

ACS Science & Human Rights Webinar Series

Physicians for Human Rights Q&A

Some of the questions asked by viewers of the July 2015 PHR webinar were not able to be addressed during the broadcast. Please see answers to those questions listed below.

- *Has PHR been involved in Haiti at all? With the recent coercive displacement of people from Dominican Republic into Haiti will PHR be involved?*

We are not currently working in either Haiti or the Dominican Republic but are following the attempt to displace people of Haitian descent from the DR and do some advocacy on the issue. The survey tool that I referenced with regard to our work in Burma is something we hope to make available after we have thoroughly tested it so that others can challenge unlawful evictions and forced displacement.

- *In order to be viewed as neutral and credible, is PHR concerned about getting involved in highly politically charged with lesser human rights violations. Guantanamo would be an example. The level of "torture" has been questioned, but is obviously less than areas where mass murder is taking place.*

We have worked for years on the human rights violations associated with the US government's counter-terrorism policies and focused in particular on the role of medical and health professionals in torture and ill-treatment. In the context of Guantanamo Bay, the issue of whether an individual violation is severe is less relevant than taking the experience of the detainees and understanding that they are experiencing multiple violations in what is essentially a right-free zone. The sum of the violations is devastating.

- *Is PHR involved in investigation of Palestinian displacement and entrapment? If yes, how so?*

There is a group called PHR-Israel with whom we work closely. We defer to them on when they want us to come into their work and when they want to do it. A relatively recent example of when they thought we would be the appropriate organization to do work was when two 16 year old boys were killed in the West Bank. The IDF claimed that they were only using rubber bullets and therefore the two deaths were from someone else. The family of one of the boys agreed to an autopsy and we were asked by a Palestinian group in the West Bank (al Haq) to have one of our medical examiners be part of the team conducting the autopsy and to assist with the crime scene investigation. As a result, the IDF had to back down on its claim and charges have been brought against a member of the Israeli border patrol.

- *Have you addressed situations where environmental damage, e.g. by chemical spills, causes public harm?*

This is an issue of great interest to us and one we are looking at as we go through a strategic planning process. Chemical torts – as you well know – are difficult to prove but we may be well-situated to work on some of these cases. We have worked to document police violence and torture of environmental activists including some who have been explicitly challenging the action (or inactions) or corporations who are destroying the environment.

For more on Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), please visit <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/>



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