortalities and more. In the public hospital, about half the cases they care for involve children and pregnant women. While syphilis has been a longstanding problem, the measles outbreak is only just emerging and worsening, Salom said. In 2019, they've had 18 confirmed cases of measles and seven suspected cases.

That situation worsens month-to-month. With ongoing power struggles between Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó and President Nicolás Maduro deepening the conflict in Venezuela, Salom and Sánchez said they are seeing patients with more violent injuries arriving at their facilities.

"They arrive with all kinds of situations," Salom said. "From a birth emergency to an emergency from violence or bullets."

### ***'All I Can Do Is Pray'***

The small cluster of aid organizations — like the Red Cross, United Nations Children Fund, AmeriCares and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which

recently set up a small migrant camp near Maicao — only offer basic health services like first aid and vaccines and can't tend to the growing mass of serious cases arriving at their doorstep.

Instead, patients from the UNHCR camp get sent to the Hospital San José, an often-dangerous three-hour walk from the border in the scorching desert sun.

When those patients arrive, doctors often don't have the resources to address the more extreme cases because of the unprecedented number of patients.

The camp can hold up to 350 migrants, but due to limited resources, they only accept the most vulnerable including women, children, the elderly and disabled people. Residents also face a 30-day limit, so many end up back on the streets.

"Apart from this small group of NGOs present in Maicao," said Marco Rotunno, spokesperson for the UN refugee agency, "there is a medical services gap here in Maicao. So, we don't have third-level medical services," or higher-complexity treatments that require more money and resources.

That was the case for 10-year-old Isabel González, a migrant from Venezuela who, in early May, laid in her hospital bed with a makeshift tourniquet and cast wrapped around her shattered knee.

In April, Isabel fell from a taxiciclo, an auto rickshaw commonly used along the border, on her way to school. Her mother rushed her to San José. When she and her mother arrived, they learned doctors had the ability to operate, but the hospital couldn't afford the resources for the surgery that could cost up to \$6,000.

For more than a month, they waited in the hospital as administrators fruitlessly called NGOs for help. For them, it's still unclear if Isabel will get the surgery she needs or ever walk again.

"I'm scared that something will happen to [her], and all I can do is pray," said her mother, Celia Ipunna, crying at the foot of her bed. "Someone has to help her. ... If I could, I would ask God if I could take her place."

Other situations are fatal.

In the maternity ward, sobs echoed through the hallways as one woman clutched a phone with a picture of a baby on the screen. Her pregnant niece had crossed into Colombia to give birth, but she died during the labor. The baby, however, survived. Months prior, the woman's niece had received an operation in Venezuela that, without antibiotics, had caused a deadly infection in her stomach.

"She waited five days for an intensive care unit," said Sánchez, the assistant director. "But we couldn't offer one because we didn't have an available bed in La Guajira or other departments [in other hospitals]."

Death rates in Maicao have shot up in since January. For the entirety of 2018, the Secretary of Health's office documented 86 deaths, while in just the first four months of 2019 they documented 65 deaths, the vast majority a result of basic public health issues.

Aid providers anticipate the crisis will worsen; they say their only hope is more aid from international or Colombian leaders, which thus far has been "insufficient." If they don't, more complex medical care for Venezuelan migrants streaming across the northern border could be all but eradicated.

"It's going to get worse because we're going to arrive at a moment where the public hospitals aren't going to have resources to take care of migrants or Colombians," Sánchez said.

Megan Janetsky reported this story from Maicao, Colombia

**MIZAR KEMAL (IRAQ)**

**LOCKED HER IN A DARK  
ROOM AND PREVENTED  
HER FROM EATING...  
THE JOURNEY OF AN  
IRAQI WOMAN FROM  
MARRIAGE TO QUADRIPLÉGIA**



Iraqi Journalist. Winner of Professional Investigative Journalism Award 2020 held by NIRIJ in Iraq. Short-list nominee for Fetisov Journalism Awards 2019 in Switzerland in the category of Civil Rights. Short-list nominee for Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press 2019 presented by the European Union for the category of “investigative reporting”. Third-place winner of 2019 ARIJ Awards for Best multimedia piece.

Writer, Poet, Author of “Cries of August” (Pages Publishing House, 2016).

# LOCKED HER IN A DARK ROOM AND PREVENTED HER FROM EATING... THE JOURNEY OF AN IRAQI WOMAN FROM MARRIAGE TO QUADRIPLÉGIA

*By Mizar Kemal  
Sasapost, Turkey - December 29, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://www.sasapost.com/the-story-of-irqi-sabrin-tortured-by-her-husband/>*

*Note: All photos and videos were obtained by the writer from Sabreen's family.*

"She was like a rose, beautiful, and full of health and activity, but now she withers and withers, having lost her ability to walk and speak, as well as hearing. He is a monster, this man does not have in his heart an atom of mercy".

This is how she describes her sister, Sabreen, who during her years of marriage was tortured by her husband, who eventually gave up and prevented her from seeing her four children, to begin another painful chapter of her harsh life.

## ***Husband... Imam and Preacher of a Mosque in Baghdad***

Sabreen's tragedy began after her marriage in 2005 from Qais Obaid Imam and preacher of one of the mosques in Baghdad. Her family says he forced her to wear

the niqab, prevented her from visiting her relatives, and prevented her from visiting her married sisters who live nearby. Saberín's sister, Om Aisar, adds that his behavior was understood by us as love and jealousy, but over time it turned out that he was practicing his brutal sadism.

The photos and videos received from the Sabreen family show the great and horrific difference between her pre-marital and post-marital status. The traces of torture appear clear on her body, and her sister confirmed that her husband had deliberately locked her up in a dark room for long periods, preventing her from eating, drinking or washing.

At the beginning of her fourth pregnancy, in 2014, she began to experience strange symptoms such as stumbling to the ground, numbness in her limbs, and hearing difficulties. Many doctors in Iraq diagnosed peripheral neuropathy, gradually losing her ability to walk. And the disease caused severe muscular dystrophy.

"We want the state to intervene, and we want the President of the Republic and the Minister of Interior to consider her situation, this is a crime. Sabreen had been thrown and her children taken from her. We want the state to treat her, and we hope to be treated in India, the medicine here is expensive," this is how Alia Sarhan, the mother of Sabreen, talks about how her husband brutally beat her, held her in a room, and prevented her from seeing her children (Abdel Aziz, Aishah Rakia and Hajar) and even more if one of her children tried to enter her room he/she would have been punished severely.

Om Aisar, Sabreen's sister, says that since her sister's health deteriorated, her brother-in-law has been recording videos of his wife in the house where she is wheelchair-bound, and sends these videos to Iraqi officials and humanitarian organizations for money on the pretext of treating her, but actually, he wouldn't have done that.

The midwife Umm Ahmad, who was also responsible for Sabreen's giving birth, asserts that Sabreen was in full mental and physical strength, and that she has changed so much. But because of the psychological pressure, hunger, torture and imprisonment she collapsed psychologically and physically, and asks: "Is a man who does this to his wife?"

Sabreen is not the only, there are thousands of women like Sabreen in our society, just go to the courts and you see the disaster,” says this mother, talking about the number of lawsuits filed by the family to remove Sabreen from her husband.

Sabreen’s family says she got this video from a person who works with a representative in the Iraqi parliament. The person told them that Sabreen’s husband filmed video for “trading and begging” and getting money by the pretext of treatment.

### ***In Iraq, No Law Protects Women***

In Iraq there is no law to protect women from domestic violence, and despite the demands of international human rights organizations to enact the law on domestic violence, the Iraqi parliament has not yet done so, the Family Violence Courts of the Iraqi judiciary are constrained in their work, where there are no shelters for women or children who exposed to violence, also, those accused of domestic violence crimes are missing places of detention. They are imprisoned with those accused of terrorism, murder and other heavy sentences.

In a report issued in May 2015, the Family Violence Courts in Iraq showed that 90 per cent of domestic violence cases the victims were women, according to the report, “the court has no privacy in terms of laws because there is no special law on domestic violence, especially there are texts that contradict this concept, including that the husband has the right to discipline his wife.”

Although the report attributed the causes of domestic violence to the deterioration of the security and economic situation, which negatively affects the family; however, he noted that such crimes were not confined to those with limited education, but also to the educated and university professors.

National statistics and studies on violence against Iraqi women are few, especially after the control of the Islamic State Organization in three Iraqi provinces and the spread of armed militias in the rest of the provinces. But there is a survey conducted by “Iraqi Family Health” in 2006 concluded that one out of five Iraqi women face physical family violence.



A study by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning issued in 2012 revealed that at least 36% of married women reported exposure to some form of psychological harm from their husbands, 23% reported verbal abuse, 6% reported physical violence and 9% reported sexual violence. While no more recent national studies are available.

In March 2017, Human Rights Watch sent a memorandum to the head of Iraqi Parliament Salim al-Jubouri demanding penalties for domestic violence offenses, and the abolition of items that rely on reconciliation, not justice, with strengthening protection measures for victims in the draft law against domestic violence.

Human Rights Watch said in its memorandum that the enforcement of a national law combatting domestic violence meets international standards is an indispensable step in preventing violations and dealing with them. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Iraq in 1986, considers violence against women to be a form of discrimination based on sex.

In May 2014, the United Nations representative for women in Iraq, Francis Kay, revealed during an interview with the agency “Al-Mada Press” that 60% of women in Iraq were subjected to violence by their husbands. “The percentage of educated women in Iraq during the 1950s was about 90 percent, but now it is down to 40 percent,” she said.

According to the United Nations Office for Women in Iraq, only 14% of Iraqi women work outside the home, which is the lowest and the most dangerous rate in the world; It means that 86% of Iraqi women do not have independence because they do not have their own income.

### ***A Lawsuit in “Abu Ghraib” and a Death Threat***

Sabreen’s family says her husband, Qais Obaid, threatened that she would not see her children if she responded to her parents’ request and filed lawsuits against him. The family says that the husband threatened to kill Sabreen’s father, Abdullah Farhan, if he did not close the case file in the Abu Ghraib court. Sabreen’s sister says how he told them that the court judge stood beside him and raising his right hand and rubbing his index finger and thumb fingers together, a movement that meant bribing in Iraq.

The father of Sabreen asks the competent authorities in the state to punish his daughter's husband and asks how he can handle his daughter's right if the state fails to do so. Mr. Abdullah Farhan says: "Will I kill him?" Then he says: "It will turn into a tribal issue and I am a poor man who has nothing to spend on the tribal separation."

But why should the father of Sabreen fear tribal separation more than his fear of state law? Tribal custom in Iraq is a more effective and binding law than civil state laws, and women are often victims of this custom and a price to resolving conflicts between two tribes.

For example, in 2015, a dispute broke out between two tribes in the southern province of Basra, in which heavy weapons were used, dead and wounded among the two tribes, to end this war, the aggressor clan had to provide 40 women, including minor girls, as a compensation to the other tribe, where they are forced to be married to men from the tribe of the opponent.

In a similar incident, in the province of Basra also 11 women have been provided as a compensation for the resolution of armed conflict between two clans; this is a tradition followed by the tribes in southern Iraq for hundreds of years.

At a time when the voices of organizations defending women's rights are rising in the need for the state to intervene to curb the tribal customs that make women a commodity and deprive them of their human value, the head of the Parliamentary Tribes Committee in the Iraqi Parliament Aboud al-Issawi defended these customs, "Iraqi society is a tribal society basically, and therefore the clan act within the social controls that relieve the state a lot of judicial matters" saying to Aljazeera magazine.

### ***The Father Tells the Story of His Daughter***

Sabreen's father, Mr. Farhan, continues to tell the tale that his daughter's husband was only allowed her to visit them for long periods of time, sometimes up to six months or a year, although she lives in the same city, but at the beginning of her fourth pregnancy in 2014, she was permanently prevented from seeing her parents or brothers; and also prevented her family from visiting her home.

He added “I could not do anything. I do not want to be told that I am trying to spoil the marital life of my daughter and her relationship with her husband and children, and I did not think to divorce her from him and file a lawsuit for that, but he abandoned her”.

It is not easy to sue for divorce in Iraq. Although the Personal Status Law grants women the right to divorce in certain cases, the husband can complicate matters if he rejected divorce. Or at least the case continues for several years in the courts.

Usually, when a woman wants to divorce, she must give up her rights, which include the “advanced and the deferred “ and her share of the house. Otherwise, the man will reject the case to force the woman to compromise and accept the settlement, as well as a retaliation for his “manhood”.

Despite the difficulty and complexity of the situation, however, Iraq recorded shocking figures for divorce cases in 2017, where the Supreme Judicial Council documented 70,097 cases of divorce, the largest share of them was in the capital through the registration of courts for 27,481 divorce cases.

The Supreme Judicial Council attributes the growing phenomenon of divorce in Iraq to several factors, including the marriage of minors, which has returned to the forefront again and more than in previous years, as well as among the reasons that the Supreme Judicial Council sees as a reason for the increasing phenomenon of divorce is the spread of social media and modern applications and the negative use of them, while stressing that the cases of electronic extortion is one of the images that accounted for a ratio of divorces.

Insecurity, widespread of unemployment, poverty and ignorance are reasons not mentioned in the HJC statement, but they may be key to extrapolating the phenomenon of divorce, in 2017, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) documented the deaths of 3,328 civilians and 4,781 others, except for civilian casualties in Anbar province for the last two months of 2017, when numbers were not available.

The statistics of the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council do not include divorces that take place away from the courts. These are not recorded in the official records of the state, and many families often resort to so-called legal marriage, which is conducted by a religious man, it differs from civil marriage being conducted by the court.

This is for 2017; but what about 2018? The SJC's data is not promising, but shocking. There are 10 cases of divorce every hour, with 48,174 cases of divorce in Iraq in the first seven months of 2018.

The HJC's expectations say that the divorce cases will rise to 100,000 by the end of the year, which means an increase of about 30,000 divorce cases comparing 2017, and Baghdad will continue to be the biggest share of the tragedy.

The large numbers of divorces have been on the increase since 2014, where - during the follow-up of statistics issued per month on the Supreme Judicial Council and from the period 2014 to the end of 2017, the total number of divorce cases reached about 700 thousand, we find that the equivalent of 20% of marriages in Iraq ends with divorce.

### ***Civil Society Organizations Defend Sabreen***

Sabreen is now in her poor family home in Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad, where one of the world's most famous prisons, the Abu Ghraib prison, is linked to a 2004 US-led scandal of torture, rape and murder of Iraqi prisoners.

Her father talks about his inability to treat her "I appeal to the President of the Republic to pay attention to our situation, I cannot treat my daughter, I do not have the money for that. I started begging to raise money and buy medicine for her. Please tell the concerned authorities about our situation."

Then, in a telephone conversation with him, Mr. Abdullah Farhan describes his fear of threats by his daughter's husband to kill him, and justified his reluctance to receive journalists or the media to talk about the issue of his daughter Sabreen that his house is watched by people who owe allegiance to the husband.

Sabreen's case was supported by civil society organizations and women's rights groups. In a real move, the president of the Iraqi "Hope Association" and human rights activist Hanaa Edouard filed a lawsuit against Sabreen's husband, who was subsequently detained by the police.

She says: "as nations celebrate World Day against Violence against Women, we hear in Iraq the story of Sabreen and her suffering with family violence. We in women's

organizations and civil society organizations have activities in various regions of Iraq to defend the right of women to live and to defend their dignity”.

Ms. Hana Edwar said that the slogan of the women's organizations in Iraq is the law against domestic violence, in order to protect families from violations and to ensure that the perpetrator did not escape punishment, Legislation is also an opportunity to rehabilitate victims of violence. Iraqi legislators should accelerate the passage of the law for Iraqi women and reduce the incidence of domestic violence that has become horrific.

### ***The Husband's Narration***

In a manner similar to giving the sermon to the pulpit, Sabreen's husband, Qais Obaid, who was released by the Abu Ghraib court judge on bail, responds to his wife's family and talks about his suffering in taking Sabreen's to hospitals, and the great financial losses incurred in the treatment, and hardly talk about anything but the amount of medical reports in his possession, which proves - as he says - his constant attempts to seek the treatment of his wife.

When asked about the accusation of Sabreen's family about beating and torturing her, he did not answer the question by saying: "I do not say that men do not beat their wives or torture them in order not to justify beating". "Then he went on to talk about" false witnesses" as he described them, who wanted to distort his image.

The husband, Qais Obaid, talks about Sabirin's last four years in the disease and how she was unable to serve him, and confirms that his wife was sick before marrying her, but her family hid that from him, because they want to get rid of her.

He says: Sabrin always felt numb in her feet, and feel that one of her legs is cold and the other is hot, and when she gave birth to my first daughter she was infected with a virus in the intestine, and when she gave birth to my son Abdulaziz he was suffering of fistulas in his bottom. During this period, I was spending money on their treatment, especially Sabreen, and my salary was not enough."

The brother of "Qais Obaid" Mr. "Saadi Obeid" did not hesitate to deny the charges against his brother, and tells how his brother treating his wife and his children well,

so he did not marry another woman, and says that her family are the cause of what happened.

The husband accuses Sabreen family of obstructing her travel plan to India, and her father refused more than once to give him the necessary documents to complete the file of travel and treatment, and between mutual accusations Sabreen remains patient, home-locked and victims of violence against women in Iraq.

Document of the Medical Committee at the Hospital of Neuroscience in Baghdad proves Sabreen's disease "Cerebrospinal spondylosis".

### ***From Bad to Worse***

According to the husband, over the past four years Sabreen reviewed 23 doctors; but her condition did not improve. In addition to peripheral neuropathy, she is suffering from "cerebrospinal spondylosis" which requires physiotherapy and natural therapy.

The Iraqi Penal Law does not protect women from violence and may encourage her persecution. According to the law, a man who kills his wife is imprisoned for a maximum of three years only.

In fact, the status of women in Iraqi society was not good during the 1990s, because of the international embargo that resulted from UN Resolution 661 of August 1990 after the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in the same year.

In 2004, one year after the US invasion of Iraq, US President George W. Bush told a White House gathering: "Every woman in Iraq is better off now, because the rape and torture chambers of Saddam Hussein's regime have been closed forever".

*Approximately 72.4% of Iraqi women in rural areas, and 64.1% of women in urban areas have their husbands' permission to go to the health clinic. "Thomson Reuters"*

That the situation for Iraqi women worsened after the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, according to a study conducted by "the charity arm of Thomson Reuters News and Information" in 2013 to assess the situation of women in 22 Arab countries in terms of violence, reproductive rights, intra-family treatment, integration into society and

attitudes towards their role in politics and economy, Iraq came second - after Egypt - as the worst Arab country in which women can live.

The mass exodus caused by sectarian fighting in Iraq has made women vulnerable to trafficking and sexual violence. Thousands of Iraqi women have been forced to flee war and work in brothels in countries such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates.


The situation of Iraqi women has declined further after the invasion of the “ISIS” organization of some Iraqi cities. After the organization’s control of the city of Mosul and its environs, the organization kidnapped hundreds of Iraqi women from the Yezidi religion and practiced the worst forms of violence and crime, where women were subjected to rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage and sale in slaves market, These violations may fall under the acts of war crimes and rise to the level of crimes against humanity.

Although the Iraqi state expelled the organization “ISIS ” from the cities that controlled it, including the city of Mosul after fierce battles caused the collapse of infrastructure, destruction and large losses of human estimated tens of thousands of dead and hundreds of thousands of displaced, however, many women are still missing. Survivors’ testimonies say that the organization transferred many women detained in Mosul to Syria to present gifts to its fighters who are still active there.

### ***The Nightmare of Violence and Disease***

According to her father, the cost of a patient’s treatment is estimated at 15 million Iraqi dinars (12,600\$), a large sum that cannot be provided by poor Iraqi families such as Sabreen family, and between the family’s accusations that her husband abused her and causing her illness and between the husband’s denied the charges Sabreen remains struggling with the disease far from her four children and her home, which has been transformed from a dream of motherhood and warmth into a nightmare of violence and disease.

During the attempts of research and investigating the facts and statistics that can be presented to highlight the suffering of Iraqi women by working on Sabreen’s story - as a



harsh and clear example of the violence and persecution of Iraqi women In a war-torn country, sectarian fighting has destroyed its social fabric - we have been able to obtain family testimonies and stories, we also got the story of the husband and his brother, but the whole story is hidden in the heart of Sabreen, who missed her voice; and she kept her eyes on those around her telling that what had happened was more harsh.



# NATASHYA GUTIERREZ (PHILIPPINES)

## ABORTION STORY

### A series



*Photo: Natashya Gutierrez's  
profile on Twitter*

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Natashya Gutierrez is a Filipino journalist best known for her work as a multimedia reporter for internet news organization Rappler.

# ABORTION STORY

## PART 1: FILIPINAS BUY, SELL, RATE ABORTIONS IN ONLINE FORUM

*By Natashya Gutierrez  
The Rappler - August 13, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
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## PETER NKANGA (NIGERIA)

# SPECIAL REPORT: HOW BUHARI'S GOVT DETAINED NIGERIAN JOURNALIST FOR TWO YEARS WITHOUT TRIAL



Peter Nkanga is a Nigerian multilingual investigative journalist and human rights advocate. He co-founded Sherlock Veritas, a private investigative firm of journalists and lawyers collaborating on investigations and instituting legal actions across Africa. Peter specializes in digital, physical and psychosocial (holistic) security. He is a foundation member of the African League of Web Activists and Bloggers for Democracy, known as Africtivistes, made up of over 250 members from 40 African countries.

Peter is a former West Africa representative of the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists. He is a past finalist of the CNN Multichoice African Journalist Awards; a former African Investigative Journalist of the Year; and twice winner of the Wole Soyinka Award for Investigative Reporting.

# SPECIAL REPORT: HOW BUHARI'S GOVT DETAINED NIGERIAN JOURNALIST FOR TWO YEARS WITHOUT TRIAL

*By Peter Nkanga*  
*Premium Times - July 1, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:*  
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/274467-special-report-how-buharis-govt-detained-nigerian-journalist-for-two-years-without-trial.html>

In tears, 80-year-old Mama Abiri undressed. Before strangers, family, and friends alike, Mama clasped her frail breasts, and cried inconsolably, naked. With emotions only a mother could express, Mama cried in the native Ijaw language of the Niger Delta creeks. Mama was calling on Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari, to feel her pain and hear her plea.

"Please, I am begging. Please, pity me. Anyone that is holding my son, please release him for me," Mama cried. "I gave birth to him. I breastfed him. I know my son. He is not a militant. He is not a criminal. He is a journalist."

For almost two years, Jones Abiri has not been seen nor heard from. Married with a wife and five children, Jones would have celebrated his 50th birthday on June 4 this year. Jones was a 300-Level student aspiring for his first degree in Law from the National Open University of Nigeria. All that is in the past.

Now, Mr Abiri remains in a state of forced disappearance as the State Security Service (SSS), Nigeria's secret police, has detained him for over 700 days without trial, and

without access to his family, lawyers, and doctors. Under international human rights law, a person is a victim of (en)forced disappearance if detained by state authorities or a third party with the authorisation of the state, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the person's whereabouts and condition in a bid to deny the victim the protection of the law.

### *The Arrest*

On July 21, 2016, a dozen heavily-armed agents of the self-styled Department of State Services arrested Mr Abiri, the publisher of Weekly Source newspaper, outside his office at 288 Chief Melford Okilo Expressway, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Eyewitnesses said the SSS agents, who came in three cars, did not read him his rights and did not produce a warrant before handcuffing him, raiding his office, and taking him into custody.

“Some men wearing black came to where we were and asked if he was Jones,” Garba Suleiman, a local provision store vendor who witnessed the arrest said in pidgin English.

“He said yes, and they grabbed him, handcuffed him, and took him. Nobody knew why.”

John Angese, the chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists in Bayelsa State, in an interview in March recalled how at gunpoint the SSS threatened everyone, including journalists, not to cross a parameter line. The SSS spent hours searching Mr Abiri's office before carting away his computer and documents, sealing his office, and taking him handcuffed into custody.

“I was personally there when he was taken away. I tried to ask what was the problem but I was rebuffed with their guns. I was threatened to be shot if I went any closer. Everybody was scared,” Mr Angese recalled.

Two days after his arrest, the SSS on July 23, 2016 released a statement alleging Mr Abiri is a militant named General Akotebe Darikoro, operating under the nom-de-guerre, General Kill and Bury, the leader of the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force, “which has been furthering separatist tendencies in connivance with other criminal gangs in the Niger Delta region”.

The SSS said the detainee “confessed and owned up” to vandalising and bombing oil pipelines belonging to international oil companies Agip and Shell in early July 2016, sending threat messages to management of both oil companies demanding a total of N750 million payment, threatening to launch missile attacks against the Presidential Villa and selected targets in Abuja, and masterminding the rumour in 2016 that the military was planning a coup against President Muhammadu Buhari.

Weekly Source, a local tabloid which operated by mostly sourcing and publishing critical stories of the government culled from online and national newspapers, had in its last edition dated July 10, 2016 published as its lead a story originally published by the online pointblanknews.com titled “Rumble In The Military: Inside The Coup Plot Story... Militants’ Warning Alters Plot.”

The story elaborated an alleged conspiracy that top military officers working with politicians had approached the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF) militant group to intensify bombing pipelines as a justification to overthrow President Buhari. The military denied the allegations.

Weekly Source in the same edition published another story sourced from pointblanknews.com on how President Buhari’s loyalists, including the Director-General of the SSS, were blocking investigations into an oil and gas company implicated by the anti-graft Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in siphoning billions of dollars in fraudulent oil deals. The story claimed that the company donated heavily towards President Buhari’s 2015 presidential campaign through the loyalists.

Jackson Ude, the publisher of pointblanknews.com based in the U.S., in an interview in 2016 said he had received threats, from proxies of the SSS, asking him to pull down stories from his website which local based journalists like Mr Abiri were re-publishing in their newspapers and tabloids. He said he had been warned of possible arrest whenever he came to Nigeria.

### ***The ‘Confession’***

In August 2016, Mr Abiri’s family filed a fundamental rights enforcement lawsuit against the SSS, asking the Bayelsa State High Court to declare his arrest and continued

detention without trial unconstitutional, unlawful, illegal, null and void, and order the SSS to release him on bail, and direct the SSS to open Weekly Source newspaper's office.

The SSS in response tendered as its only evidence in court a confessional statement allegedly written and signed by Mr Abiri on the same day of his arrest, admitting to "being the founder, co-ordinator and spokesperson" of the militant group and "directing his foot soldiers (still at large) to carry out bombings of oil pipelines" and blackmailing oil companies for money with threats of further bombings.

On September 7, 2016, a Bayelsa State high court judge, Nayai Aganaba, ordered the SSS to reopen Weekly Source newspaper's office but ruled that the SSS arrest and continued detention of Mr Abiri, then almost two months, was lawful. The ruling effectively gave legal backing for the SSS to continue detaining him without charge for almost two years and without access to his family, lawyers and doctors.

"The offence of terrorism and related offences for which [Mr Abiri] was arrested and detained is a capital offence by virtue of Section 1 (2) under paragraph (h) of the Terrorism Prevention Amendment Act 2013 and by virtue of Section 35 (7) of the 1999 Constitution, the arrest and detention of [Mr Abiri] by the [SSS] is therefore not unlawful," Mr Aganaba ruled.

The SSS also swore on oath that the "seeming delay in charging [him] to court" was due to "ongoing efforts to arrest other members of the militant group" as well as results of "scientific analysis of evidence" still been awaited. The SSS promised "to ensure an expedited conclusion of investigation on the case and to charge [him] and his accomplices to court without undue delay".

It is almost two years and Mr Abiri, a husband, father of five children, and breadwinner for his family including an 80-year-old mother and several siblings, has not been charged to court.

In the past two years, the SSS has rebuffed all efforts by Mr Abiri's family, lawyers, journalists and civil society actors to get any information on him.

In June, during the International Press Institute World Congress held in Abuja, Garba Shehu, spokesperson to President Buhari, sold to the world that Mr Abiri is not a

journalist but a militant who remains a “guest of [the SSS] because of his alleged criminal activities.” The Information minister, Lai Mohammed, also echoed a similar claim.

Nigerian authorities also declined to allow Mr Abiri’s wife and son who travelled from Bayelsa State to Abuja access to see him in SSS captivity.

In the past two years, the family relocated from Yenagoa, Bayelsa State capital, to the village in the Southern Ijaw local government creeks where they barely survive on petty farming and handouts. In the past two years, his children also dropped out and have not gone back to school due to the family’s inability to pay school fees.

In the past two years, his younger brother, Ebikesayi Abiri, died from fire burns he sustained in 2017 after he involved himself for the first time in illegal oil bunkering which his family said was in a bid to raise money to pay among other things legal costs and other bills associated with getting Mr Abiri released. Ebikesayi left behind a widow and two children, one of whom was born the same day he died.

Curiously, in the past two years, the SSS and Nigerian authorities have also kept hidden from the public and refused to act on vital information relating to members and financiers of the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force militant group, according to Mr Abiri’s alleged confessional statement dated July 21, 2016 in court records.

“The only person that has funded the group to the best of my knowledge is the former commissioner of Ijaw National Affairs, Dr Felix Tuodolo, who gave us the sum of N500, 000 through Sele Dise sometime between 1st and 15th June 2016,” Mr Abiri allegedly wrote in his confessional statement. “Sele told me that the commissioner called him on phone and gave him the money to support the group.”

Mr Tuodolo is at present the Special Adviser on Ijaw national affairs to Seriake Dickson, the governor of the oil-rich Bayelsa State. The former state commissioner is well known as a human rights activist and the founding president of the influential Ijaw Youth Council which was set up at the twilight of Nigerian military dictatorship to coordinate the Ijaw people’s struggle for self-determination and greater control of vast oil and gas resources in the Niger Delta region.

Mr Tuodolo was influential in stemming the tide of militancy in the 2000s by advocating for the government to grant amnesty to known militant warlords and



their camps in a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme in exchange for assurances of a stop to the destruction of oil installations. The militants who ostensibly repented and surrendered their arms were given huge government contracts, placed on regular stipend running into billions of naira yearly, and sponsored around the world for training in diverse skills acquisition and education programmes.

Mr Abiri in his alleged confessional statement mentioned Sele Dise, Ebi John, Justice Tare and Ebi-Ladei as other members of the JNDLF militant group. Independent findings during this investigation, including obtaining communication exchanges between Mr Abiri and an individual believed to be Sele Dise, revealed both had been friends prior to Mr Abiri's arrest in July 2016.

"Sometime February this year 2016, Mr Sele Dise came to my office with the idea that let us form the organisation. I don't know what they [other members] do for a living but I know Sele is a 200-Level student of Public Administration in Niger Delta University [Bayelsa State]," the statement read.

When contacted, Mr Tuodolo said he was only aware from media reports that Mr Abiri is a journalist but that he does not know him personally nor the details of his arrest. He said as a prominent Ijaw leader, he often renders financial assistance to his kinsmen who regularly solicit his help to pay school fees, house rent, and other financial support, but not to fund militant activities.

Mr Tuodolo expressed shock over Mr Abiri's alleged confessional statement linking him as a financier of the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force militant group.

"I don't even know Jones Abiri. This is the first time I am hearing about this that Jones Abiri made a statement involving my name. That sounds strange to me," he said in a telephone call in June this year. "And if indeed he made such statement, why hasn't the SSS come to question me about it? I have never been invited."

Mr Tuodolo's claim has not been independently verified as efforts to get the SSS to react to Mr Abiri's case and other instances of human rights violations, including indefinite detentions, torture, and extra-judicial killings, have repeatedly been ignored over the years.

Since 2015, the agency has been operating without a physically identifiable spokesperson or official contact to interface and respond to information requests from the public and the media. Press statements distributed by the SSS cite as its spokesperson one Tony Opuiyo, a fictitious character whom no one has met, several journalists who cover the defence and security beat have said. The journalists complained that during parades of crime suspects, the SSS does not permit them to ask questions and many times hinder their reporting factually through intimidation and threat of arrests.

“The way the SSS operates now is we can’t ask for information and get it. There is no spokesperson, no one to make enquiries on behalf of the public who we are reporting for. No one to hold accountable. It is serious. Even in court, many of the cases, they disturb us from covering,” said one journalist during an informal chat during this investigation.

Ayebaitari Easterday, the chairman of newspaper publishers in the state, in March said Mr Abiri whom he had known for over 20 years as a law-abiding citizen was on medication for an undisclosed ailment at the time of his arrest. He said the liability of responsibility lies on the SSS to disprove rumours of his death.

“I don’t want to believe Jones is dead because you can only believe what you’ve seen and what you know is true,” said Mr Easterday. “The SSS should declare the condition of Jones Abiri, where he is right now, what is the state of his health, and why they have refused to prosecute him over the years. Something should be told to the public. We are curious. We want to know. And we have a right to know.”

### ***Ex-SSS Detainee Narrates Experience***

Comrade (name withheld), a Niger Delta Ijaw activist whose identity is being protected for his safety, said he met Mr Abiri in SSS custody while detained for nearly two years on allegations of being a militant. Comrade said that before his release in 2017, he was detained with over 50 Ijaw and Niger Delta youth, numerous Boko Haram suspects and members of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) secessionist group, who were all routinely tortured at the SSS Headquarters in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja.

“We were all together for over one year so we knew ourselves. I was in New Depot detention facility while Jones was in Old Depot. I remember one particular day Jones was shouting: “They wan go beat me again. They wan go beat me again.” It pained me so much I cried,” Comrade said.

Early 2016, the government declared an influential ex-Niger Delta militant commander, Government Ekpemupolo, popularly called Tompolo, wanted. The anti-graft agency, EFCC, froze his bank accounts, and began an unsuccessful manhunt for the former warlord after he refused to appear before a court to answer corruption charges over contracts obtained from the previous government of President Goodluck Jonathan.

His supporters alleged a ploy by the government to arrest and indefinitely detain the former warlord seen by many as a very influential folk hero in the Niger Delta. They cited with examples several ongoing cases where the SSS continues to refuse to obey Nigerian and international court orders granting the release on bail to several high-profile suspects in SSS custody.

Militant groups responded to the government’s clamp down with renewed bombings of oil installations. Security agencies, in an unsuccessful bid to flush him out, arrested scores of Niger Delta activists and youth perceived as sympathetic to the former militant leader.

Comrade said Mr Abiri told him he was set up by powerful people who capitalised on the government’s clampdown in the Niger Delta to punish him for publishing a story that exposed how their company, which was a local contractor to Agip [international oil company], failed to fulfil its corporate social responsibility to oil-producing host communities.

“His article led Agip to find out that their company was shortchanging the communities and this caused problems for them. They were angry and then petitioned the security agencies that Jones is the media handler to militant groups and that was how he was picked up,” Comrade said Mr Abiri told him.

## SSS *'Above the Law'*

Comrade said suspects in SSS custody were habitually tortured. In tears, he narrated how the SSS at different times used beating, electrocution, and exposure of radiation to his testicles to force him to confess being a militant. Comrade quoted his case officer as once telling him “the DSS is above the laws of the land. DSS only listens to the instruction of Mr President. Anything short of that, including court orders, you are just wasting your time.”

Femi Falana, a foremost human rights lawyer, wrote an open letter to President Buhari in December 2017 asking him to end the illegal arrest and detention without legal justification of Nigerians and foreigners by security agencies, especially the SSS, which he described an embarrassment to the country by its continued violation of the Nigerian constitution, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights Act, and the Nigerian Administration of Criminal Justice Act.

“From the information at our disposal, the DSS has detained several Nigerians and foreigners to settle personal scores,” Mr Falana said to President Buhari. “Others have been arrested and detained by the DSS on the suspicion that they have committed criminal offences, a matter that is within the purview of the Police and the anti-graft agencies. To compound the illegality of such arrest and detention, the orders made by competent courts of law directing the DSS to either release or produce detainees in court have been treated with contempt.”

In the past three years since President Buhari appointed Lawal Daura, his kinsman from Katsina State, as SSS director general, the agency’s mode of operations has been reminiscent of past Nigerian military dictatorships, which created the organisation and deployed it with impunity to intimidate, indefinitely detain without charge, and habitually torture individuals, including journalists, activists, and political figures, deemed critical of the military government.

Under Mr Buhari’s rule as military Head of State in the 80s, the SSS, then known as the National Security Organisation, became an agency of repression and a crack violator of human rights. Mr Buhari promulgated and implemented several laws, including Decree 2 which granted the SSS arbitrary powers to indefinitely detain any person

without charges, and Decree 4 which provided imprisonment to any person who published any information deemed false or ridiculed his government.

Leading to the 2015 general elections, the SSS under former President Jonathan had become politically partisan, targeting journalists, activists and political opponents, including Mr Buhari and his political party. Mr Buhari while campaigning said he had become a reformed democrat and, if elected, promised to uphold the rule of law, respect fundamental rights, and ensure access to justice for all Nigerians.


Yet, in the past three years, the SSS has been heavily criticised for operating with utmost secrecy, crass impunity, and total disregard for the rule of law, including serially disobeying court orders and violating federal laws in lopsided recruitment to favour people from President Buhari's part of Nigeria.

Mr Abiri's ordeal as a persecuted journalist represents possibly hundreds of people detained and tortured across all the offices of the SSS in Nigeria's 36 States and the federal capital Abuja. Mr Falana, in an interview in June 2018, said Nigeria's terrorism law is being abused by the SSS to violate Mr Abiri's and other citizens' rights to personal liberty and fair hearing in a competent court within a reasonable time.

"Subject to obtaining a court order, section 27 of the Terrorism Act permits a detention for 90 days which, subject to review, can be renewed once for another period of 90 days. Afterwards you have to release the suspect. Either conditionally or unconditionally, you grant the suspect bail," Mr Falana said.

A global advocacy effort from the media, Nigerian and international human rights defenders, civil society, and social impact groups calling for Mr Abiri's release is mounting. The Ondewari Health, Education and Environmental Project, a civil society group working in the Niger Delta creeks, took the lead in March by gathering signatures from several Ijaw communities which was sent to local and international human rights organisations as an appeal calling on the international community to intervene on the detainee's plight.

On a visit into Bayelsa State's creeks, several youth and elders from different Ijaw communities refuted the government's allegation that the detainee is a militant. In a show of solidarity with the Abiri family, community members gathered to sign



OHEEP's petition as a single voice echoing their growing frustration and anger with the government. Resonating loudest among the pleas directed at President Buhari were those of Mr Abiri's children calling for the release of their father.

"My father is a journalist. All the allegations against my father that he is a militant are lies," said 16-year-old Abadeifa Abiri Jones, with eyes red and swollen from flowing tears. "He did not do anything and he does not know anything. The government should release my father unconditionally."

# JOURNALISM'S ROLE IN HOLDING POWER TO ACCOUNT

Across the globe there is a crisis of confidence in democracy, and this is also felt in journalism, which struggles to maintain its key role in holding people in power to account.

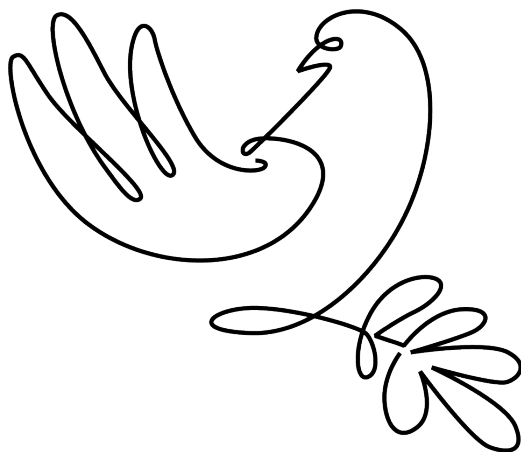
There is a crisis of confidence in institutions and elections, a crisis of public debate, even a crisis in the depiction of reality (as polls about conspiracy theories show), which is partly a consequence of a crisis of journalism. There are numerous reasons: information chaos due to technological change, the weakening of the media's economic model, the decline of quality journalism and even, sometimes, a moral crisis, a crisis of meaning.

Despotic regimes develop and export enormous propaganda machines which undermine the idea of journalism in order to create a “new world information order.” At the same time, an entire sponsored content economy is prospering, with often unstated aims but very complex self-interests at work.

The response to this crisis should be more journalism, not less - more journalism worthy of that name. Without journalism, no truth can be established and major global problems (the health crisis, climate, governance, corruption, etc.) cannot be resolved. Journalists speaking truth to power are a precondition of democracy.

On a daily basis, journalists and others need to work together to create the conditions in which quality journalism can survive and develop, while ensuring its freedom, independence and pluralism, because, as Albert Camus said, “a free press can be either good or bad but without freedom it can assuredly only be bad.”

**CHRISTOPHE DELOIRE**  
*Secretary General of Reporters without Borders (RSF)*



# **OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE**



# OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE

Perhaps surprisingly, only four entries made the shortlist in this category. In a world of continuing conflict, particularly in the Middle East, there may be a degree of 'war fatigue' that has overtaken much of the coverage of long-running conflicts, such as that in Syria and Palestine, but as these entries illustrate, the media must continue to shine a light on the harsh realities of conflict – whether it is the open warfare of armed rebellion, or in the continuation of the search for peace in areas where the bullets stopped flying many years ago, but resentments still remain.

An example of fearless reporting from the frontline came from an Italian journalist covering the conflict in Libya. This is an example of war reporting of a high order – giving voice to the victims of a relentless conflict from a human perspective. There is a constant sense of threat and simple incredulity at the inhumanity being endured in this long-running conflict, but there is also hope in the vision of a peaceful future that emerges from the narrative. As always in such reporting is the challenge for journalists to report impartially but not without humanity. The aim is to tell the story without showing undue bias - it is never an easy task, but it is achieved here.

At the same time entries from Bosnia and Herzegovina revealed that the path to a lasting peace is still littered with obstacles more than 20 years after open warfare in the Balkans came to a close.

These entries highlight judicial decisions that appear, on the face of it, to reflect local self-interests rather than natural justice. A major decision to uphold the right of war crime suspects to receive legal aid in their defence raised important public interest questions.

While these stories were well sourced and detailed, they reveal how the region is still influenced by a political and nationalist bias that makes an enduring vision of peace still some way off. Other stories submitted from the region concerned migration and a questionable court decision in Sweden concerning a war crimes suspect who escaped justice on a technicality. All of this was informed journalism of quality, but not enough to make a significant contribution to peace building.

In the end the judges had little doubt about the winner in this category – Mohamed Abo-elgheit (Egypt) - for his terrific expose of how the international arms industry is stoking the conflict in Yemen. This story was in a class of its own, and for that reason was one only one judged to be deserving of a prize in this category.

Abo-elgheit's work revealed a murderous business that sees weapons produced in Western arms factories ending up in the hands of terrorist groups and third parties engaged in a bloody conflict.

For more than a year, working with Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism in Jordan, he analyzed thousands of pieces of materials in open sources and on closed internet groups, and worked with local sources on the ground who supplied exclusive information.

The result is an excellent analysis of documented cases of arms and vehicles from the United States, Britain, Germany, Spain, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, as well as from Serbia and Bulgaria, feeding the warring parties in a relentless conflict. This was painstaking and meticulous work. It provides a forceful reminder that if there is to be any meaningful change in international politics, countries that speak loudly of the need for peace must do more to back up their fine words with action at home, particularly to curb the trade in the weapons of war that make killing ever more efficient, and which prolong the ordeals of people and communities caught in the crossfire.

# FIRST PRIZE WINNER

**MOHAMED ABO-ELGHEIT (EGYPT)**

**THE END USER: HOW DID WESTERN WEAPONS END UP IN THE HANDS OF ISIS AND AQAP IN YEMEN?**



Mohamed Abo-elgheit (Egypt) is an award-winning investigative journalist. His range of coverage included Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Sudan and Yemen, that he was recently honoured with the UN Correspondents Association Award and Fetisov Journalism Award for his work on arms exports to Yemen war countries. He also worked on the files of human rights violations, counter terrorism and Kleptocracy.

He works as a senior broadcast journalist for Alaraby TV network, based in London, and he is a contractor with the UK-based Global Witness, Jordan-based Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ).

He is also a well-known Arabic columnist, who had been honoured with the EU-Samir Kassir Award for press freedom in 2014.

# THE END USER: HOW DID WESTERN WEAPONS END UP IN THE HANDS OF ISIS AND AQAP IN YEMEN?

*By Mohamed Abo-eltgheit  
ARIJ website - February 28, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following link:  
<https://en.arij.net/investigation/the-end-user-how-did-western-weapons-end-up-in-the-hands-of-isis-and-aqap-in-yemen/>*

*This report was coached and produced by ARIJ  
(Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism)*

International criticism mounts against the bombing campaign in Yemen — but other aircraft attracting less attention and no protest continue to fly vast amounts of weapons into Yemen.

Much of it is supposedly banned by laws and agreements stipulating that the military in the countries importing the weapons are to be the “end user”.

The Saudi-led coalition has ignored that condition not only by giving these weapons to third parties in Yemen, but also because some of those parties were militias operating outside the control of the Yemeni state and army. Those weapons made their way into the hands of terror groups and caused more civilian casualties. These weapons were also found for sale in arms markets.

For more than a year, we analyzed thousands of pieces of materials in open sources and on closed internet groups, and we worked with local sources on the ground who supplied us with exclusive materials.

We have documented cases of arms and vehicles from the United States, Britain, Germany, Spain, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, as well as from Serbia and Bulgaria.

### ***Germany: E-Shopping Heaven for Weapons***

In January 2016, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) broadcast a video showing a battle against the Houthis in Taiz. It appeared to show a fighter using German MG3 machine guns. The question was: How did such gun reach Yemen?

A resistance fighter in Taiz told us that the Saudi army handed out to allies, the machine gun that the Yemenis had nicknamed “The fish,” *al-samaka*.

The Saudi army uses the MG3 and MG4 machine guns, both manufactured by Heckler & Koch. The company granted Saudi Arabia a license to manufacture the G3 assault rifle, and later the newer G36 version.

We spotted dozens of these four guns in the possession of Yemenis in various provinces.

Nic Jenzen-Jones, a weapons expert and director of Armament Research Services (ARES), calls these German guns “flag items” that refers to visually distinctive arms that indicate diversion after the conflict began.

Only three months after the start of Operation Decisive Storm, Germany became the first European country to officially ask Saudi Arabia about supplying German weapons to a third party.

This happened after a video revealed the Houthis had received G3 assault rifles dropped from a plane. The German manufacturing license requires that the last user of these rifles be the Saudi Army.

Also in April 2015 the same rifle was found in boxes of weapons dropped by airplanes in Aden, and the name of Saudi Arabia appeared on them.

We tried contacting the German government. The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy did say that it “has no valid evidence that military equipment exported from Germany is being used in Yemen... The Federal Government takes

tangible evidence regarding non-compliance with the end-use certificate very seriously.”

In January 2016, the same month in which the German MG3 were spotted with AQAP in Taiz, the United Nations Security Council’s Panel of Experts on Yemen issued a report warning that “lax accountability measures on the part of the coalition and the legitimate Government of Yemen may have resulted in the diversion of weapons into the hands of radical groups and to the black market.”

We interviewed Ahmed Himmiche, coordinator of the experts panel, who said that it learned from sources that some Yemeni fighters had sold their weapons, especially at times when they did not receive their wages. The panel also monitored cartridge prices and noted that they were stable or declining, demonstrating that the supply was increasing massively.

In order to collect evidence, we created social media accounts with Yemeni names and phone numbers to be able to enter informal trade networks. On the Telegram app, which offers encrypted conversations, we found a wide variety of illegal trade including artefacts and heavy weapons.

We documented dozens of these German guns being sold. In some cases, the seller would stress that the rifle was brand new and had never fired a single bullet.

We posted a request to buy an MG3, and easily received an offer.

We asked both Heckler & Koch and the German government to track MG3 and MG4 serial numbers. The company did not respond, and the ministry ignored our tracking request and again said there was no valid evidence. When we asked what kind of evidence would be valid, the ministry stopped answering.

### ***Introducing SHEIKH Abu al-Abbas***

In discussing AQAP in Taiz, the first person who must be introduced is Sheikh Adel Abdo Farea Abu al-Abbas.

In October 2017, he was listed on terror watch list for the United States, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The US Department of the Treasury said that this was for his “acting

for or on behalf of AQAP” as well as for providing financial and material support for AQAP and ISIS-Y.

Early in 2015, Abu Abbas founded his battalions in Taiz as one of the “Popular Resistance” in support of President Abdrabu Mansour Hadi, against the alliance of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Iranian-linked Houthis.

Early on, the Abu al-Abbas group’s relationship with al-Qaeda has been debated.

We interviewed Brigadier General Mohamed al-Mahmoudi, undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior, who previously served as Taiz’s security director until January 2018. He was in this position in January 2017, when there was a bloody attack against the security headquarters, by the forces of Abu-Abbas joined with AQAP, whose men raised the black flag, he said.

“The security personnel were killed in cold blood, and the wounded were denied aid.”

A spokesman for the Abu al-Abbas Brigades, Radwan al-Hashidi, denied these accusations. However, he said that AQAP has been involved from the beginning in the battles with the popular resistance. “Everyone knows this and all factions deal with them.”

Al-Hashidi even said that members of AQAP protected the United Nations delegate during his visit to Taiz and some of them appeared in pictures taken of him.

Through tracing weapons we found clues strongly linking Abu al-Abbas’ group with AQAP. In March 2016, AQAP published a video showing an RPG-32 anti-tank grenade launcher. The Jordanian company Jadara makes this weapon, equipped with a laser range finder, with a Russian partner. The company has announced one customer: the United Arab Emirates.

Footage shows the Abu al-Abbas Brigades repeatedly and exclusively using this weapon. No other faction in Yemen has been spotted using it.

However, the Brigades’ spokesman denied his group had passed any weapons.

## ***Belgium: The Prime Minister Has No Time***

The same mentioned AQAP video featured another western-made weapon, the FN Minimi machine gun, designed by the Belgian company FN Herstal.

Many Yemeni factions were spotted with Minimis.

In February 2018 we obtained an exclusive video showing a member of the Abu al-Abbas Brigades holding one, with the barcode visible.

FN Herstal is a holding company that owns firms in other countries, including the UK and the US. This means the gun in itself is not evidence of the country of manufacture.

However, in February 2016 a video broadcast by Houthis about their spoils from the Yemeni army in the Northern Province Hajjah, showed data on ammunition box stating it was imported from Belgium to Saudi Arabia.

We also found Minimis being sold in markets, the company's name and serial numbers clearly visible.

The company and the Belgian ministry of defense did not respond. The office of Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel sent a brief reply saying that "his schedule does not permit interviews" then ignored our emails.

## ***Switzerland: "Yes, These Are Our Weapons"***

We found clues for another weapon in an area close to where the Belgian gun was spotted.

The Swiss hand grenades HG 85 appeared in an exclusive video we obtained showing a fighter from Abu al-Abbas Brigades placing it in his belt in April 2017. It appeared also with another fighter in a photo posted on Facebook.

Then we interviewed an Abu al-Abbas local field commander, who showed this grenade as a sample of weapons the resistance used, which allowed us to identify the serial number.

He denied passing any weapons to AQAP. However, he spoke positively of AQAP's role. "God knows how much they fought and sacrificed," he added.



The Swiss company RUAG, confirmed that the grenade we asked them to track “can clearly be allocated to a delivery to the UAE from 2003.”

The Swiss government confirmed that “Each export of weapons to a state entity requires an End User Certificate (EUC).”

“Switzerland is not aware of Swiss weapons being used in the conflict in Yemen,” the government said, adding that an investigation is underway based on our information.

In September 2018 three grenades, of the same lot number, were spotted in the West Coast front, in a video released by the Houthis for their spoils from the Emirati-backed “Giants brigades”. It appeared again in the same way in November 2018.

Switzerland had declared in July 2012 a temporary halt on exporting weapons to the UAE. This came after publishing of photos of these grenades in the possession of Syrian armed factions. After the tracking, it was proved that the grenade was one of a quarter million exported to the UAE in 2003. We found it in Yemen too.

### ***Spain: Weapons by Airmail***

How did the weapons entered Taiz despite the strict Houthi-imposed siege on the city? The coalition announced many times that it dropped weapons in Taiz by air.

In April 2016 Yemini activist Hisham al-Omeisy published images on Twitter showing weapon boxes that accidentally fell into the yard of a friend’s house in Taiz. Two boxes contained Spanish C90 rocket launchers.

Dozens of these rocket launchers were spotted in the hands of Yemeni fighters, especially in the Northern Province of Hajjah, and there we spotted in January 2016 a C90 box with a production date from 1990.

According to the Armament Research Services, Saudi Arabia is the only country in the region that bought this weapon during the 1990s.

The province of Hajjah is also the only location where we spotted another piece of Spanish military equipment: BMR-600 armored vehicles.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's database, since 1985, Saudi Arabia has received 140 of these armored personnel carriers.

We received no answer from any Spanish entity.

### ***Austria: A Gift to ISIS***

When the war in Yemen started, the Gulf states were experiencing a period of amity. This was reflected in Yemen.

Thus, an understanding was reached between the Abu al-Abbas Brigades and their rivals from the Muslim Brotherhood's Islah Party.

In a Yemeni press interview in October 2016, Sheikh Abu al-Abbas said that he was responsible for passing money and weapons in Taiz. He provided details about 35 million Saudi riyals (US \$9.3 million) out of which he passed 11 million riyals to Hammoud al-Makhlafi, a prominent Muslim Brotherhood's Islah Party leader in the city.

In February 2016, al-Makhlafi appeared in a video receiving a battalion armed with dozens of Austrian Steyr AUG assault rifles.

A month later, Mohammed Yfrosi, alleged colonel in the Yemeni army, wrote on Twitter 'Thank you for the Saudi Kingdom and its King' as they supplied Taiz with 600 Steyr Aug rifles."

This is a distinctive weapon for the Saudi army. They became some of the most common weapons in the hands of fighters and in informal arms markets.

We even documented a case of its being used by a resistance child fighter on the Nihm front, only 16.

The Austrian sniper rifle Steyr SSG 69 was also spotted in many locations in Yemen including the province of al-Baidah in the Popular Resistance's possession, as well as that of ISIS. In June 2017, the rifle appeared in pictures ISIS published of sniper training.

The Austrian government did not respond to a request to track the serial numbers.

## ***The United States: Armored Vehicle Chaos.***

In November 2015, the Abu al-Abbas Brigades celebrated the receipt of three American Oshkosh M-ATV armored vehicles.

This type of vehicles became widespread in Yemen.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute data shows that Saudi Arabia and the UAE purchased 2,600 of these vehicles between 2011 and 2014.

In the second year of the war in Yemen, the forces of the Security Belt and the Hadrami Elite Forces were formed in Aden and Hadramout. They were made up of supporters of the secession of the south into an independent state.

In February 2018, the Security Belt and the Hadrami Elite Forces, made up of supporters of the secession of the south, raised the South Yemen flag on another US-made armored vehicles, the BAE Caiman.

International reports have accused these forces of human rights violations, including enforced disappearances and torture, though the coalition denies it.

Later, the southern resistance formed the forces of the “Giants brigades”, which received dozens of American armoured vehicles of the type “Maxx Pro”.

The United Arab Emirates bought these vehicles in a 2014 deal that included 1,150 Caimans and 3360 Maxxpros. There was a clear determination that the recipient would protect the sensitive technology.

Although the contractor is BAE Systems in Texas, this is a subsidiary of BAE Systems Plc, a British company.

Only the southern forces use these MRAPs. This is consistent with the map drawn by the Security Council Panel of Experts on the areas of influence in Yemen, between Saudi Arabia in the north, and the UAE in the south.

Pentagon spokesman, Johnny Michael, responded to our questions saying: “We are aware of these reports and are seeking additional information. Recipients of U.S.-origin defense equipment have signed an obligation to adhere to end-use requirements.”

He added: “Military action alone will not restore stability to Yemen. ”

## ***The United Kingdom: “This is All Propaganda!”***

Another prominent Salafist (fundamentalist Islamist) leader in Taiz: Sheikh Adnan Rouzik, founder of the Hasm Brigades , which has been accused of human rights offenses.

In November 2016, Sheikh Rouzik received a special gift: a British Aardvark JSFU mine-clearing sweeper. Pictures show him inside this vehicle marked with Saudi army signs.

The vehicle later appeared in July 2017 at the Battle of al-Tashrifat military camp against Houthis.

The vehicle appeared also in the possession of Yemenis in other provinces, including the battle for control of Al-Mukha port, west of Yemen, in January 2017.

We contacted UK company Aardvark, which initially welcomed us and referred us to the office of the company manager, but he stopped responding.

The British Department for International Trade said that companies do not need a license to export minesweepers, but did not answer questions about the legality of passing them on to a third party.

Graham Jones, head of the UK Parliament’s Committees on Arms Export Controls, declined to discuss the matter.

“The main problem is Iran to Yemen, not the west to Yemen which is nothing more than a political agenda,” he said.

We interviewed Colonel Abdul Baset al-Bahar, a spokesman for the army loyal to President Hadi in Taiz, who complained that the army did not receive sufficient arms support from the coalition. “We are talking about 22 Mechanized Brigade which is supposed to have armored vehicles, but does not have a single vehicle.”

## ***Canada: Saudi Arabia is Changing its Rules.***

Since the beginning of the war, it seems that the Saudi army has established a rule that Canadian weapons would not be given to Yemenis. The only Canadian weapons

spotted in the war were PGW sniper rifles (Coyote, LRT-3, and Timberwolf) used by the Saudi border guards, and also the National Guard's Lav-25 armored vehicles. These were spotted only on the Saudi side of the border.

However, by the beginning of 2018, the Saudi army began to invade the northern province of Saada, the main Houthi stronghold, with the help of Yemeni allies. With this shift, Canadian arms began being passed.

In June and July of 2018, Brigadier General Abdullah al-Ajabi, commander of Storm Brigade 3 of the Yemeni army in Saada, appeared in two videos holding the Canadian-made PGW sniper rifle, and interestingly, in one video the soldier next to him was also carrying the German G36 assault rifle, providing additional proof of Saudi-supplied armaments.

The Canadian Lav-25 armored vehicle also spotted six times in the border provinces of Hajjah and Saada, as part of a Yemeni convoys. At least twice it appeared that the letter "N" referring to the Saudi National Guard had been erased and replaced by the letter C.

The armored vehicles' manufacturer, General Dynamics, replied briefly to our inquiries saying "We decline to comment,"

PGW, which manufactured the sniper rifle, responded by asking for more details, which we offered. At that point they stopped replying.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Allison Lewis replied, "Should Global Affairs Canada become aware of evidence that the authorized end use of an export is being violated, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has the authority to cancel or suspend the associated export."

When we sent our evidence and asked what exactly the Foreign Ministry would consider sufficient to open an investigation, we received no response.

### ***The Gulf Crisis: The Moment of Truth***

The internationally recognized Yemeni government merged its allies into the army through numerous decisions.

As a result, Abu al-Abbas Brigades became part of the Armored Brigade 35 and Sheikh Abu al-Abbas received the rank of colonel.

In addition, groups affiliated with the Islah Party were merged into the 22 Brigade, while Sheikh Adnan Zureiq received the rank of Brigadier General and became commander of Brigade 5 of the presidential guard in Taiz.

However, clashes still occasionally erupted between members of the groups on the basis of old affiliations. In February 2016, the people of Taiz took to the streets to protest when a poor banana vendor was killed during clashes between the Abu al-Abbas Brigades and another group.

This integration of resistance forces faced a real test. In June 2017 the Gulf crisis erupted, and the effects reached Yemen. Many violent clashes broke out between the Abu al-Abbas Brigades and the Islah Party.

In the south, the most violent clashes broke out in Aden in January 2018. The southern Security Belt took over most of the city and surrounded the government headquarters in the Maasheq Palace. The camp of Brigade 4 of the presidential guard loyal to Hadi fell, and its commander, Brigadier General Mehran Qabati, told a local channel that “The separatists arrived on armored vehicles owned only by the UAE.” Local press reported that the Saudis intervened to stop the invasion.

Amid this turbulence, the US, Saudi Arabia and the UAE decided to place the Abu Al-Abbas Brigades on the terror watch list, which was surprising to Brigadier General al-Mahmoudi, “It is strange for an entity to be classified as a terrorist organization, while being supported by those who classified it as such.”

However, al-Hashidi said that Qatar and the US were able to include the Abu al-Abbas Brigades on the list at the last minute, and the UAE and Saudi Arabia were not able to remove it, but they will in the upcoming days.

The Abu al-Abbas Brigades even claimed that declaring it a terrorist organization did not change how the Arab coalition deals with it. “Nothing has changed. The weapons and financial support are still the same as before,” he stressed. He added that they have been invited to a meeting in Saudi Arabia.

## ***Eastern Europe: Syria is Not the Only Destination***

In March 2016 AQAP in Taiz used M79 Osa rocket launchers for the first time. The resistance, including Hasmi Brigades, appeared also holding them.

It was surprising to spot this distinctive Yugoslavian weapon in Yemen that was not used by armies of the Arab coalition.

The Armament Research Services confirmed that M79 Osa and also M80 Zolja had not ever been spotted in Yemen before the war.

However, both have been in use in another war in the region: Syria.

This led us to a dramatic investigation published by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) in July 2016.

“There were approximately €1.3 billion worth of Soviet style weapons, that the Saudi military doesn’t use. The question was why suddenly they’re interested?” BIRN editor Lawrence Marzouk said. His explanation was that these weapons are “much less problematic.”

Through BIRN, we obtained end-user certificates for Saudi Arabia weapon deals in 2013, including the import of 3,500 OSA and 12,000 Zolja rocket launchers.

In June 2017, a Twitter account of the “hacktivist” group Anonymous published a massive leak from the Azerbaijani embassy in Bulgaria. The documents reveal an arms trade network that used diplomatic flights on the Azerbaijani state-owned Silk Way Airlines, which ensures the flights are tax-free and not inspected.

From January 2016 to April 2017, the documents show more than 100 flights to Saudi Arabia and the UAE carrying weapons from Serbia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovakia.

The documents reveal an arms trade network that used diplomatic flights on the Azerbaijani Silk Way Airlines.

One of the most prominent cases was that Saudi Arabia received three flights carrying 50,000 mortar shells produced by the Serbian Krušik factory.

These were spotted with both the popular resistance in Baydaa and ISIS, like the Austrian rifles.

And again, these shells had been spotted in Syria, even with the same lot number as the ISIS-Y ones.

Tracing the dates of manufacturing provide evidence of the flow, as we spotted shells manufactured in 2012, 2015, 2016, and 2017.

Another shipment took place in March 2017 from Belgrade to Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia carrying 27,000 Plamen A missiles and 400 M84 rifles. Both appeared in Yemeni hands. The same shipment included RAK-SA-12 multiple rocket launchers, a Croatian distinctive weapon that appeared in Syria.

Another distinctive weapon was the Serbian M05 assault rifle. Two shipments in the beginning of 2017 carried tons of this rifle.

Since then, it became one of the most widespread rifles in the hands of Yemeni forces, which work with the Saudi Army in the northern provinces, while the Austrian and German assault rifles became less visible.

We received no response from any Serbian entity.

### ***Bulgaria — Advertising in Arabic***

In November 2015, the M9 and M9F Arsenal rifles appeared in photos published by the UAE media showing a parade of a Southern Resistance group trained by the UAE. These rifles appeared many times later.

The same pictures also featured the UAE-made Caracal pistol. Both weapons were found for sale in Aden.

We also spotted many Bulgarian RPGs, obtained some of their serial numbers. Some of them were brand-new. The Bulgarian authorities did not respond.

It is interesting to note that the Bulgarian arms company Armaco offers its products on its website in only three languages: Bulgarian, English and Arabic.



## ***Does The Coalition Know?***

Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE responded to our repeated correspondence, but when we asked the former Saudi Brigadier General Hassan al-Shahri about the “leakage” of weapons, he said:

“We have transparency in the coalition to say yes, although it is partial and not influential. The Yemeni situation is stressful and there are clashes between parties and tribes.”

The brigadier general, however, focused on Iran’s violations of the international arms embargo against the Houthis-Saleh alliance by supplying the Houthis with ballistic missiles and drones.

The undersecretary of the Yemeni Ministry of the Interior also confirmed that the coalition knew. Brigadier General al-Mahmoudi said: “An investigation was started by the coalition about a ‘leakage’ of a weapon that was handed over to a resistance faction in Taiz, and was leaked to AQAP in Aden.”

## ***International Steps***


In July 2018, The Belgian Supreme Administrative Court suspended eight FN Herstal licenses for arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

Recently Germany has moved to cut arms exports to countries involved in the Yemen war.

Some Yemenis, such as Brigadier General al-Mahmoudi, demanded that all armaments go directly to the Yemeni national army to support the control of the central Yemeni state.

In contrast, some international organizations welcomed these steps to ban exports completely.

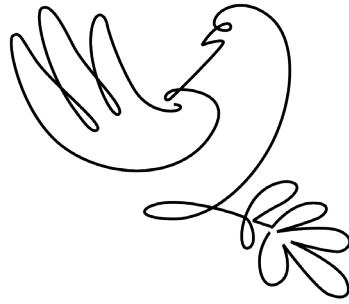
Patrick Wilcken, Amnesty International’s Arms Control and Human Rights researcher, says international agreements such as the Arms Trade Treaty and regional agreements such as the EU Common Position on arms exports contain provisions that prohibit



changing the end-user in arms sales, and makes it the states' responsibility to assess the risk of their weapons reaching terrorist groups or groups involved in violations of human rights.

On the ground, though, the experience in Syria and Yemen has shown that there is still much to do.

*This investigation was carried out with support and supervision from Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)*



**OUTSTANDING  
CONTRIBUTION  
TO PEACE**

**SHORTLISTED  
PUBLICATIONS**

# ALBINA SORGUČ

## (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)

### A series of stories



Albina Sorguč has been monitoring war crimes trials before the Cantonal Court in Sarajevo and the Court of BiH for several years. Besides reporting from the court, Albina wrote many victim-oriented analyses and stories, giving the victims much needed public space to share their stories. Before joining Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Bosnia and Herzegovina she worked for Bosnian newspapers Dnevni Avaz and Nezavisne Novine, where she reported on social and community issues, focusing on organized crime and corruption.

# SARAJEVO TO PAY €358,000 FOR WAR CRIME SUSPECTS' DEFENCE

*By Albina Sorguč*  
*www.detektor.ba – April 10, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following links:*  
<https://detektor.ba/2019/04/10/kanton-sarajevo-izdvojio-700-000-maraka-za-odbrane-optuzenih-za-ratne-zlocine/> (Bosnian)  
<https://detektor.ba/2019/04/10/sarajevo-to-pay-e358000-for-war-crime-suspects-defence/?lang=en> (English)

**The government of the Sarajevo Canton allocated 358,000 euros in its 2019 budget to provide legal assistance to ex-soldiers and police officers – almost all of them Bosniaks – who have been charged with war crimes, BIRN has learned.**

In its budget for this year, the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs of Sarajevo Canton has allocated 450,000 Bosnian marks (230,000 euros) to assist in paying war crimes defendants' lawyers, while 250,000 Bosnian marks (128,000 euros) has been set aside for financing non-governmental organisations involved in projects providing legal assistance to accused ex-soldiers of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and former officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Ministry of Veterans' Affairs told BIRN that the allocation of a total of around 358,000 euros to assist defendants did not mean that Sarajevo Canton justified crimes committed by members of the armed forces.

“We consider that everyone should be tried for their actions, but we want to help the accused and their families to defend themselves from accusations in a dignified manner and prevent revisions and distortion of historical facts about the aggression

against Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was also established by the Hague Tribunal,” the ministry said.

Lawyers dealing with war crime cases before the Bosnian state court said that the money was needed and welcomed the decision by the authorities in Sarajevo Canton, which is one of 10 cantons that make up the country’s Bosniak- and Croat-dominated Federation entity.

Vasvija Vidovic, a lawyer who has represented former Bosnian Army soldiers at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Bosnian state court, argued that defendants find themselves difficult financial situations because trials are long-running and very expensive.

“Hardly anyone, even if they are in a good financial situation, would have enough money to pay for the defence,” Vidovic said.

She also argued that Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia’s Serb-dominated Republika Srpska entity had been allocating resources for the defence of their citizens at war crimes trials for years.

“Of course the state should help as it can,” Vidovic said.

During the trials of former Bosnian Serb political and military leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, the government of Republika Srpska allocated around 5,100 euros per year for their defence, while Serbia and Croatia also partially financed the defence of some of their war crimes suspects.

Former judge Vehid Sehic, of the Forum of Tuzla Citizens, said that he also sees nothing wrong with Sarajevo Canton’s decision to assist war crime defendants, given that Croatia, Serbia and Republika Srpska have done the same.

“Helping them is a humane act. Now, the amounts and cases to which it should be applied should be regulated under certain decisions by both legislative and executive powers, because we can see that proceedings last a very long time,” Sehic said.

But Aleksandra Letic of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska entity argued that decision is disputable because the financial aid is only intended for

former soldiers of the Bosniak-led Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She also said that the money could be better spent on more socially-necessary projects.

“It should definitely be reconsidered. There are a series of other activities which governments should support financially. At this moment, citizens need those activities much more than the defence or legal representation of people who were members of certain military formations,” Letic said.

### ***50 Suspects on Trial***

The Ministry for Veterans’ Affairs said that around 289,000 euros was also allocated in the 2018 budget and spent on 41 individuals who were on trial for war crimes.


In 2017 and 2018, further financial assistance was offered through foundations registered for the purpose of offering legal aid and other types of assistance to former soldiers of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina suspected or accused in war crime cases and their family members. In 2017, 138,000 euros was allocated for this purpose, and around 128,000 euros in 2018.

The Ministry that said that the number of beneficiaries and the level of the financial assistance depended on the number of requests received, as well as the scope of the indictment, and whether the specific case referred to command or personal responsibility for crimes, as well as the defendant’s financial status.

Proceedings against more than 50 former soldiers of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and former officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including former generals and commanders like Atif Dudakovic, Ramiz Drekovic, Ahmet Sejdic, Sakib Mahmuljin, Himzo Selimovic and Dragan Vikic, are currently underway at the state court in Sarajevo.

The Ministry said that the allocation of financial aid was important due to “the increasing number of indictments” against former Bosnian Army troops and Bosniak police officers.

It claimed that judicial officials were making an “obvious effort to make a balance” between the number of charges filed against Bosniaks and Serbs by indicting Bosniaks for smaller-scale crimes.



As an example, the Ministry said that an indictment against former general Ramiz Drekovic was filed last year for a shelling that resulted in one death, but no indictments have ever been filed to the Bosnian state court for the long-term shelling of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces.

Last year 24 indictments were confirmed by the state court, charging 92 individuals with wartime crimes. More than 50 of them were ex-soldiers of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina or former officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



# 'WE WERE JUST LIKE THEM' – IN BOSNIA, PAST MEETS PRESENT

*By Albina Sorguč, Co-author: Semir Mujkic  
www.detektor.ba – August 13, 2018*

*The original publication is available via the following links:*

*<http://detektor.ba/izbjeglicki-put-izmedju-sirije-i-bih-u-razmaku-od-cetvrtine-stoljeca-video/> (Bosnian)*

*<https://detektor.ba/2018/08/13/we-were-just-like-them-in-bosnia-past-meets-present/?lang=en> (English)*

**Syrian refugees are arriving in ever greater numbers in Bosnia.**

Twenty-five years ago, Bosnia's own were going the other way.

Leila Naser Saleh was a few weeks short of giving birth when she reached Bosnia and Herzegovina, four months into a journey from Syria to the gates of the European Union.

"I was running out of time," she said. "I wanted the journey to end as soon as possible. It was so hard."

A quarter of a century earlier, Mersa Pasic travelled in the opposite direction, fleeing Bosnia south through the Balkans into Turkey and on to Syria's Aleppo. She was just a child.

"They wanted to take my only doll and check whether something was hidden in it," Pasic said of the border police between Turkey and Syria. "It was the only thing I had brought with me from Sarajevo. They wanted to slit it open to see if we were taking anything illegal across the border."

Now both women find themselves in Sarajevo, a city besieged for the duration of Bosnia's 1992-95 war, haemorrhaging residents and scattering them across the globe.

Syria is doing the same, only on an even greater scale, and a growing number, like Saleh, find themselves in Bosnia, one border short of the EU but blocked from advancing by Croatian police accused of using violence to keep them out.

More than 40,000 Syrians are forced to flee their homes every day, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees says, seven years into a war that is estimated to have killed half a million people.

Syrians are among the more than 9,000 refugees and migrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East stranded in Bosnia, where authorities are struggling to provide adequate care.

### ***Exhaustion and Fatigue***

Saleh, her husband and their three children walked 20 hours through Montenegro to Bosnia, along a new path from Greece up through Albania and hugging the Adriatic coast after a crackdown closed the original 'Balkan route' of 2015, when hundreds of thousands poured across the peninsula into Hungary.

Saleh said she would close her eyes "not to feel the pain and see what we – a pregnant woman and her family – were going through."

After an initially frosty reception and a then a change in shift in the border police, they made it into Bosnia. "It's OK," Saleh recalls the border officer saying. "This is Bosnia, Bosnia."

Turned back from the Croatian border in northwestern Bihac, the family returned to the capital Sarajevo, where Saleh gave birth several days later to a baby, a fourth son.

"They did laboratory and other necessary tests and found that the baby's heart was weak and wasn't functioning well due to exhaustion and fatigue. He was also underweight," she said. Mother and baby spent eight days in the hospital.

Twenty-six years earlier, Pasic who is now 35 years old went the other way. Then, also, the borders were intimidating.

"I went through some kind of shock at the Turkey-Syria border, the way police treated us," she said.

Both women, too, recall living happy lives before conflict turned them upside down.

“When the war broke out, I was attending the first semester of second grade elementary school,” said Mersa. “Just like all the other kids, I had had a happy childhood up until then. We used to live in the old part of Sarajevo. I used to hang out with other children, go to the theatre and parks. Everything was just beautiful.”

Saleh spoke in similar terms. “We had a family, brothers, sisters, friends and neighbours. We were very happy and had a very nice life,” she told BIRN.

“I was happy. We felt safe. We left our homes and returned at all times of the day. We, the women, would stay out even until midnight. Life in Syria was the same as in European countries, even more beautiful. Wherever we went, we had friends and acquaintances. We felt secure.”

Five years ago, two years into the war, Saleh’s husband was called up to fight. “For what? On whose side? We are Palestinians, refugees in Syria,” she said.

They sold up and left for Europe. They travelled through Turkey then by boat to Greece.

## ***Homecoming***

Mersa recalls her confusion at leaving the family home in Sarajevo.

“I was a child. I didn’t understand. They just told me we would go visit our relatives in Macedonia and would come back soon.”

As Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Mersa’s mother told her to conceal her real name as they travelled to Belgrade and south to Macedonia on false identification papers. From Skopje they went to Istanbul and then Aleppo.

“In Syria, everything looked much nicer and different,” she said. “I enrolled in the second grade of elementary school and learned the language. I remember everyone accepting me and I really enjoyed my time there.”

Saleh says they received a similar welcome when a Sarajevo family offered them use of one floor of their house.

It was a relief after the trauma of the road. In Montenegro, she said, “when they looked at us, even at our children, they would make an awful face. I cannot forget when my son Zein touched the hand of an officer at the camp and the officer began wiping her hand. As if we do not belong to the human race. We are people, just like you. Had it not been for the war, we would never have left Syria.”

While they do not want for essentials, Saleh said, there are some things they do miss.

“I miss my family. I miss my mum, my sisters and brothers,” she said.

Pasic said the same. As a child refugee, she missed relatives left behind and her room in Sarajevo.

“I sometimes dreamt I was entering my room, seeing my Barbie dolls, my favourite books. I visualised my worktable,” she said. “At some stage I could even smell my old room.”

Mersa returned to Sarajevo in 1996, shortly after the end of the Bosnian war and is now a logistics coordinator for an international company. She has tried in her own small way to help with the refugees in Sarajevo and Bihac.

“We have to understand we were just like them 20 years ago and they accepted us,” she said. “We felt what it was like to lose someone, what it means to be in a war, what it means to escape from war and to return to a war-torn country.”

There are currently 25 million refugees around the world. Most, around 60 per cent, come from three countries – Syria, Afghanistan and Southern Sudan. More than half are under the age of 18.

# BOSNIAN WAR RAPE SUSPECT AVOIDS PROSECUTION IN SWEDEN

*By Albina Sorguč*

*www.detektor.ba – January 28, 2019*

*The original publication is available via the following links:*

*<http://detektor.ba/neposteni-svedski-zakon-koci-procesuiranje-ratnog-silovanja-u-bih/> (Bosnian)*

*<https://detektor.ba/2019/01/28/bosnian-war-rape-suspect-avoids-prosecution-in-sweden/?lang=en> (English)*

**Bosnia asked Sweden to take over the case against Serb ex-soldier Sinisa Milojcic, who is accused of rape and other wartime crimes, but Swedish law says he can't be prosecuted now because he was under 21 at the time of the offence.**

Former Bosnian Serb Army soldier Sinisa Milojcic was first indicted by military prosecutors as long ago as 1994 for his alleged crimes, committed a year earlier during the Bosnian war.

But it seems that Milojcic, who is now a Swedish citizen, may never appear in court to answer the charges against him.

After the war ended in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the District Prosecution in Banja Luka took over the case, reclassified the offence as a war crime against civilians, and issued a warrant for Milojcic's arrest.

According to the indictment, Milojcic is charged with having participated, along with two other Bosnian Serb soldiers, Miladin Trivic and Slobodan Bajic, in the rape and murder of a woman at the Mirnica riverside beach in Vrbanja in 1993.

He is also charged with abusing and robbing Bosniak civilians, in collaboration with Trivic. Trivic and Bajic were convicted in 2009 and sentenced to a total of 23 years in prison.

However the District Prosecution in Banja Luka was informed by Interpol in February 2008 that Milojcic had Swedish citizenship, and the Banja Luka District Court ruled that the criminal prosecution should be handed over to the Swedish judiciary.

But in 2012, Sweden rejected the request because its legislation puts a 15-year statute of limitations on crimes committed by people who were aged between 18 and 21 at the time of the offence – even if that offence is a war crime.

Rikard Ekman, one of the investigators at the Swedish Interior Ministry's War Crimes Unit, told BIRN that he had worked on Milojcic's case until it was decided that the statute of limitations had expired.

"As a result, this case could not be taken over [by Sweden] and we could not approve his extradition [to Bosnia] either," Ekman explained.

"Had Sinisa Milojcic turned 21 when the alleged crimes were committed, there would have been no expiry of the limitation period. If a person is less than 21 years old, there is the limitation period, even for the gravest crimes. However, it is not applicable to cases in which the perpetrators were more than 21 years old," he added.

The legal provision has attracted criticism from war victims' associations in Bosnia, as Ekman admitted: "I fully understand that the Swedish law can be considered deficient and unfair with regards to this matter," he said.

Bakira Hasecic, the president of the Women, Victims of War association, told BIRN that she was in contact with the Swedish embassy in Sarajevo in 2010 and 2013 and asked if any way could be found to prosecute Milojcic.

Hasecic said she was given indications that the law might be revised, but this didn't happen, so she addressed the Swedish embassy with her request again this month. She said she told the embassy that she would take the issue to the European Court of Human Rights and to the United Nations, if necessary.

"If they cannot extradite him, we demand that they process him in Sweden. He is not the only one who has found refuge in that country. It is inconceivable that someone is granted amnesty, that there's a statute of limitations; it's disastrous," she said.

## ***‘The Most Heinous Crimes’***

Kevin Jon Heller, an expert in international law at the Amsterdam University, told BIRN that the Swedish law was “unusual, considering that international tribunals have always set the age limit for responsibility at the legal age, ie. 18 years”.

But, he added: “I don’t think international law forbids the existence of statute of limitations in war-crime cases.”

Heller noted that in 1968, the UN General Assembly adopted a convention prohibiting limitation periods for war crime cases, arguing that war crimes and crimes against humanity are “the most heinous crimes in international law”.

But because Sweden has not signed the convention, Heller said the Bosnian authorities have no possibility of filing a complaint to the UN.

Bosnian lawyer Krstan Simic, a former judge with the state-level Constitutional Court, argued that Sweden is allowing war criminals to go free.

“Such a stance by the Swedish authorities sends a message that war crime perpetrators can be granted amnesty if they fulfil standards set by a certain country. I hope that the Swedish authorities will realise that, no matter who the perpetrators are, war crimes have no skin colour or nationality, but are just monstrous acts,” Simic said.

“I hope they will find a way to extradite or try the people who have been accused of these crimes,” he added.

Simic observed that Sweden had made an exception to its own rules in the case of former Bosnian Serb President Biljana Plavsic, who served her war crimes sentence in the Scandinavian country after being convicted of persecuting Bosniaks and Croats during the war.

“In Sweden, when a person reaches certain age, they can no longer be held in prison and have to be released,” Simic explained.

“In Plavsic’s case, considering that it was about grave war crimes, which she had admitted and which had been established by the verdict, the Swedish authorities agreed

not to apply their domestic law, so Plavsic had to serve two-thirds of her sentence [instead of being granted early release,” he said.

Lawyer Vasvija Vidovic, who has worked on war crimes cases in The Hague, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Scandinavia, pointed out meanwhile that Bosnian laws also foresee specific situations in which younger adults are treated more leniently.

“In our country they can be tried for war crimes, but if they committed the crimes as young adults, the maximum penalty of long term imprisonment cannot be pronounced,” Vidovic said.

But Hasecic argued that Sweden should pay more attention to the rights of war crime victims, particularly as Milojcic is not the only suspect at large in the country.

“There are several of them... Some of them have even changed their names there,” she said.

Asked if Sweden has considered revising the law, Rikard Ekman said his team at the Swedish Interior Ministry’s War Crimes Unit had not raised the issue, but insisted that there was “constant contact” with the Swedish Justice Ministry about the application of the legislation.

BIRN was not able to contact Milojcic for a comment.



# BOSNIAN SERBS' WAR COMMISSIONS: FACT-SEEKING OR TRUTH-DISTORTING?

*By Albina Sorguč*  
*www.detektor.ba – February 25, 2019*

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<http://detektor.ba/prvi-sastanak-spornih-komisija-za-srebrenicu-i-sarajevo-krajem-marta/> (Bosnian)  
<https://detektor.ba/2019/02/25/bosnian-serbs-war-commissions-fact-seeking-or-truth-distorting/?lang=en> (English)

**Two new commissions set up by Bosnia's Serb-dominated Republika Srpska entity to examine wartime crimes in Srebrenica and Sarajevo have been accused of seeking to distort the truth to whitewash Serbs' role in atrocities.**

Two controversial new commissions set up by the Republika Srpska government to examine wartime crimes in Srebrenica and Sarajevo are to hold their first meetings in late March despite widespread concerns raised by international experts, diplomats and Bosniak war victims' organisations that their aim is to rewrite history.

The two commissions have suitably weighty names – the Independent international Commission for Investigating the Sufferings of all Peoples in the Srebrenica Region in the Period from 1992 to 1995 and the Independent International Commission for Investigating the Sufferings of Serbs in Sarajevo in the Period from 1991 to 1995 – and are made up of a variety of academics from all over the world. How they will actually work, and what methodology they will use, is not yet known.

Milorad Kojic, the director of the government-funded Republika Srpska Centre for the Research of War, War Crimes and the Search for the Missing, insisted that the commissions' only goal was "to determine the truth".

"There can be only one truth. These are international commissions which will work without pressures. We expect them to determine the truth," Kojic told BIRN.

But last week, 31 international experts on the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia published an open letter saying that the commissions appear to be an attempt to revise established truths and "represent the culmination of more than a decade of genocide denial and historical revisionism by the [Party of Independent Social Democrats-led] government".

The director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of Republika Srpska, Branko Todorovic, also argued that the commissions' goal was to exonerate Serbs accused of responsibility for wartime crimes.

"Their goal is to enable the authorities who committed the crimes to justify themselves and to relativise, minimise, falsify and justify the crimes. This is not just the goal of these commissions, but also of all ruling political structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the last 20-plus years," Todorovic told BIRN.

### ***Focusing on Serbs' Suffering***

The International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and Bosnia's state court have all classified the mass killings of more than 7,000 men and boys from Srebrenica in July 1995 by Bosnian Serb forces as genocide.

However the Bosnian Serb authorities, and governing politicians in Serbia, have consistently refused to accept that the massacres constituted genocide.

In 2004, the Republika Srpska government adopted a previous commission's report on events in and around Srebrenica in from July 10 to 19, 1995 – a report which acknowledged that Bosnian Serb forces killed thousands of Bosniaks and said the executions represented a serious violation of humanitarian law.

But this report was annulled at a special session of the Republika Srpska National Assembly last year. Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik, who initiated the parliamentary session, said that the document contained “false data” and had been put together under pressure from the international community’s High Representative in Bosnia at the time, Paddy Ashdown.

Dodik claimed that the Srebrenica crimes were being exaggerated “with the intention of satanising Serbs”.

Kojic said that the new Srebrenica commission’s task was not only to look at the events that happened during “seven or nine days in July 1995” – when Bosniaks were slaughtered by Bosnian Serb forces – but everything that happened in the Srebrenica region between 1992 and 1995.

When ordering the new report, the Bosnian Serb parliament said it should highlight “the suffering of Serbs in and around Srebrenica” as well as crimes against Bosniaks.

But the US embassy in Sarajevo insisted that the verdicts of international courts could not be questioned.

“The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, ICTY, have both concluded that what happened in Srebrenica, in July 1995, was genocide. Everyone should respect court decisions and bravely face and accept the truth, regardless of how painful it was,” the US embassy said in a statement after the Bosnian Serb authorities announced the establishment of the new commissions.

The International Commission for Missing Persons pointed out meanwhile that the commissions could not affect facts about the number the number of victims’ bodies found and identified.

“More than 8,000 persons were reported missing during the fall of the UN’s protected zones of Srebrenica and Zepa in July 1995. Out of that number, 6,979 persons have been identified through a DNA analysis. Only 84 persons had been identified before the ICMP introduced the DNA-based identification procedure in 2001,” the ICMP told BIRN.

“Determining a person’s identity is based on reliability of at least 99.95 per cent. The identity of the large majority of persons who went missing in Srebrenica and Zepa has been scientifically and definitely confirmed,” it added.

Kojic however denied that the Republika Srpska government intended to play down the seriousness of the wartime violence.

“The accusations that the Republika Srpska government wants to minimise the crimes in Srebrenica are meaningless,” he said.

### ***Half-truths and Genocide Denials***

The Republika Srpska government has appointed Israeli historian and Holocaust researcher Gideon Greif, a professor of Jewish and Israeli History at the University of Texas, as chairman of the Srebrenica Commission.

“The aim of the commission is to establish the truth, of which there can be only one, and it is the commission’s moral obligation to be loyal to facts, the truth and the victims,” Greif told Bosnian Serb public broadcaster RTRS earlier this month.

Adenrele Shinaba, a Nigerian expert on the Boko Haram terrorist organisation, who has also been appointed to the Srebrenica commission, told Bosnian media in October 2018 that the commission a step “to reach the truth through objective findings and thus contribute to reconciliation among peoples”.

However some commission members have expressed pro-Serb or anti-Islamic opinions in the past, or have declared that the Srebrenica massacres were not genocide.

A member of the Sarajevo commission, Raphael Israeli, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told Serbian news magazine Pecat in 2011 that “the only proven genocide is the Holocaust, it was an attempt to systematically exterminate an entire nation”.

Another Sarajevo commission member, former French army officer Patrick Barriot, testified for the defence of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and Croatian Serb wartime rebel leader Milan Martić at the Hague Tribunal. Barriot claimed during

Milosevic's trial that Serbs were only defending themselves against Islamic terrorism, and later co-authored a book describing the trial as an "indictment of the Serbian people".

The international experts' open letter questioned the credibility and impartiality of the commissions, claiming that their membership "is composed of fringe elements, individuals who do not represent either the consensus views of the academic or legal communities, and who appear handpicked to produce narratives that will advance the revisionist politics of the current RS [Republika Srpska] government".

Kojic argued however that Bosniak politicians in Sarajevo had been seeking to enforce their own narrative of the 1992-95 conflict ever since it ended.

He said that "in Sarajevo political circles, the truth was determined in 1996, and they have been trying to impose it [on everyone else] ever since".


Kojic acknowledged that it was unlikely that the Sarajevo city authorities will collaborate with the commission probing violence in the capital, which was besieged by Bosnian Serb forces for the duration of the war.

"Nevertheless, I am calling on [the Sarajevo authorities] to cooperate and, if they have documentation that supports their stance, to make it available to the commission. They are avoiding the truth. They are trying to maintain a false thesis by hiding documentation, through media reports and grotesque court proceedings," he said.

He added that both commissions will also deal with the way the media reported on the Bosnian war, "creating an image for the international public that Serbs had an exclusive responsibility [for crimes]".

Fernando Travesi, executive director of the International Center for Transitional Justice, said that some truth-seeking commissions set up by governments merely appear to be intended to seek truth.

"Some governments, which have no real interest in implementing justice, responsibility, reparations or reforms that substantially deal with consequences of violations of human rights or historical roots of violence, have learned to play a game and use transitional justice language in order to satisfy the international community or appear as though



they follow international standards. Their actual goals, however, are opposite to the goals of transitional justice,” Travesi said.

Former Bosnian judge Vehid Sehic pointed out that the biggest problem preventing Bosnia and Herzegovina from honestly facing the past was the fact that nobody in the country’s three major communities – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – genuinely wants to assess what happened exclusively on the basis of the facts that have been determined by the courts.

“There are always three truths in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but there can only be one,” Sehic said. “In fact, these are half-truths which can sometimes be more destructive than lies.”

# EMINA DIZDAREVIĆ

## (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)

### A series of stories



Emina Dizdarevic is a reporter for the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She started her career in journalism in March 2014, after graduating and getting a master's degree in journalism from the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Sarajevo. BIRN in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a specialized investigative outlet reporting on war crime trials, transitional justice processes and the rule of law. Dizdarevic is now one of the senior journalists for BIRN in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a track record of publishing court reports, news, analyses, interviews and investigations related to transitional justice processes. She is also the anchor and host of BIRN's TV Justice programme, which is aired on two of the country's public broadcasters and more than a dozen local TV stations.

# BOSNIAN JUDICIARY RESTRICTS INFORMATION ON WAR CRIME CASES

*By Emina Dizdarević*  
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<https://detektor.ba/2018/11/08/bosnian-judiciary-restricts-information-on-war-crime-cases/?lang=en> (English)

**Bosnian courts and prosecution offices are restricting access to information on cases, making it harder for media to report on war crimes and corruption cases, although the law states that trials are open to the public.**

Fifteen years after the judiciary was reformed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, courts and prosecutions do not apply uniform rules on transparency, so indictments at the state level cannot be accessed, audio and video recordings of hearings that are made available are only ten minutes long, and journalists still encounter delays and obstructions in getting responses to their inquiries.

Journalists and editors say that the judiciary is increasingly closed to the media, which makes it impossible to prepare high-quality reports on judicial processes involving war crimes, corruption and organised crime.

Mervan Mirascija of the Open Society Fund, which monitors the country's judiciary, said that the transparency of the judiciary is "the key condition for the work of courts and prosecutions".

"We live in a country that is still scarred, 25 years after the end of the war. We must have judicial truth in order to put this society at ease and be able to look into the



future, but, unfortunately, the level of accessibility of information is decreasing each year. That is a worrying phenomenon,” Mirascija said.

Neither the Bosnian state prosecution and court, nor the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, which oversees the country’s justice system, agreed to talk to BIRN about the transparency issue for this article.

### ***Lack of Indictments Undermines Coverage***

Vildana Kurtic, a journalist with Federal TV, a Bosnian public broadcaster, said it is impossible for journalists working for the electronic media to report on proceedings without having access to indictments.

“When a journalist comes to a trial for the first time, it is almost impossible for him to do good coverage without having read the indictment,” Kurtic explained.

“Meanwhile if we do not have the indictment, we may not be able to comprehend what some situation described in the courtroom is about. If a defendant is entering his plea and says ‘I admit guilt on count three’, the term ‘count three’ means nothing to us if we do not have the indictment in front of us,” she added.

From the establishment of the state prosecution in 2003 to the spring of 2012, all indictments were uploaded to the internet and submitted to journalists, accompanied by a media announcement.

In the early years of the state prosecution, while foreign prosecutors still worked for it, it was so transparent that it provided a list of evidence alongside the indictment, as well as an annex entitled ‘The Results of the Investigation,’ which contained an explanation of prosecutorial decisions.

But transparency decreased in 2012, when the state-level Agency for the Protection of Personal Data told the state court and prosecution that they could not publish all data automatically.

The state prosecution then removed all indictments from its website, while the court adopted revisions to the rules on access to information, which implied the use of initials instead of full names in court documents and the issuing of ten-minute

audio and video recordings from trials rather than full versions of proceedings, which significantly reduced the material available to reporters.

In response to the change, BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina launched a campaign entitled ‘Stop Censorship’, which was supported by international organisations like the International Commission for Missing Persons, ICMP, and associations of Bosnian war victims, such as Women – Victims of War.

The ICMP coordinator for the Western Balkans, Matthew Holliday, said he supported the campaign because it was of crucial importance for the public to have accurate information on war-crime trials.

“The media plays a key role in communicating the actions undertaken to ensure justice for victims of war crimes or violations of human rights and informing the public about it,” Holliday said.

Associations representing war victims and other injured parties are most affected by the judiciary’s decision to restrict information to the media, said Bakira Hasecic, the president of Women – Victims of War.

“I think that both the court and prosecution are closed to the public, the non-governmental sector and ordinary citizens to a large extent. I think you should ask them why. They obviously do not want the public to be informed, knowing they did a lot to hide the identities of perpetrators of crimes and anonymise them,” Hasecic said.

As a result of public pressure, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council formed a working group to analyse the outcome of the ‘Stop Censorship’ campaign and decided that anonymisation could not be applied in cases in which there was a justified public interest – in other words, in cases dealing with war crimes, terrorism and corruption.

The council also concluded that there were no obstacles to publishing confirmed indictments. Despite that, the state prosecution has never published a single indictment since then.

One of the working group members, Sabina Sarajlija, a prosecutor from Sarajevo, argued that judicial institutions should publish confirmed indictments.

“These are indictments have already been subject to judicial review. I believe that prosecution offices should assume the obligation to do it, at least in complex cases and in cases in which the public is interested,” Sarajlija said.

Although more than three years have passed since the issuance of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council’s recommendations, the prosecution declined to say whether it is planning to publish indictments any time soon.

### ***Video Restrictions Hamper Electronic Media***

The Bosnian state court returned verdicts to its website after the ‘Stop Censorship’ campaign, but continued the practice of giving only ten-minute extracts of audio and video recordings from courtrooms to the media.

Admir Arnautovic, spokesperson for the Tuzla Cantonal Prosecution, argued however that there is no reason for not giving entire recordings from hearings to the media, as happened prior to 2012.

“In certain situations, the media could even be allowed to bring in their equipment for making audio-visual, audio and video recordings,” Arnautovic suggested.

The video recordings currently being given to the media last for ten minutes at the maximum and, according to Kurtic, they are “unusable material”.

“It can happen that our journalists spend three or four hours in courtrooms and a cameraman even comes and waits in front of the courtroom in order to record at least one audio statement, but you just get a DVD containing ten minutes of a testimony which was maybe the least important on that day,” Kurtic said.

“Or you may get only one shot [from one single angle] depicting a witness testifying, which means you have around 20 seconds of material that can be used in the news,” she added.

Television editor Suzana Stambol pointed out that the regulations put electronic media at a disadvantage compared to text-based outlets.

“You can enter the courtroom, but you must not bring a voice recorder or phone. You can only take a pencil and paper,” Stambol said.

Meanwhile electronic media are only are supplied with “a DVD with pre-cut images which, in most cases, are not usable on TV”, she added.

Lawyer Nina Kisic suggested that the Bosnian state court should follow the example of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, ICTY, which used to offer live coverage of hearings on its website with a half-hour delay and publish all court documents.

“In the last year and a half approximately, all trials have been published. So video recordings of all hearings have been uploaded to the website. There is also a court archive of all documents and all transcripts, which can be found on the ICTY website. I think the Bosnian state court should follow this good practice,” Kisic said.

### ***No Public Oversight Without Media Reporting***

Journalists and editors claim that courts’ internal protocols on access to information for media have led to fewer reports about cases being published or broadcast.


They also raised concerns that the process of getting responses to their inquiries and arranging interviews with judicial officials has deteriorated.

Arnautovic claimed that some judicial officials were not properly trained to communicate with the media.

“They don’t know the structure of the media, the way it operates or how information should be released to the media. These people are often burdened with formal-legal language, so neither the media nor the public understand what they are talking about,” he said.

Stambol claimed that there are political motivations behind the unwillingness to make information about sensitive cases public.

“I think the non-transparency of the judiciary is a consequence of the role played by politics and of influence on the judiciary. It is actually in the interest of politicians to close the door for the media to courts and prosecutions, and to the judiciary as a whole, in order to prevent some important incidents or large-scale organised crimes in this country from being uncovered,” Stambol said.



Experts argued that if the country's courts and prosecutor's offices do not become more transparent about their work, it will not be possible for the media to fulfil its role as the only public outlet of information about judicial process.

"The media should contribute to the wider public's monitoring of the work of the judiciary, it should be a corrective to our work, to point out the judiciary's bad sides, but also make good outcomes popularly known. I believe that only media that do their job professionally, expertly and ethically can contribute to getting the right information based on verified facts to the general public," Sarajlija said.

Mirascija argued that if information continues to be withheld, the public will remain uninformed about serious criminal cases.

He urged the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council to step in immediately and give all courts "an interpretation of its instructions on how to respect the principles of transparency".

# CROATIA CUTS BOSNIAN CROAT'S JAIL TERM, CAUSING POLITICAL STORM

*By Emina Dizdarević, Co-author: Anja Vladislavljevic  
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<http://detektor.ba/radicevo-smanjenje-kazne-u-hrvatskoj-nece-postati-presedan/> (Bosnian)  
<https://detektor.ba/2018/11/09/croatia-cuts-bosnian-croats-jail-term-causing-political-storm/?lang=en> (English)*

**A Zagreb court's decision to reduce former Bosnian Croat battalion commander Marko Radic's war crimes sentence caused concerns that other Bosnian convicts with Croatian passports might ask for a transfer to Croatia in search of shorter sentences.**

The decision last week by Zagreb County Court to cut war criminal Marko Radic's sentence has caused a political storm in Sarajevo.

A public feud erupted between a Bosnian Croat minister and his Bosniak deputy, while a war victims' association filed a criminal complaint against the minister, Josip Grubesa.

The judgment which cut Radic's sentence from 21 years to 12-and-a-half years in prison was handed down by Zagreb County Court on October 1. It amended a verdict originally delivered by the Bosnian state court in Sarajevo, which convicted Radic in March 2011.

Radic, who was convicted of committing crimes against humanity in the Bosnian town of Mostar, was due to remain in prison until 2027, but will now be released by the end of this year because of the time he has already served.

## ***No 'Joint Criminal Enterprise' in Croatia***

The Zagreb court amended the Bosnian judgment because Croatia does not recognise the legal concept of a 'joint criminal enterprise', which formed part of the Sarajevo verdict convicting Radic.

Although there are currently about a dozen other people in Bosnia and Herzegovina who have Croatian passports and are serving war crimes sentences for crimes involving a joint criminal enterprise, lawyers are doubtful that Radic's case can serve as a precedent enabling them to ask for a transfer to Croatia in search of a shorter sentence.

Bosnian justice minister Grubesa was the official who allowed Radic's request to serve the rest of his time in Croatia.

His deputy, Nezir Pivic, told BIRN that Grubesa's decision in the Radic case was "illegal and unacceptable". He added that it will not be permitted in similar cases.

"This cannot happen, since this case should also have never happened. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia have an agreement that clearly defines this as illegal," said Pivic.

The Bosnian state court's verdict in 2011 found that Radic, as commander of the First Bijelo Polje Battalion of the Croatian Defence Council's Second Brigade, participated in setting up prisons and ordering the arrest and unlawful detention of several dozen Bosniak civilians, including women, children and elderly people.

The verdict also said that he participated in the unlawful detention of Bosniak men at the Heliodrom prison camp. The men were taken to the village of Vojno to do forced labour and kept in brutal, humiliating and inhumane conditions in a garage and the basement of a house in the village.

## ***A Question of Dual Citizenship***

In October this year, Grubesa approved Radic's transfer to Croatia, after which Zagreb County Court reduced his sentence.

Grubesa said that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a signatory to the European Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons – according to which every convict can serve his or her sentence in the country whose passport he or she holds – and that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia have a bilateral agreement which allows for this.

His deputy Pivic claimed however that the Bosnia-Croatia agreement explicitly forbids the extradition of either country's citizens, which means that such transfers can only happen in cases in which people who only hold a Croatian passport are sentenced in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If they also have Bosnian citizenship, they cannot be transferred, he said.

"Croatia has shown no cooperation [with Bosnia and Herzegovina] in these [war crimes] cases [against Bosnian Croats] so the minister should have been protecting Bosnian interests," argued Pivic.

"Finally, the County Court changed the verdict so that Radic is allowed to go free in just a few days, which is unacceptable," he added.

Watchdog organisation TRIAL International also said that Radic's transfer was "unacceptable" because the agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia does not envisage the extradition of either country's own nationals.

"Considering there was a dilemma about how to act in cases in which there are people with dual citizenship, the answer is in the European Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons," said TRIAL's legal advisor Adrijana Hanusic-Becirevic.

The convention states that only "foreigners" imprisoned for a crime can be transferred to their home countries, Hanusic-Becirevic pointed out.

"Since Radic is not a foreigner in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but a citizen, and according to media reports has residency in Mostar, he is already serving his sentence in his community. So his transfer – as well as violating the agreement between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – goes against the logic and spirit of the European convention," she said.

The Association of Victims and Witnesses of Genocide filed a criminal complaint against minister Grubesa, calling the process through which Radic achieved his freedom "illegal".



“The minister violated the laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina and allowed a war criminal to reduce his sentence by half,” the president of the association, Murat Tahirovic, told BIRN.

Grubesa declined to answer questions about the Radic case, but wrote a lengthy statement in which he described his deputy’s remarks and the criminal complaint as the “unacceptable gathering of cheap political points” and the misuse of “victims’ pain”.

The minister also said he was sorry that some politicians want certain people who have been convicted of war crimes “to be thrown in cells to which the keys are lost”, which, he added, is “not acceptable or in line with international standards”.

“In this specific case, a convict asked for his case to be transferred to Croatia for him to serve the rest of his sentence, and no authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina could stop this request, since this convict has this right,” insisted Grubesa.

He argued that extradition and the transfer of sentences are two different practices.

### ***Lawyers Disagree Over Radic’s Transfer***

Lawyers and legal experts are also split on the issue of the legality of Radic’s transfer.

Nina Kisic, a lawyer specialising in war crimes cases in Sarajevo, claimed such transfers highlight “differences in [countries’] systems which allow justice to be avoided”.

“The problem is that these inter-state documents allow it,” said Kisic.

But Jelena Djokic-Jovic of Documenta – Centre for Dealing with the Past, an NGO in Zagreb, told BIRN that the entire process was “conducted in accordance with legal regulations”.

“In the Radic case, command responsibility was considered the basis for conviction – that he failed to prevent the crimes, ordered and participated in the establishment of the detention system and personally committed some crimes. He was sentenced to 12-and-a-half years in prison. Compared with sentences handed down to members of Croatian forces, I would say this is in the same range, or maybe slightly longer,” Djokic-Jovic said.

However, she also said that the Sarajevo authorities “could have requested the execution of the sentence pronounced by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina”.

Commenting on the Zagreb court’s decision to remove the reference to a joint criminal enterprise in the Radic verdict, Djokic-Jovic also explained that Croatian law does not recognise the concept.

“Croatia, in a political sense, is wary of that concept, particularly when taking into account the verdict against Jadranko Prlic and others,” she explained.

Prlic and five other former Bosnian Croats were sentenced by the Hague Tribunal to a total of 111 years in prison in 2017 for taking part in a joint criminal enterprise involving high-ranking officials in Zagreb, whose aim was to expel Bosniaks from territories controlled by Bosnian Croat forces.

The verdict, which named the late Croatian President Franjo Tudjman as a participant in the joint criminal enterprise, was heavily criticised by Croatian politicians, who deny that Zagreb played an active role in the Bosnian war.

Djokic-Jovic noted that in 2016, the Croatian government adopted a decision which “stops Croatian judicial bodies from acting in cases in which responsibility was founded on a joint criminal enterprise”.

However, Belgrade-based lawyer Aleksandar Lazarevic, who represents war crimes defendants at the Bosnian state court, said there is nothing controversial in the Croatian court’s decision to remove the parts of the verdict referring to a joint criminal enterprise.

In Lazarevic’s opinion, the joint criminal enterprise concept is being applied retrospectively by courts in The Hague and Sarajevo that deal with war crimes, as it did not exist in law at the time the crimes were committed.

“You cannot designate something a crime now and try people for committing that crime if it was not designated as such at the moment of its commission,” Lazarevic said.

At the same time as Radic, the Bosnian state court also convicted three other members of the First Bijelo Polje Battalion of the Croatian Defence Council’s Second Brigade.

Dragan Sunjic was sentenced to 16 years in prison, Damir Brekalo to 20 years and Mirko Vracevic to 12 years for committing crimes as participants in a joint criminal enterprise at the Vojno prison, in collaboration with other soldiers and guards.

In a separate trial, a former prison chief in Mostar, Ivan Zelenika, was sentenced to six years, while former Croatian Defence Forces member Ivan Medic was sentenced to seven years, Edib Buljubasic to six years and Marina Grubisic Fejzic to five years for participating in a joint criminal enterprise aimed at removing the Serb population from the Herzegovina area.

The defence lawyers for most of these convicts told BIRN that they had no intention of requesting their clients' transfer to prisons in Croatia so they would be released sooner.

Fadil Abaz, who represented Ivan Zelenika, said it was "incomprehensible for one of our citizens to request that his sentence be executed in another country".

"He is our convict, he was sentenced on the basis of our laws. The fact that he has dual citizenship does not give him the possibility to go from one country to the other," Abaz said.

Midhat Koco, the lawyer for Dragan Sunjic, said there were "no indications or requests" that his client wanted a transfer to Croatia.

"I do not want to comment on that. If the law allows for it, it is OK. If not..." Koco said.

Danilo Mrkaljevic, Mirko Vracevic's lawyer, also said he had not requested a transfer for his client.

"We have not been in contact since the completion of the case," Mrkaljevic said.

Bosnian deputy justice minister Pivic was also adamant on the issue: "The Radic case will not become a precedent for similar cases," he insisted.

# BOSNIA'S UPDATED WAR CRIMES STRATEGY LANGUISHES IN LIMBO

*By Emina Dizdarević*  
*www.detektor.ba - 26.02.2019*

*The original publication is available via the following links:*

<http://detektor.ba/godina-bez-plana-radana-predmetima-ratnih-zlocina/> (Bosnian)

<https://detektor.ba/2019/02/26/bosnias-updated-war-crimes-strategy-languishes-in-limbo/?lang=en> (English)

A year after Bosnia and Herzegovina's revised draft strategy for war crimes processing was completed, it has not even been considered by the Council of Ministers, raising questions about when the country will finish prosecuting all its remaining cases.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's revised Strategy for War Crimes Processing, which was approved in February last year by the country's judicial overseer, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, has not even made it onto the agenda of the Council of Ministers, the executive branch of the state government, BIRN has learned.

The strategy, which envisages the completion of all war crimes cases by 2023, was included, at the justice ministry's request, on the agenda for a Council of Ministers session on July 3, 2018, but was then removed on the request of the minister for human rights and refugees, Semiha Borovac.

Justice Minister Josip Grubesa said he has never received an explanation why his colleague Borovac removed the revised strategy from the agenda.

Grubesa added that the Council of Ministers is unlikely to discuss the strategy until its new members are chosen. A new Council of Ministers should have been decided after elections last October, but has been delayed by political wrangling in the country.

“It is unlikely that the revised strategy will be put on our agenda now, although I have urged that this item be discussed on several occasions in the past period. Its adoption and possible revision of its deadlines due to the delay in its adoption will be the task of the new Council of Ministers,” Grubesa explained.

Borovac’s office told BIRN meanwhile that she will not address the subject and the question should be raised with the justice ministry.

Legal experts believe that the failure to adopt the revised strategy may lead to a slowdown in processing war crimes, as well as creation of inter-ethnic tensions. Representatives of war victims believe meanwhile that the judiciary should stick to the original strategy which has been in place since 2008.

The 2008 strategy envisaged that the most war crimes complex cases would be processed at the state level within seven years, while all the other cases would be referred to the entity-level and completed within 15 years – in other words, by 2023.

But because the initial seven-year deadline expired at the end of 2015 and the most complex cases had not been completed at the state level, the revised strategy was prepared. According to the new strategy, a larger number of cases was supposed to be transferred to the entity level.

### ***Lack of Strategy ‘Slows Down Justice’***

The revised strategy says that more than 550 unsolved war crimes cases are currently with the state prosecution, in which more than 4,500 known perpetrators are named – and as many cases again against unidentified perpetrators.

Courts in Bosnia’s two entities, the Federation and Republika Srpska, and in the Brcko District, have around 200 more unsolved cases involving known perpetrators.

The OSCE mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which monitors the work of judicial institutions, told BIRN that the revised strategy was the best way to complete all the remaining cases, “which is a precondition for achieving reconciliation”.

“The revised strategy proposes some concrete measures to improve the distribution of the remaining cases in such a way that the most complex cases will be processed at the state level, while the remaining ones will be transferred to the jurisdiction of the entities and the Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Any delay in adoption slows down the achievement of justice,” the OSCE said.

The vice-president of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, Ruzica Jukic, said it was obvious that the Council of Ministers is not doing its job.

Jukic said it is not unclear whether it will be possible to complete the processing of war crime cases within the prescribed deadline due to the time that has been wasted and because “there are sure to be some deadlocks”.

Meanwhile Murat Tahirovic, president of the Association of Victims and Witnesses of Genocide, said he objects to the revised strategy because representatives of victims and academics were not involved in its preparation.

He said that his association’s attempts to have an input were ignored, “so we asked the Council of Ministers not to adopt the strategy”.

“As regards the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, the court and particularly the prosecution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they should continue working on the basis of the existing strategy and there will be no harm to victims or criminals. They should just adhere to the strategy which has been at their disposal since 2008,” Tahirovic argued.

## FRANCESCA MANNOCCHI (ITALY)

### LIBYA, TRIPOLI UNDER FIRE



Francesca Mannocchi is a journalist and director. She contributes to Italian TV and Italian and international magazines.

In recent years, she has covered wars and the migration crisis in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Gaza, Egypt, Afghanistan and Libya.

She co-directed the documentary “If I Close My Eyes,” on the lost generation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with war photographer Alessio Romenzi.

In 2016, she won the Premiolo, the most important journalistic award in Italy, for her reports in Libyan detention centers.

Her last documentary ‘Isis, tomorrow’ has been screened at 75° Venice Film Festival.

# LIBYA, TRIPOLI UNDER FIRE

*By Francesca Mannocchi  
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“A lie makes you drink once, but it doesn’t make you drink the second time.” So says Abdullah as he walks in Martyrs’ Square, looking at banners and flags. “We have already overthrown a dictator, we celebrated his end; we will not let another enter the capital,” he adds, pointing to an image of General Khalifa Haftar on a banner hanging on the wall.

Haftar’s face is covered with an X and an inscription at the bottom says: Leave us alone.

Abdullah is twenty-nine years old, and for most of his life this was Green Square, named after the philosophy of the guardian of a different revolution: Muammar Gaddafi, the Bedouin born in a tent.

It is Friday, the usual day of demonstration and celebration and the day on which, since the beginning of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s offensive, the citizens of Tripoli take to the streets to demand an end to hostilities. Abdullah recalls the large demonstrations in support of the Gaddafi regime: on 2 March to celebrate Jamahiriya, the declaration of Gaddafi’s Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (people’s republic); and on 1 September, for al Fateh, the day of the revolution.

From this square, at the beginning of the protests on February 25, 2011, Gaddafi shouted to his supporters: “Life without dignity has no value, life without green flags has no value, so sing and dance! Those who do not support me will die.”

A few months later there were revolutionaries dancing in the square. The posters celebrating the Ra’īs, the leader, were torn to the ground in defiance of the regime, to



claim victory and take possession of the place that for decades had been the symbol of the Colonel's power. To rename it Martyrs' Square.

In this new time of crisis, as Haftar's shells rain down on the city, the square is full again, men and children on one side, women on the other. A huge flag is dragged around the entire perimeter by boys shouting, "No to another dictator! No to Haftar, the war criminal!" A billboard stands out in front of the sea: "No to the militarisation of Libya." But Libya is already militarised. There are five million people and twenty million weapons.

An elderly man sits on a stool reciting a poem, an ode to the desert and to the courage and heroes of Libya, first of all Omar al Mukhtar, who led the anti-colonial resistance against the Italians in the 1920s. He cites his words: "I will not leave this place until I have achieved one of the two highest levels: martyrdom or victory.

Al Mukhtar did not win; he was captured and tried in the Littorio Palace in Benghazi. He was sentenced to death and hanged in the square in front of twenty thousand people.

These days, other dead are commemorated in the square. They will be called the martyrs of the Haftar offensive. All around, people shout: "Allahu Akbar!" And: "We will win!"

The walls are covered with images of Haftar and his allies. There is Saudi crown prince Bin Salman, Egyptian president Al Sisi, Russian President Putin and crown prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. There are also many images of French president Macron. Each face has been erased by a red mark.

The posters in Martyrs' Square are the mirror of how this latest war in Libya has already become a proxy war rather than a civil war. Both sides rely on arms from foreign powers to conduct their offenses or defensive campaigns. Tripoli residents are asking foreign allies to supply weapons, just as Haftar's powerful allies are supplying him with the latest T72 tanks, drones, Grad rockets, planes and helicopters.

One of the missiles used by Haftar on Tripoli is the Chinese LJ-7, fired from Chinese Wing Loong unarmed aerial vehicles, which have been sold to Saudi Arabia, the UAE

and Egypt. An LJ-7 was used by the Saudi-led coalition to assassinate the president of Houthi Supreme Political Council Saleh Ali al-Sammad in Yemen.

Among these countries, the UAE stands out. According to the United Nations, it has supplied Haftar with aircraft and around 100 armoured vehicles, and has allocated \$200m to support his military campaign.

In Martyrs' Square, the people repeat: "Tripoli will not become a new Benghazi, a new Derna, razed to the ground by Haftar bombs."

But looking at the walls of the square, Tripoli feels like it is already becoming a new Syria. A girl is holding a banner: "The UN is destroying the country." She explains: "Nobody trusts Gassan Salamé anymore here, the UN has lost credibility, they have been talking about negotiations for years, but they are accomplices too. They know that you can't deal with criminals and yet they insist on talking to Haftar. Our patience is over, the time for negotiation is over."

Another woman, Salma, approaches with a rose. She is twenty-five years old, her face covered by the niqab. "No to the military government, yes to the civil government" says the manifesto she holds in her hand. "Libyans are brothers, they are not enemies."

Part of her family lives in Benghazi, in the area of the country controlled by Haftar. Benghazi, where the revolution began. Salma says the only army she recognizes is the one of February 17.

"The revolution is not over," she says. "There are so many people with whom we can still sit and talk, negotiate, make agreements. Libyans of the east are no enemies, they are brothers, Libyans like us. They are welcome, but in peace. Haftar has destroyed the efforts made so far with his military advance. Therefore I still believe that there is a diplomatic solution, but only if he is excluded from the negotiations."

As Abdullah walks away from the square – it is almost evening – someone donates sweets and baryoush, croissant-shaped brioches popular in Tripoli. Someone intones more protest songs – "Haftar, Tripoli will not let you in."

Others, speaking low, describe the tiredness of the city. "It is not about being optimistic or pessimistic about the end of the war, but being lucid and admitting

that the choice is between militias and dictatorship,” says an old man wearing the white jalabiya. “Part of those filling the square until a month ago complained about the abuses of the militias, they evoked the times of security, they regretted the past, when the regime guaranteed everyone at least housing, work and electricity. We are tired, and many of those who fill this square would have been ready only a few weeks ago to welcome Haftar.”

The tiredness of Tripoli is in its queues for petrol, the banks controlled by militias, the electricity blackouts during the heat of summer. The tiredness of Tripoli can be read in its contradictions: the largest oil reserves on the African continent, ninth largest in the world. With 48 billion barrels of crude oil and 1.5 trillion cubic metres of natural gas reserves, Libya could be a market force for a century.

This is an economy based on oil – 95% of government revenues, 96% of export value, average turnover of \$24bn – where citizens can pay \$4 for a full tank of gas. But people queue for hours at petrol stations, cars full of cans to fill. Because everything, including refineries, is the hostage of the militias.

A very rich country, in which there is no cash. Because even the banks are in the hands of armed groups.

Haftar wanted to use this tiredness to build consensus, but he overestimated his support in the city and dared too much, too fast. He wanted to enter as a hero, repeating the rhetoric with which he led the Benghazi war: clean the capital of militias and Islamists.

But he cannot be accepted as an invader. “Haftar said it in 2014: Libya is not ready for democracy. And [he] has now presented his strategy to conquer it: a dictatorship disguised as a release from terrorists,” says Abdullah.

## ***At the Frontline***

It is May, and five weeks have passed since the beginning of the offensive against the Government of National Accord in Tripoli by the troops of Haftar, head of the Libyan armed forces (LNA). Fighting has reached the southern part of the city, Ain Zara, Khalat al Ferjan, Salhaeddine, Yarmouk camp and the area of the old international

airport destroyed in 2014. There have been more than four hundred people killed, two thousand injured. Sixty thousand displaced.

There are many front lines, each more fluid than the last. Daily advances and daily retreats. More than fighting, it's a cat and mouse game under mortar fire.

Travelling with the Misurata brigades, we reach the Ain Zara district, 15km south of the city – one of the crucial sectors of the battle. Our armoured vehicle is driven by a young boy from Misurata, who navigates his way through the ghostly suburb. The shops remain as they were when abandoned. The fruit and vegetables still stand outside, now covered with sand and rubble dust. Mosques are used as sniper positions.

Taking the road through Ain Zara means risking being attacked by snipers and bombs. Along the way there are signs of the Haftar bombs.

"They have latest-generation tanks, drones, Grad rockets, airplanes and helicopters," says Yasin Salama from Misrata. "We are trained, but on the ground it's easy. If the enemy bombs, you can't do anything. You can just pray."

An experienced veteran, Yasin explains that soldiers cannot advance indiscriminately. "We must think of civilians. First of all, we have to save lives. Where are our allies? Why don't they send drones, while we live with the fear of Emirati bombs?"

At the entrance to Ain Zara is a paper factory destroyed by bombs. The sound of the stacks of sheet metal waving in the wind mixes with the sound of gunshots getting closer and closer.

Along the road comes a car loaded with boxes and bags. It stops on the side of the road, followed by an ambulance. Osama Oshah is the last resident to leave the neighbourhood, with his wife and two young children. "The destruction of Ain Zara is nothing compared to Benghazi and Derna. What Haftar calls an army is a band of savage mercenaries, Sudanese, Chadians. Those called terrorists to justify his war are political opponents. Dictators do this, they play with words, they call it a war on terror to justify their brutality," he tells us.

The ambulance carries a man – skeletal, he seems not to have eaten for days. For weeks it was not possible to evacuate him. The soldiers look at the sky. Every noise is the threat of a drone, of a sudden bomb.

Khaled Mansour, one of the soldiers of the brigade, is from Misrata. He keeps his face covered by a balaclava because part of his family still lives in Benghazi, and even on the front line it's better not to trust anyone, he explains. The previous week, two men arrived waving a white flag, saying they were soldiers of Haftar, that they wanted to surrender and desert.

But it was an ambush and they were attacked on both sides by Haftar soldiers. He lost three of his men.

A few hundred metres separate the snipers: Libyans on one side, Libyans on the other. The frontline is haphazardly organised, with sandbags, and piles of sand used as barriers against the enemy's vehicles.

We are in a house on the front line. The commander carries an AK-47 and quickly climbs three flights of stairs, one of his men releasing a burst of machine gun fire.

The brigade are seasoned fighters who also fought in 2016 with Bunyar al Marsous, the coalition of military forces of Misrata that defeated ISIS in Sirte, in a war that lasted six months and left 700 dead and 3,000 wounded.

"I cannot accept being described as a terrorist by an aspiring dictator puppet of other dictators. If there is someone who fought jihadists in Libya, those are soldiers of Misrata," says the commander.

## ***Churn of Alliances***

To read the Tripoli front it is necessary to observe who is not fighting almost as much as who is. The forces in the field are mainly from Misrata – the most numerous fighters, the most experienced. The Misrata troops are the best equipped; they are here to protect the capital but also to protect themselves. Haftar considers the city a stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood, and they know that if Tripoli falls he will move directly to Misrata.

There are brigades of Zawhia and Zuwara, the Amazighs, the men of Janzour, but the majority of the Tripoli militias are missing. The great absentees are the Salafi militants of the Rada militia, the Deterrence Forces which count 1,500 people and control the Mitiga airport and the prison.

These powerful Salafis are supported by Riyadh, and it is with them that Haftar's emissaries seem to have talked in recent years, through the Salafist Madkhalist groups that support him in Cyrenaica, the eastern coastal region of Libya. They could tip the scale today.

Atiya is around twenty, wearing shorts and a camouflage jacket. He always smiles. "It is my war," he says. "I am not afraid of being a martyr if it's useful to protect the capital from the invader."

He fights in the area of the old international airport, one of the most dangerous fronts, the most disputed. It is open countryside, and advances are fought among farms.

The armoured vehicles move south, in reconnaissance. The radio transmits the positions: "Zone 17, here we are, debbaba, debbaba, tank, tank." An enemy tank has been spotted. The voice on the other side responds: "We will die if necessary, we do not move until further notice. We will show who we are. Allahu Akbar."


Being on the Tripoli front line today means moving seemingly at random. The soldiers who preside over Airport Road conquer the road metre by metre, under mortar fire, because Haftar's men are on the right and left. Suddenly a rocket propelled grenade hits our armoured car, followed by a barrage of bullets. The dull round sound of the shots going out is interspersed with the repeated hissing sound of the shots coming in.

Then the shooting stops.

"It is the fourth war in eight years," says Atiya. "[There was] the revolution, the civil war, then the September war, militias against militias marching on Tripoli, and now the Haftar war. Yesterday's enemies are today's allies. And today's allies can become tomorrow's enemies."

The rapid pace of conflict and ally-shifting explains why the soldiers are not only exhausted but also demoralised. They know that if they defeat the General of Cyrenaica, as in all previous conflicts those who fought most tenaciously will present their bill, asking for political positions, personal laws, money, refineries, oil.

It is hard to imagine the Misrata soldiers now fighting to defend Tripoli leaving their positions in the case of victory. And again, today's allies will be tomorrow's enemies.



“It is the opportunism that killed the spirit of the revolution,” says Atiya. “The young died for freedom and the old stole the loot.”

During the revolution Atiya lost his father, a rebel, “a martyr of 2011”, he says as he looks out at blocks of damaged or destroyed homes from the window of the armoured vehicle. But he can’t stop believing in the spirit of February 17, in the watchwords of the revolution.

He says it is difficult to kill, because these are Libyans like him. But: “If I don’t shoot first, I’m the first to die.” He shouts “Hurria, Hurria – freedom, freedom,” as he gets out of the vehicle. “I can’t stop believing in freedom.”

But Atiya’s view is endangered. The risk of ceasing to believe in freedom, today in Tripoli, is the surrender to the fatigue and passivity which opens the way to a new dictatorship. This fatigue, deep under the skin of Tripoli’s people and the soldiers guarding the city, is one of the reasons Haftar felt confident enough to enter the capital.

# AI IS JOURNALISM'S NEW POWER, BUT HUMAN HANDS NEED TO KEEP CONTROL

The use of advanced technology in journalism has led to interactive stories and multimedia newsrooms, but it has also come at a price. It reinforces financial challenges, some magazines and newspapers are closing, and at the same time audiences increasingly crave stories that suit their shorter attention spans.

The potential for digital storytelling is endless, and we see some of it used among the winning entries for the Fetisov Journalism Awards, including *The End User*: How did western weapons end up in the hands of ISIS and AQAP in Yemen? with its use of video clips. Also, *The Notebooks of Corruption* allowed readers to access notebooks kept by Oscar Centeno for 10 years, through an [interactive graphical interface](#). These are examples of quality storytelling through a mix of technology and traditional reporting.

AI already helps journalists to create data rich stories. It is a positive source that enriches journalism, but it also raises questions which can only be answered by human intervention and the social intelligence of journalists. AI algorithms need to be made fit for different tasks, they need to avoid transmitting biases that often come with machine learning, and we need to understand and recognize the limitations of AI in evaluating real world situations.

The future of multimedia journalism will inevitably involve the use of AI in storytelling but its long term impact is still not clear. What is certain, however, is that this new power in the newsroom will only work well if journalists and editors are responsible in the way they use it.

**BARIŞ ALTINTAŞ**

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Turkey*



# EPILOGUE

In the weeks following the inaugural presentation of the Fetisov Journalism Awards many journalists across the globe have set their sights on one story – a historical health emergency that presents major challenges for all those who cover it. These range from common misconceptions about the illness to the problem of newsroom bias and tendencies either to hype or sensationalise the story or to ignore it completely.

For journalists the task is to provide context and clarity and particularly to prevent rumour, speculation, uncertainty and confusion. The reporting of the Covid-19 story requires that journalists play a leading role in keeping people informed.

It is in the heat of the newsroom battle to report the biggest global story of a generation that the Fetisov Journalism Awards is announcing its second year covering what has been a momentous time for news media. The next call for entries opens on April 15 and closes on August 1st.

The FJA is looking for entries from reporters and editors who observe, learn and share information about the world around them for a public purpose. They should report honestly and fairly, often in harsh working conditions, and sometimes in a political environment that is hostile to critical and independent thinking on the part of news media.

But the efforts of journalists who keep to their professional values will reap rich rewards. Clear, fact-based and useful reporting that keeps emotions in check will always make communities stronger and help individuals to make the right choices when dealing with the perils they face.

The categories for this year's awards remain the same and the challenge to journalists and news media is also unchanged – to provide samples of journalism that illuminate the world around us, respect the rights of all, and give voice to people who are too often unheard.

*Aidan White*  
**Founder of the Ethical Journalism Network**

# FJA JURY 2019



**AIDAN WHITE**  
Founder  
Ethical Journalism Network (EJN)



**BARBARA TRIONFI**  
Executive Director  
International Press Institute (IPI)



**CHRISTOPHE DELOIRE**  
Secretary General  
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)



**DEBORAH BERGAMINI**  
Italian Journalist  
Vice-president of the Italian Delegation at PACE



**EVA MERKACHEVA**  
Journalist  
Human Rights Defender



**GUY METTAN**  
Executive Director  
Geneva Press Club



**OLIVER VUJOVIC**  
Secretary General  
South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)



**RICARDO GUTIÉRREZ**  
General Secretary  
European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

# FJA EXPERT COUNCIL 2019



**ANDREAS HARSONO**  
Indonesia Researcher  
Human Rights Watch  
Indonesia



**BARIŞ ALTINTAŞ**  
Co-Founder and Co-Director  
Media and Law Studies Association  
Turkey



**INDAY ESPINA-VARONA**  
Senior Contributing Editor and Blogger  
ABS-CBN News Senior Contributor, UCANews  
Philippines



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Press Council BiH  
Bosnia and Herzegovina



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Premium Times  
Nigeria



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Director, Pen Moscow  
Editor, Media Group Journalist  
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INK Centre for Investigative Journalism  
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Editor-in-Chief, "Moskovski Komsomolets"  
Russia



**RANA AYYUB**  
Investigative journalist, Writer  
India



**SERGE RAKHLIN**  
Chairman  
Foreign Language Film Committee  
Hollywood Foreign Press Association, USA



**STUART LAIDLAW**  
National representative –  
Communications  
UNIFOR, Canada



**TOM WEINGÄRTNER**  
API - Bureau Member  
International Press Association (API)  
Belgium



**VANESSA BASSIL**  
Founder, President & Executive Director  
Media Association for Peace  
Lebanon



**YUSUF JAMEEL**  
Kashmir Correspondent  
The Asian Age, Deccan Chronicle  
India

# FJA FOUNDER

## Gleb Fetisov



Gleb Fetisov is a businessman, producer, scientist and philanthropist.

Fetisov has a PhD in Economics, is a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a Professor and a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences of the Russian Federation. Fetisov is a member of Producers Guild of America (PGA).

Gleb Fetisov is a graduate of the Economics Department at Lomonosov Moscow State University. He also completed the World Bank educational program in the USA.

Gleb Fetisov has been successfully engaged in entrepreneurial and investment activities for many years. At present he is a film producer and founder of the Fetisov Illusion production company.

He is famous for his internationally acclaimed film projects such as the Russian drama “Loveless” co-produced with Alexander Rodnyansky (Grand Prize 2017, London and Munich Festivals; Jury Prize 2017, Cannes Festival, Oscar nomination in 2018); «Chef» (2014) by Jon Favreau; «Some Like It Cold» (2014), a sports comedy directed by Evgeniy Nevskiy released at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

In 2018 the world premiere of an international historical drama “Sobibor» took place in Warsaw. Fetisov acted as the general producer of the film. The drama was also shown at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Fetisov Illusion was the General Sponsor and Guardian of the prestigious «Russian Booker Prize» in 2017.

# FJA STEERING COMMITTEE



**EVA MERKACHEVA**  
**Chair of the Steering Committee**

Eva is a journalist, a writer and a human rights defender. She writes for a Russian newspaper as an investigative journalist. Eva is famous for her human right activities. She is the author of a book entitled “Crimes and Secrets of Present-Day Russia”. In 2013, Eva received a national printed press award (“Iskra”) for a publication that achieved the greatest public impact. In 2017, she received “The Golden Feather of Russia” award for a series of publications on protection of convicts.



**NADEZHDA AZHGIKHINA**  
**Co-Chair of the Steering Committee**

Nadezhda is a journalist, writer, the director of PEN Moscow, a Vice-President of European Federation of Journalists in 2013-2019. She graduated from Moscow State University (Ph.D. in Philology). Nadezhda coordinates international projects on journalists’ rights and freedom of the media, as well as culture and gender.



**GUZEL DAUKAEVA**  
**Member of the Steering Committee**



**NATALYA VALKINA**  
**Member of the Steering Committee**



Website: <https://fjawards.com/>

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Youtube: [FJA Youtube channel](#)

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Enquiries regarding  
participation in the contest

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General enquiries  
(including partnership, sponsorship  
or participation as an expert)