

“...for his courage and skill in revealing the unprecedented extent of state surveillance violating basic democratic processes and constitutional rights.”

EDWARD SNOWDEN (Honorary Award)

(USA)

Edward Snowden is an American technologist, and former CIA officer and NSA contractor. When he discovered classified evidence the U.S. government was, contrary to its public statements, secretly operating a global system of mass surveillance in violation of human rights standards and international law, he revealed it to the press, an act for which his home country is pursuing him on criminal charges. His actions have precipitated an intense global debate on privacy and surveillance. They have also led to historic rulings on privacy and to changes in policies and technologies. In the words of RLA Laureate Daniel Ellsberg, “Snowden has done more for our Constitution in terms of the Fourth and First Amendment than anyone else I know.”

Career

Edward Snowden was born on 21 June 1983, and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 2004, volunteering to serve in the Special Forces. Some months into his training, he was separated from the Army due to an injury. In 2005, he began working for the CIA as a computer systems engineer and was posted in 2007 to the CIA station in Geneva, where he became concerned by some of the agency’s unlawful practices. After leaving the CIA, he worked for the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), Dell and finally with contractor Booz Allen Hamilton.

When his concerns grew that the mass surveillance practices that he witnessed violated rights and would, if left unchecked, pose an existential threat to democracy, he first tried to raise concerns within the system, but without an impact. He then worked at great risk within the intelligence agency to directly gather classified evidence revealing unlawful and disproportionate surveillance activities by the U.S. and other governments.

Exposing mass surveillance

In May 2013, months after making contact with American journalists at The Guardian and Washington Post, Snowden met with The Guardian’s Glenn Greenwald, Ewan MacAskill and filmmaker Laura Poitras in Hong Kong. Days later, the first articles based on his leaked documents were published. Snowden chose to identify himself as the source of the leaks, explaining his motivation and the significance of the documents to the public.

Snowden evaluated documents carefully to ensure their release would be in the public interest, and would not needlessly reveal legitimate operations. Glenn Greenwald has stated that “it’s

1,000 percent clear that he read and very carefully processed every document that he gave us by virtue of his incredibly elaborate electronic filing system.”

Publications based on the files have revealed that the NSA and GCHQ work closely with Internet service providers and telecom companies to amass enormous quantities of data on the general public. The files show the scope of the vast surveillance being conducted by the NSA, which collects hundreds of millions of email address books, hundreds of billions of cellphone location records and trillions of domestic call records, most of which belong to ordinary people suspected of no wrongdoing. The revelations showed that the U.S. government was spying to a far greater extent than it claimed and that National Intelligence Director James Clapper’s sworn testimony in Congress that the NSA did not wittingly collect the communications of millions of American citizens was knowingly false: a serious crime under American law.

Legal consequences

For revealing secret information to the public, the U.S. Department of Justice charged Snowden with two counts of violating the Espionage Act and theft of government property, punishable by up to 30 years in prison. When Snowden declared an intention to ask the world for justice and departed Hong Kong to seek political asylum, the U.S. Department of State revoked his passport, leaving him trapped in a Russian airport, unable to travel internationally nor exit the airport. He applied for asylum in 12 European countries, but they failed to respond, claiming a grant of asylum might damage relations with the government of the United States.

He has expressed a desire to seek permanent asylum in Latin America, where a number of countries have offered it, but the U.S. has sought to block his travel. On July 1st 2013, France, Italy and Spain closed their airspace to the diplomatic aircraft of Bolivia’s President Evo Morales, in violation of international law, claiming that Snowden was on board, forcing an emergency landing. When it was discovered that he was not amongst the passengers, the plane was allowed to travel onward. France and Spain issued apologies.

Snowden has been adamant that he gave no information to either the Russian or Chinese governments, and after sharing his documents with The Guardian and other journalists, he destroyed his copies to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. He refutes the criticism that he broke a civil secrecy agreement, pointing out that intelligence officers are required to take an oath to defend the U.S. constitution, and when he witnessed its violation “on a massive scale”, his loyalty lay with his country, not an agency.

On January 1, 2014, the editorial board of The New York Times demanded that the U.S. Government grant Snowden clemency or “at least a substantially reduced punishment”, arguing that while he may have broken the law, he had “done his country a great service” by bringing the abuses of the NSA to light. “When someone reveals that government officials have routinely and deliberately broken the law,” they wrote, “that person should not face life in prison at the hands of the same government.”

RLA Laureate Daniel Ellsberg says that Snowden “has revealed these earth-shattering revelations at a great personal risk.” Ellsberg counters the argument that Snowden should have returned to the United States and face trial: “Chelsea Manning has not been able to give an interview since

her arrest. When Hillary Clinton and John Kerry say that Snowden should come back to America and make his case to the American people, it's absurd. He would have been in an isolation cell straightaway, and not able to work with journalists. (...) He would not have been able to make his case in a court. He wouldn't be able to tell a Jury why he did what he did. (...) There is absolutely no chance Snowden would have been able to get a fair trial."

Impact

Snowden's revelations have caused a worldwide re-evaluation of the meaning of privacy and the boundaries of rights. In December 2013, U.S. Federal Judge Richard J. Leon ruled that bulk collection of American telephone metadata likely violates the Constitution of the United States stating that "Surely, such a program infringes on 'that degree of privacy' that the founders enshrined in the Fourth Amendment." In April 2014, the Court of Justice of the European Union declared the Data Retention Directive of 2006 invalid, because it entailed serious interference with the rights to privacy and personal data protection of individuals guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Laws are now being proposed in many countries to restrain mass surveillance, users are more aware of risks, and some telecom companies are implementing new technologies or routines to better protect their customers' data. Even the President of the U.S. concluded the debate initiated by Snowden had "made us stronger".

Honours

Snowden is the Rector of the University of Glasgow, and serves on the Freedom of the Press Foundation board of directors. He was voted as The Guardian's person of the year 2013 and was placed first in Foreign Policy's 2013 list of leading Global Thinkers due to the impact of his revelations. He was TIME's runner up to Person of the Year 2013, behind Pope Francis. He has also won the German "Whistleblower Prize" and the Sam Adams Award. He was chosen to give Britain's 2013 "Alternative Christmas Message", which takes place at the same time as the Queen's Speech.

Quote:

"There is a huge difference between legal programs, legitimate spying ... and these programs of dragnet mass surveillance that put entire populations under an all-seeing eye and save copies forever ... These programs were never about terrorism: they're about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation. They're about power."

“... for building a global media organisation dedicated to responsible journalism in the public interest, undaunted by the challenges of exposing corporate and government malpractices.”

ALAN RUSBRIDGER (Honorary Award)

(UK)

Alan Charles Rusbridger is a British journalist, author and editor of the Guardian, who has been setting benchmarks in journalism for many years. He oversaw the integration of the paper and digital operations, making the Guardian the second largest serious English-speaking newspaper website in the world and one of the most important sources for news on the global environment, development and human rights questions. During his editorship the paper has fought a number of high-profile battles over libel and press freedom, including cases involving Wikileaks and the News of the World phone hacking scandal. In 2013, Rusbridger played a leading role in publishing the surveillance revelations of Edward Snowden, persisting in this endeavour in the face of fierce government pressure.

Career

Born in Rhodesia on 29 December 1953, Alan Rusbridger graduated from Cambridge University with a degree in English in 1976. Rusbridger's career began at the U.K.'s Cambridge Evening News, where he trained as a reporter, before joining the Guardian in 1979 as a feature writer and diary columnist. In 1986, he left the paper to become a TV critic for the Observer and the next year he worked as the Washington correspondent of the London Daily News. In 1989, he returned to the Guardian as a feature writer and soon moved from writing to editing. In 1995, he became editor-in-chief.

Responsible journalism in a digital world

At a time when a global debate on issues of war and peace, governance and the preservation of our global environment is more badly needed than ever, and with the internet increasingly connecting the world's citizens, many newspapers are paradoxically reducing their numbers of foreign correspondents. Faced with the same trend of dwindling print sales as his competitors, Rusbridger has decided to not compromise the quality of the Guardian's reporting on urgent global challenges. It now has more than 30 correspondents in 20 countries. In addition there are two large regional operations in the US and Australia and networks around Africa, Eastern Europe, Iran and North Korea.

To meet the challenges of a rapidly transforming global media landscape, the Guardian is at the forefront of integrating news content across platforms. While other online publications install paywalls, Rusbridger is insisting on free access to its online version. This has turned the Guardian from the 9th largest paper in the UK to the second largest "serious" (not tabloid) news

organisation in the world, after the NY Times, with a total audience of more than 100 million per month. The goal is for the broad readership to make it possible to finance the online version through advertising income.

The Guardian uses networks of selected bloggers to add to the reporting diversity of its journalists. This has enabled it to create the world's biggest environmental newssite. This method is also used for the coverage of culture, science, sport etc, "inviting everyone to be a reporter". Rusbridger describes his goals as building a new model of a trust-based not-for-profit news organisation and fostering the democratisation of information.

Phone Hacking Scandal

The Guardian played a central role in uncovering and publicising the scandal about the now defunct News of the World and other Murdoch publications engaging in phone hacking, police bribery, and exercising improper influence in the pursuit of stories to publish. This came about through one Guardian reporter working on the story for more than five years.

The scandal raised awareness of the possibilities of new technologies, combined with a news organisation so dominating that it could intimidate Parliament, the police and press regulators by its ability to access private information. The Guardian, under Rusbridger's leadership, showed that it was possible to stand up to this power, and survive, and the Murdoch press' plan to gain a similar dominance over TV was stopped.

The Snowden revelations

In 2013, Edward Snowden came to the Guardian with the biggest ever leak of intelligence documents because he admired the paper's investigative track record and because it had hired Glenn Greenwald – a former lawyer who wrote an expert blog on national security. Over the next few months, Rusbridger put a team of around a dozen reporters and editors on the story - painstakingly working through complex material in order to produce a series of exclusive stories about the secret activities of the NSA and GCHQ which were followed up around the world.

The story was a complicated one to report and edit, given that Snowden had distributed material to four different players across three different continents. It involved coordination across London, Hong Kong, Rio De Janeiro, New York, Berlin, Sydney and Russia. In addition to the reporters and editors, Rusbridger pulled in tech experts, security consultants and lawyers. Throughout, he and his colleagues balanced the need to reveal the true extent of the surveillance and the clear intentions to further extend these illegal practices, with the need to protect legitimate state security concerns. During the period of preparation and publication of the Snowden files Rusbridger provided unwavering support and leadership to his colleagues, grounded in his conviction that an enormous public interest dimension compelled publication.

The Guardian published the first story on the leaks on Wednesday, June 5th. This first piece, detailing a secret court order issued in April 2013 that compelled Verizon to hand over consumer data to the NSA, was followed, on June 6th, by a second story, exposing the PRISM program, and then a third, on June 7th, explaining how the British GCHQ gained access to PRISM in order to collect user data from U.S. companies. On the 8th, Greenwald and Ewan MacAskill

published in the Guardian a report about an internal NSA tool, known as “Boundless Informant”, which recorded, analysed and tracked the data collected by the agency.

The official authorities pushed back – trying to attack the Guardian’s reporting. The police were called in to investigate and – in an unprecedented move – the Cabinet Secretary was involved in discussions about destroying the paper’s source material. According to Rusbridger, “The British state had decreed that there had been ‘enough’ debate around the material leaked in late May by the former NSA contractor Snowden. If The Guardian refused to hand back or destroy the documents, I, as editor of The Guardian, could expect either an injunction or a visit by the police. The state, in any event, was threatening prior restraint of reporting and discussion by the press, no matter its public interest or importance.”

As other copies of the material existed, Rusbridger agreed to destroy the Guardian’s London copies under the eyes of two state observers, knowing that the reporting and editing would continue out of New York. He writes: “At some level I suspect our interlocutors realised that the game had changed. The technology that so excites the spooks – that gives them an all-seeing eye into billions of lives – is also technology that is virtually impossible to control or contain.”

Honours and other roles

Rusbridger and reporter Nick Davies received the UK’s Media Society Award for their revelations and coverage of the phone hacking story in the Guardian. Rusbridger was awarded the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism by Harvard’s Joan Shorenstein Centre. The Guardian was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for public service in 2014. In April 2014 the Guardian was named newspaper of the year and won the top digital prize at the British Press Awards. Rusbridger was recently awarded the Spanish Ortega y Gasset award for journalism and the 2014 European Press Prize. In 2012, the Committee to Protect Journalists honoured Rusbridger at the 22nd Annual International Press Freedom Awards. In September 2014, he was made an honorary doctor at the University of Oslo and honoured by City University of New York and Columbia Journalism School.

Rusbridger is a member of the board of Guardian News and Media, of the main board of the Guardian Media Group and of the Scott Trust, which owns the Guardian and The Observer. Rusbridger was a visiting Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, and is Visiting Professor of History at Queen Mary, University of London and at Cardiff University. Between 2004 and 2013 he was Chair of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

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“...for defending, protecting and promoting human rights in Pakistan and more widely, often in very difficult and complex situations and at great personal risk.”

ASMA JAHANGIR

(Pakistan)

Asma Jahangir is Pakistan’s leading human rights lawyer. For three decades, she has shown incredible courage in defending the most vulnerable Pakistanis – women, children, religious minorities and the poor. Having founded the first legal aid centre in Pakistan in 1986, Jahangir has courageously taken on very complicated cases and won. For her relentless campaigning against laws that discriminate against women, and for continuously speaking truth to power, Jahangir has been threatened, assaulted in public and placed under house arrest. She made history when she was elected as the first female President of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan in 2010.

Asma Jahangir’s early life

Asma Jahangir was born on 27 January 1952, and earned a B.A. from Kinnaird College, Lahore, followed by a law degree in 1978 from Punjab University. Born into a politically active family, her activism began at a young age when she protested against the military government for detaining her father for opposing dictatorship.

Campaigning against discriminatory laws and defending the disadvantaged

In 1980, Jahangir and 3 of her fellow women lawyers got together to form AGHS Law Associates, the first law firm established by women in Pakistan. In 1981, Jahangir supported the Women’s Action Forum (WAF), a group that began campaigning against Pakistani laws that discriminated against women, most notably against the proposed Law of Evidence, where the value of a woman’s testimony would be reduced to half that of a man’s testimony, and the Hudood Ordinances, where victims of rape had to prove their innocence or else face punishment themselves. In 1983, Jahangir led a protest march in Lahore against a decision by then President Zia-al Haq to enforce religious laws.

While protesting against the draft Law of Evidence in 1983, Jahangir and others were beaten, tear-gassed and arrested by the police. Undaunted, in the same year, Jahangir protested against a judgment where a blind, 13 year old girl, who had been raped by her employers, had been accused of *zina* (fornication) and had been sentenced to three years of imprisonment and flogging. The verdict was overturned following the protests. Subsequently, Jahangir was placed under house arrest and then imprisoned for opposing Zia’s Islamisation policy.

As Pakistan lacks a national human rights institution, Jahangir was one of the founder members of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, an independent NGO, which was established in 1986. She has subsequently served as both Secretary General and Chairperson of this eminent

institution, which promotes and defends human rights in Pakistan, as well as monitoring human rights violations. The Commission has taken up contentious issues including violence against women, honour-killing, abolishment of capital punishment and religious violence.

Jahangir is a strong proponent of protecting the rights of persecuted religious minorities in Pakistan and speaks out against forced conversions. In 1995, after she had defended a 14-year old Christian boy – Salamat Masih, accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death – a mob outside the Lahore High Court smashed her car window and assaulted her driver. Jahangir and her family have been attacked, taken hostage, had their home broken into and received death threats ever since. Jahangir and her team continued to work on the case and Salamat Masih was acquitted.

Providing free legal aid and advancing women's rights

Since 1986, Jahangir and her associates at AGHS' Legal Aid Cell, have taken on several cases involving women, children and bonded labourers. It also established a shelter for women, called 'Dastak'. Dastak is now an independent trust run jointly by civil society organisations in Pakistan.

In 1996, the Lahore High Court ruled that an adult Muslim woman could not get married without the consent of her male guardian. Women who chose their husbands independently could be forced to annul their marriages and Jahangir, who frequently took on such cases, highlighted the repercussions. She has been able to secure the release from prison of several women accused of adultery or "immoral" sexual behaviour.

In 1999, Jahangir took up the case of Saima Sarwar, who was given shelter at Dastak after leaving her husband and seeking a divorce. Sarwar was subsequently murdered in an act of honour-killing that took place in Jahangir's offices, highlighting the immense risks involved in taking on these sorts of cases in Pakistan.

In May 2005, Jahangir helped to organise a symbolic mixed-gender marathon in Lahore to raise awareness about violence against sports women by religious extremists. Islamist groups armed with firearms, batons and Molotov cocktails violently opposed the event and Jahangir was publicly beaten, stripped and detained by the police.

More recently, Asma Jahangir was, in November 2007, one of 500 lawyers, opposition politicians and human rights activists detained when President Musharaff declared a state of emergency. She remained under house arrest for three months.

International work and other achievements

Besides her work in Pakistan, Asma Jahangir has promoted human rights internationally through her long service with the United Nations. She was UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions from 1998 to 2004, and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief from 2004 to 2010.

Jahangir has authored two books: *Divine Sanction? The Hudood Ordinance* and *Children of a Lesser God: Child Prisoners of Pakistan*. She has received numerous awards including the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders and the Ramon Magsaysay Award, both in 1995, and the coveted Hilal-i-Imtiaz – the second highest civilian award and honour given by the Government of Pakistan – in 2010.

The esteem in which Asma Jahangir is held among her fellow lawyers in Pakistan is evidenced by her election as the first female President of the Supreme Court Bar Association, the apex body of lawyers in Pakistan, in 2010.

Asma Jahangir is married and has three children and a granddaughter.

Quote:

“Everyone is entitled to a dignified life and no society can advance unless the individuals within it are free from fear and can at least enjoy basic political rights.”

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“... for his tireless and outstanding work to support and document the implementation of human rights in Asia.”

BASIL FERNANDO / Asian Human Rights Commission

(Hong Kong SAR, China)

Basil Fernando is a leading Asian human rights defender. In a career spanning three decades, he has been pivotal in linking ordinary citizens striving for human rights principles at the grassroots to institutions working for structural reform at the policy level. Fernando, and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) that he led for nearly two decades, have developed one of the world’s most sophisticated “Urgent Appeals” systems. Through its Human Rights School and training initiatives, the AHRC has educated countless lawyers and activists on the principles of fair trial and the rule of law, thereby greatly advancing an Asian movement working towards the realisation of human rights for all.

From Sri Lanka to Hong Kong: Basil Fernando’s early life

Basil Fernando was born on 14 October 1944 and graduated in law from the (then) University of Ceylon in 1972. After graduation, he taught English as a second language at university level for 8 years, before becoming a practising criminal lawyer in 1980.

Fernando became concerned and began resisting the pernicious politicisation and corruption that was becoming common in the public justice system in Sri Lanka, undermining the legal profession. In 1989, when tens of thousands of people had already “disappeared”, his name was placed on a death list, forcing him to flee to Hong Kong.

Fernando worked for a UNHCR sponsored project for three years as a Counsellor for Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. Subsequently, between 1992-94, he worked for the Human Rights Component of the UN Transitional Authority of Cambodia and UN Human Rights Centre as a Senior Officer. These experiences helped shape the approach to human rights that Fernando adopted when he accepted Directorship of the Asian Human Rights Commission, and the associated Asian Legal Resources Centre, in 1994.

Asian Human Rights Commission: a new approach to human rights work

Basil Fernando was the Asian Human Rights Commission’s only full-time employee when he joined the organisation in 1994. His approach to human rights was a radical departure from most human rights work in the region at the time. He focused on assisting victims of human rights violations and activists from within the communities who were supporting the victims, rather than propagating human rights from urban centres. Moreover, he began analysing precisely why and how principles of human rights were not being incorporated in, and implemented through, national public justice systems. Also, he began engaging in lobbying and advocacy from outside the country where human rights abuses were taking place in ways that supported and protected

victims and informants. To achieve this, Fernando began building up AHRC's capacity and the capacities that would allow such work to be done in the countries in which AHRC became involved – by recruiting and training staff and empowering partner organisations.

The AHRC today works actively in 12 Asian countries: Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Nepal, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Philippines. Fernando stepped down from the position of Executive Director at AHRC in 2010 and today serves as its Director of Policy & Programmes.

Documenting human rights violations & promoting suitable solutions

Basil Fernando and his colleagues at the AHRC have painstakingly documented human rights violations in the countries in which they work, and published them in AHRC's Annual Reports. Fernando and the AHRC team have produced several monumental works, which include the book *Narrative of Justice in Sri Lanka told through stories of torture victims* that documents 1,500 cases of police torture in Sri Lanka between 1998 and 2011, and *article 2*, a quarterly journal that analyses recent developments in the implementation of human rights standards in Asia. *Torture – Asian And Global Perspectives* and *Ethics in Action* are also regular publications.

The AHRC, under Fernando's guidance, has done extensive work in exposing and reducing the number of forced disappearances and in assisting victims. It has documented a number of disappearances in a "Cyberspace Graveyard", available at www.disappearances.org

Given the absence of a governmental charter on human rights in Asia, and cognisant of the arguments against human rights on the basis of cultural relativism, the AHRC launched a series of consultations, which lasted several years, to develop consensus for a human rights charter. The *Asian Human Rights Charter*, a people's charter representing the consensus of Asian civil society, which resulted, was adopted in South Korea in 1998. While subscribing to the universality of human rights, it demonstrates Asia's particular approaches being used in framing human rights, and is available in several languages. Efforts towards drafting an Asian Charter on the rule of law are ongoing.

Initiating an Asia-wide campaign against torture and ill-treatment, as an answer to widespread use of torture in Asian countries, has become one of AHRC's core activities. This has resulted in the formation of the Asian Alliance Against Torture and Ill-Treatment (AAATI), which also holds meetings for parliamentarians from Asian countries to encourage them to play an active part in eliminating the use of torture.

The AHRC urgent appeals system

During Fernando's leadership, the AHRC developed one of the most extensive urgent appeals programmes in the Asian region to assist persons who suffer human rights abuses. This programme is arranged so complaints can be received quickly, speedy interventions can be made at local, national, and UN levels, and the information can be disseminated to a large audience across the world. Over 350 urgent appeals from different Asian countries are received and acted upon by the AHRC annually. The appeals system has successfully led to the release of many ordinary people, saving them from suffering further human rights abuses.

Human rights education

The AHRC under Fernando's watch has established a human rights school with a view to developing a new form of human rights education based on the application of human rights principles to current problems, adopting the Danish Style Folk School method of education through dialogue. The school holds live sessions in different countries in the region, and also by way of a correspondence school, disseminates lessons to local human rights organisations and also makes the same available on the Internet. The human rights school has been widely subscribed by the global human rights community, with over 200 persons accessing the modules every month.

In 1995, the AHRC also commenced a direct programme to train Chinese lawyers on the principles and proof of fair trial. This training programme has been ongoing annually, and the AHRC has managed to make a significant impact in promoting the rule of law in China, establishing partnerships with a remarkable number of lawyers, law teachers, academics, and activists.

On the basis of a large body of data gathered over many years, the AHRC has identified that archaic and extremely backward public justice systems, i.e. police, prosecution, judicial and prison institutions, are the major obstacle to the implementation of human rights in Asian countries. In order to overcome this major obstacle the AHRC has made advocacy for re-engineering of justice systems another key focus of its work.

Recognition

Basil Fernando is a Senior Ashoka Fellow and a Sohmen Visitor of Law at the University of Hong Kong. He received the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights in South Korea in 2001. He is also a reputed poet and creative writer, who writes in his mother tongue Sinhala and in English.

Quote:

“People want change. People demand that their human rights are respected by their governments, not by words but by genuine improvement of the public institutions; they want justice to be something real, tangible and accessible. A wise way to deal with this is for governments to facilitate these changes. This is the only way open to end violence and achieve peace in all parts of the world. More developed countries should demonstrate more wisdom by assisting such changes and not supporting repression.”

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“...for mobilising growing popular support in the USA and around the world for strong action to counter the threat of global climate change.”

BILL MCKIBBEN/350.org

(USA)

Bill McKibben is one of the world’s leading environmentalists. He has been an influential author and educator for 30 years, and his 1989 book *The End of Nature* was one of the first-ever books written to inform a general audience about climate change. Over the last ten years he initiated and built the first planet-wide, grassroots climate change movement. With the organisation 350.org at its core, this movement has spread awareness and mobilised political support for urgent action to mitigate the climate crisis that is already unfolding.

Career as environmental author

Bill McKibben was born on 8 December 1960 and graduated from Harvard University in 1982. McKibben worked as a staff writer for *The New Yorker* from 1982-87 and then went freelance. In 1989, he published *The End of Nature*, which has been considered to be the first book on global warming written for a general audience. The book became a bestseller and was published in more than 20 languages.

Wikipedia provides an overview of his subsequent writing: “His next book, *The Age of Missing Information* (...) is an account of an experiment in which McKibben collected everything that came across the 100 channels of cable TV (...) for a single day. He spent a year watching the 2,400 hours of videotape, and then compared it to a day spent on the mountaintop near his home. This book has been widely used in colleges and high schools. (...)

Subsequent books include *Hope, Human and Wild*, about Curitiba, Brazil and Kerala, India, which he cites as examples of people living more lightly on the earth; *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*, which is about the Book of Job and the environment; *Maybe One*, about human population; *Long Distance: A Year of Living Strenuously*, about a year spent training for endurance events at an elite level; *Enough*, about what he sees as the existential dangers of genetic engineering and nanotechnology; and *Wandering Home*, about a long solo hiking trip. (...)

His book, *Deep Economy: the Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (...) addresses what the author sees as shortcomings of the growth economy and envisions a transition to more local-scale enterprise. In (...) 2007 he published (...) *Fight Global Warming Now*, a handbook for activists trying to organise their local communities. In 2008 came *The Bill McKibben Reader: Pieces from an Active Life*, a collection of essays spanning his career. Also in 2008, the Library of America published ‘American Earth’, an anthology of American environmental writing since Thoreau edited by McKibben. In 2010 he published another national bestseller, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*, an account of the rapid onset of climate change. (...)

Some of his work has been extremely popular, an article in *Rolling Stone* in July 2012 received over

125,000 likes on Facebook, 14,000 tweets, and 5,000 comments.” Titled *Global Warming's Terrifying New Math: Three simple numbers that add up to global catastrophe and that make clear who the real enemy is*, the article shows that only a tiny fraction of the proven coal and oil and gas reserves that the fossil-fuel companies want to develop over the coming decades could be burnt to avoid global temperatures rising by more than 2°C.

From author to activist

In 2001, McKibben took a job as scholar-in-residence at Middlebury College in Vermont, where he now has an endowed position as Schumann Distinguished Scholar. The Boston Globe writes (22.1.2012): “After watching two decades of political inaction, McKibben began to lose patience. ‘I spent a long time thinking that I was doing my part by writing and speaking about this and that, since it wasn’t really my nature to be a political organiser; someone else would build a movement,’ he once told the Utne Reader. But when that didn’t happen, he realized he had to act.”

McKibben started a number of campaigns through the churches, e.g. a “Hundred Dollar Holiday” for a non-materialistic Christmas or “What would Jesus drive?” initiated by him for less polluting cars.

In 2006, with a group of Middlebury College students, he organised a 1,000 person 5-day March across Vermont to get a political commitment from state politicians to an 80% carbon emissions reduction by 2050. “Vermont’s politicians fell all over themselves to sign on. With a few days of sore feet, McKibben had achieved more concrete results than in 18 years of writing.” (article 17.9.2012, Outside Magazine).

In 2007, again with the Middlebury College students, McKibben set up Step It Up, which organised rallies in hundreds of American cities and towns to demand that Congress enact curbs on carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. McKibben remembers: “I had a couple of new insights of how you can organise, with the computer in a dispersed way. The thing succeeded beyond anything. There were 1,400 decentralised events on April 14 with hundreds of thousands people. The coverage we got was unbelievable. It was all over the place in the small papers. It was much more than we could have gotten if all these people had marched on DC. And it was not dull, but creative actions, some activists were diving, and others were marking the coastline in New York that we would get with global warming. (...) It worked: Obama and Hillary Clinton changed their platforms.”

350.org

In 2008, McKibben co-founded 350.org. The name reflects the atmospheric CO₂ concentration (in parts per million, ppm) thought to be a threshold for unacceptable risk of dangerous climate change (the current concentration is already over 400 ppm).

In March 2009, McKibben co-organised, and participated – together with RLA Laureate Vandana Shiva and other activists – in an act of civil disobedience to block the US Congress’s own coal power plant.

The initial focus of 350.org was strongly on the Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009. On 24 October 2009, 350.org coordinated more than 5,200 demonstrations in 181 countries in what was called “the largest ever coordinated rally of any kind” by Foreign Policy magazine and “the most widespread day of political action in the planet’s history” by CNN.

Six weeks later, 350.org took 350 young people to the Copenhagen Climate Conference and by the end of it 117 countries had endorsed the 350 ppm target (however, as McKibben acknowledged, these were not the big polluters).

In 2010, 350.org organised the Global Work Party, bringing together 7,200 communities in 188 countries to work together on local climate solutions. Other campaigns have included 350 eARTh, the world's first planetary art show large enough to be seen from space, and the Great Power Race, a student clean energy competition for over 1,000 universities in China, India, and the United States. In 2011, 350.org merged with 1Sky and held a rally in Washington, DC with thousands of people protesting big polluters as part of the 10,000 person Power Shift 2011 conference.

In the fall of 2011, 350.org started campaigning against the Keystone XL pipeline that would take oil from Canada’s tar sands in Alberta to the Gulf of Mexico. At a rally in front of the White House, McKibben was arrested together with over 1,000 people. This contributed to the Keystone project being put on hold indefinitely.

The Climate Impacts Day in May 2012 encouraged the media to “connect the dots” between extreme weather and climate change. Also in 2012, 350.org organised a 22-city Do the Math tour, which focused on the factor-five difference in the amount of carbon that could still be emitted within the 2°C limit, and the amount in the proven reserves of the fossil fuel companies (see Rolling Stone article mentioned above).

In June 2013, the Global Power Shift conference brought together 500 young leaders from 135 countries. And on 21 September 2014, 350.org and many partner organisations organised a large demonstration in New York and other marches around the world attracting some 400,000 people to underline climate concerns at Ban Ki-Moon’s climate summit.

350.org is a 501(c)3 non-profit organisation with some 70 staff members. The Executive Director of 350.org is May Boeve, and McKibben is its Board President.

Recognitions

McKibben has received a number of awards and honorary degrees. In 2010, Utne Reader magazine listed McKibben as one of the “25 Visionaries Who Are Changing Your World” and Foreign Policy magazine named him to its inaugural list of the 100 most important global thinkers in 2009. In 2010, the Boston Globe called him “probably the nation's leading environmentalist” and *Time* magazine book reviewer Bryan Walsh described him as “the world's best green journalist”. In 2013, he won the Gandhi Peace Award.

McKibben has honorary degrees from 18 colleges and universities, and in 2014 a newly discovered insect – a woodland gnat – was named in his honour: *Megophthalmidia mckibbeni*.

Personal life

Bill McKibben is married to Sue Halpern, a writer. They have a daughter, Sophie McKibben, who is currently a student at Brown University.

Quote:

“The climate fight is the first timed test humanity has faced; if we don't win quickly we won't win at all. It's the definition of urgent.”

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