

The Misleading Role of Human Rights NGOs in International Politics

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"Along with military invasions and missionaries, NGOs help crack countries open like ripe nuts, paving the way for intensifying waves of exploitation and extraction" ~ Stephanie McMillan

When the media reports on events happening in countries other than their own, the nature of the information they rely on tends to be very different than they otherwise would use when reporting on domestic matters. Although most major news institutions have correspondents on site in different nations, most of them rely on the same information from the same sources in their reports, which can be very dangerous given its one-sidedness. Any journalist with integrity and respect for his profession should know better and check his sources properly before returning the information back home. Questions like "who do I get this information from? are they truly impartial or do they have a clear political bias? who funds them and what are their agendas?" are all very important ones to ask.

In many modern conflicts abroad, the information relied on comes from diverse human rights NGOs. Given their status as non-governmental and their focus on human rights, their reports on matters such as casualties, diverse victims of violence and oppression are rarely questioned – yet most often than not, these NGOs have clear agendas and political positions and will have been taken time and again inflating, miscalculate or misreporting results in their reports which are later on used by political establishments abroad to justify interference, sanctions and other forms of soft or hard power on the country's legitimate governments. Three countries come to mind when it comes to NGO dishonest reporting in the recent years : Syria, Nicaragua and Venezuela. I'll be looking closer to who exactly operates in this countries and point out their hypocritical nature as they taint their misdeeds under the disguise as independent humanitarian organizations.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua has been suffering through a 3-month protest against the Ortega government that started after it [implemented policies that went directly against the proposal of the IMF](#) to raise the retirement age and more than double the total amount of weeks that workers need to pay in the pension fund to be able to access benefits. In short, the IMF wanted more austerity, and the Nicaraguan government refused. Many anti-Ortega hence took to the streets and have over several months fought against the government forces in the form of

protests, riots, blockades, vandalism and more. Needless to say, the conflict has inflicted casualties, compelling local human rights NGOs to do what they're founded to do and report on the situation.

When it comes to Nicaragua, most human rights organizations are directly funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and controlled by the Movement for Sandinista Renovation (MRS). The NED has been described by its co-founder Allen Weinstein as the [overt CIA](#), adding that *"a lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA"*, a claim that strongly reveals the true nature of the organization. Anyone who is even remotely familiar with the history of South America over the last two centuries is aware that the CIA has played an enormous role in [destabilizing and overthrowing governments](#) that happened to go against US interests, in the form of funding atrocious rebellious groups that regularly engaged in extremely violent insurgency acts, and installing far-right dictators that would help secure US interests in resource-rich Latin American countries by all means necessary – often resulting in mass slaughtering of their own citizens, inhumane torture techniques and alarming "disappearance" rates. [LiberationNews.org](#) counted as many as [56 US military interventions in Latin America alone](#). Funded by the NED and following in the footsteps of the CIA, the MRS mostly associates with far-right ideology and is fervently anti-Ortega – and despite being supported by [less than 2%](#) of the Nicaraguan electorate, it is heavily relied upon by Western medias for information regarding the local situation in Nicaragua.

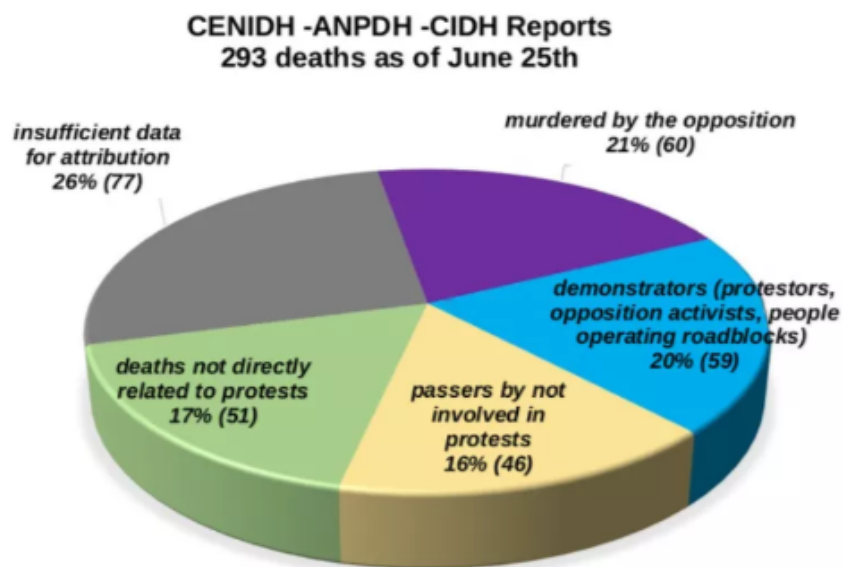
The MRS has been heavily funded by the NED to the sum of [\\$4.1 millions since 2014](#). The NED also funds institutes and organizations closely associated with the MRS, such as the Institute of Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEPP). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), created by the Organization of American States (OAS) (a well-known anti-socialist Washington-based entity) refused to meet with the Ortega government, arbitrarily chose to ignore their reports on the situation, and [immediately sided with the opposition](#) movement. This resulted in only [10 out of the 34 countries of the OAS](#) supporting the report made by the IACHR given its one-sidedness and lack of integrity.

The NED and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) [also funds the Freedom House](#), yet another NGO supposedly supporting peace and democracy, yet constantly pushing for non-democratic means of regime change. Another NGO heavily relied upon by the mainstream press is The Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights (ANPDH), which was originally [founded by the Reagan administration](#) in 1986 as an openly anti-Sandinista NGO, that since day one has showed its support to the Contras (who Reagan always showed support for), despite their well-documented crimes, violence and general [disregard for human rights](#). It too, is funded by the NED. The ANPDH has worked together with The Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH), yet another NGO, to campaign for the removal of the Sandinista government. And last but not least, The Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CPDH) founded in 1977 is closely linked to far-right parties and is, of course, funded by the NED.

All of these organizations are heavily relied upon by the Western media establishments despite their clear bias and questionable funding, more often than not being the only sources cited in news articles that paint the Ortega government as savagely dictatorial. Other human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch rely on the reports made by these local NGOs in the exact same way as the media does – and so does the US Congress. An example of this distortion can be seen in reports made

by the CENIDH, CIDH and ANPDH that have shown to strongly inflate the number of deaths attributed to the Ortega government opposed to those afflicted by the opposition. Their reports tell that somewhere close to 300 have been caused by the Ortega government forces – numbers then further spurred in the US Congress by political leaders to justify more intervention in Nicaragua. Yet, independent Nicaraguan reporter and researcher Enrique Hendrix looked at the reports and blew the whistle on the cooked books in his new report named [“Monopolizing Death”](#). Unsurprisingly, the report shows that as many people have been killed by the opposition as have been by the government forces (see chart below). He explains how the techniques used by these three NGOs have been purposely false and misleading to show a worse image of the situation, while pinning all the blame on the government. He too condemns the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for its clear bias and refusal to even consider the data from the official Nicaraguan investigation. Referencing the ANPDH, he [stated](#):

“it is impossible to verify in so many cases if they are even telling the truth [...] we could be seeing an even greater manipulation than we know.”



From the report “Monopolizing Death” by Enrique Hendrix

Venezuela

The situation in Venezuela is very similar to the one in Nicaragua when it comes to honest reporting, as many local NGOs here as well receive [direct funding](#) from the National Endowment for Democracy, the Agency for International Development (AID), the United States Information Service (USIS) and the International Republican Institute (IRI).

The amount of NGOs in Venezuela skyrocketed the moment Chavez came into power in 1998, for the first time [reaching numbers in the triple digits](#). Despite his widespread local popularity as the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution and his prowess at lifting Venezuelans out of poverty, [55 Venezuelan NGOs](#) met in Miami back in 2012 for a conference accusing him of crimes against humanity and urging that he should be trialed at the Hague Tribunal. Back in 2007, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), created by USAID, had invested

roughly [\\$30 million dollars](#) in the form of 139 subgrants to two dozen Venezuelan NGOs working against the Chavez government. The [Venezuelan NGO Súmate](#) funded by the NED and other private Venezuelan interests poses itself as an impartial election monitor, has showed its true anti-Chavez colors but is often used by many medias to report on the Venezuelan nonetheless. It has been accused of being an opposition group masked as a human rights NGO, for example supporting the [2002 attempted coup](#) against democratically elected Hugo Chavez. Many of the same NGO's located in Nicaragua also operate from Venezuela, such as The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

One NGO that requires special attention (also reporting on the situation in Venezuela) is Human Rights Watch (HRW) because of its general popularity and recognition, very often used as a source and meter of a country's overall level of democracy, freedom and respect for human rights. Yet more often than not, HRW turns a blind eye on the illegal actions of the US in foreign countries, which can be explained by its very close ties to Washington. The former Washington Director of HRW, Tom Malinowski, used to be a special [assistant for President Bill Clinton](#) and has [worked for Madeline Albright](#) as a speechwriter during her term as Secretary of State, as well as Secretary of State Warren Christopher before joining HRW. Madeline Albright is known for her complete disregard for human rights, when she famously mentioned that the death of 500.000 Iraqi children that resulted from the US sanctions imposed on Iraq were "[worth it](#)". [The Board of Directors](#) on the HRW is also filled with former CIA officials, NED directors, consultants for major US corporations active in foreign countries (such as ExxonMobil, Chevron and Boeing) and Wall Street bankers. HRW stated in 2013 that Venezuela was unfit to serve on the UN Human Rights Council, all while remaining silent during the numerous coups attempts by the US in Venezuela, Honduras, Haiti, and Guatemala. Greg Grandin, New York University history professor, called HRW "[Washington's adjunct](#)" in an article in The Nation, denouncing its very close ties to the US political establishments and alignment with US foreign policy.

Syria

Syria is in a little bit of a different political situation given that it has been ravaged by a devastating civil war for many years now. On the ground reporting in Syria is difficult, which is one of the reasons why the UN has [stopped completely](#) trying to keep track of the actual death toll. When reporting on Syria, the Human Rights Watch mostly gets its numbers from the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) (which is generally one of the most cited sources in the media as well). Their methodology for the way they document deaths in the Syria conflict has been [criticized](#) for having no verification, relying solely on first hand reports from activists in Syria. More often than they then chose to pin the deaths on the government forces of Assad, despite being completely unverified. Knowing the bias of HRW, it is not surprising that they rely on such an organization for their statistics.

Similarly to the IACHR in Nicaragua, the SNHR completely refuses to acknowledge or accept any reports or information provided by the government or state media. Even though skepticism is of course needed when receiving information from a government with a clear agenda, a complete denial of their accounts which could be as legitimate as any other accounts, comes across as cherry-picked information and hence unreliable. Some of the main activists providing the information to the SNHR are the White Helmets, officially named the Syrian Civil Defense (SCD), that have been highly criticized (mostly fringe internet medias) and investigative journalists reporting on Syria for their very [close ties with Al-Nusra](#) (also known as Al Qaeda in Syria) and ISIS – despite having been absolutely whitewashed by

the mainstream Western media as heroes selflessly fighting for human rights in Syria. The White Helmets are mostly [funded by Western nations](#) including the US and many EU and NATO countries, and are hence far from impartial. They have been taken in fabricating footages of their heroic rescue missions more than once and have been widely criticized by [local Syrians](#) as being nothing more than terrorists disguised as freedom fighters (Source [pt1](#) [pt2](#)).



Picture shows White Helmets 'cleaning up' after Al Nusra execution in Aleppo dated 5/5/2015.

Another NGO active in Syria heavily relied upon by the media is The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) founded by ex-convict Osama Ali Suleiman (also known under his stage name as Rami Abdulrahman) currently living in England. He is a self-declared member of the Syrian opposition, and once [stated](#):

"I came to Britain the day Hafez al-Assad died, and I'll return when Bashar al-Assad goes".

The New York Times reported that the SOHR is partially [funnded by EU countries](#) the name of which he won't disclose to the public, even though his ties to the UK government are quite obvious (yet another NATO country fighting against Assad in Syria). The reports compiled by the SOHR are hence far from impartial, just like those by the SNHR. They have a clear agenda is to vilify and inflate the casualties of the Assad regime while downplaying the role of the so called "moderate" rebels funded by the West.

Conclusion

In many such situations, as we have seen in the case of Nicaragua, Venezuela and Syria, the information that we rely on on a daily basis as we attempt understand what is happening in faraway countries, is more often than not deeply flawed. Hiding behind labels of “human rights”, “democracy” or “freedom”, many of the major NGOs that operate in foreign countries turn out to have clear messages and agendas that they want to show to world. They do so by distorting the truth in order to make it fit their narrative. What makes the situation worth is that the reports and data coming from these clearly biased NGOs is also used to form decisions on foreign policy by many Western nations. They are used to justify interference, sanctions, and even military intervention. Yet they are not reliable sources of information and do not show a clear and impartial picture of what is happening on the ground in countries that are already suffering through internal political turmoil. Unfortunately these NGOs are used day after day by all major news outlets and journalists who refuse to take the time to even verify the nature of their sources, and hence end up promulgating what could only be described as incomplete and misleading “fake news”.

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