



Albanian Helsinki Committee

Strategic Plan 2016 – 2018

November 2015

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I. Introduction

This document presents the Strategic Plan of the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) for the three-year period 2016 – 2018. AHC's Strategic Plan:

- is based on an analysis of the main political, economic, societal and cultural developments in Albania, in Southeast Europe, the rest of Europe and the world; these developments may have an impact on the area of human rights and, therefore, on AHC's work in the next three years;
- reflects a re-evaluation of the vision, mission and values on which AHC's work is based;
- presents the strategic objectives of AHC for the period 2016 – 2018 and the programs that AHC will implement in order to achieve these objectives; and
- outlines some changes in AHC's approach in order to increase the effectiveness of work for the implementation of this plan.

The Strategic Plan will lead the work of the General Assembly of Members, the Directing Board and AHC staff for the next three years. It will serve as a reference document for collaborators, institutions and partner organizations, as well as AHC donors.

The Strategic Plan reflects: (i) discussions and ideas exchanged during the Seminar on AHC's Strategic Planning, which took place in June 2015, with the participation of all full-time personnel of AHC; (ii) the ideas, facts and lessons learned from the review of a series of documents of importance to AHC's activity, such as, annual reports and previous evaluations of the organization; (iii) discussions and suggestions of the General Assembly and the Directing Board of AHC about the first version of the Strategic Plan; (iv) a final discussion of the plan with AHC leading officials; as well as (v) the results of an evaluation of AHC's work in the last three years; participants in this evaluation included beneficiaries of AHC work, external collaborators, as well as partners from state institutions or non-profit organizations. AHC engaged Ms. Delina Fico as an expert to help with the process of preparing this Strategic Plan.

II. Organization

a. Background

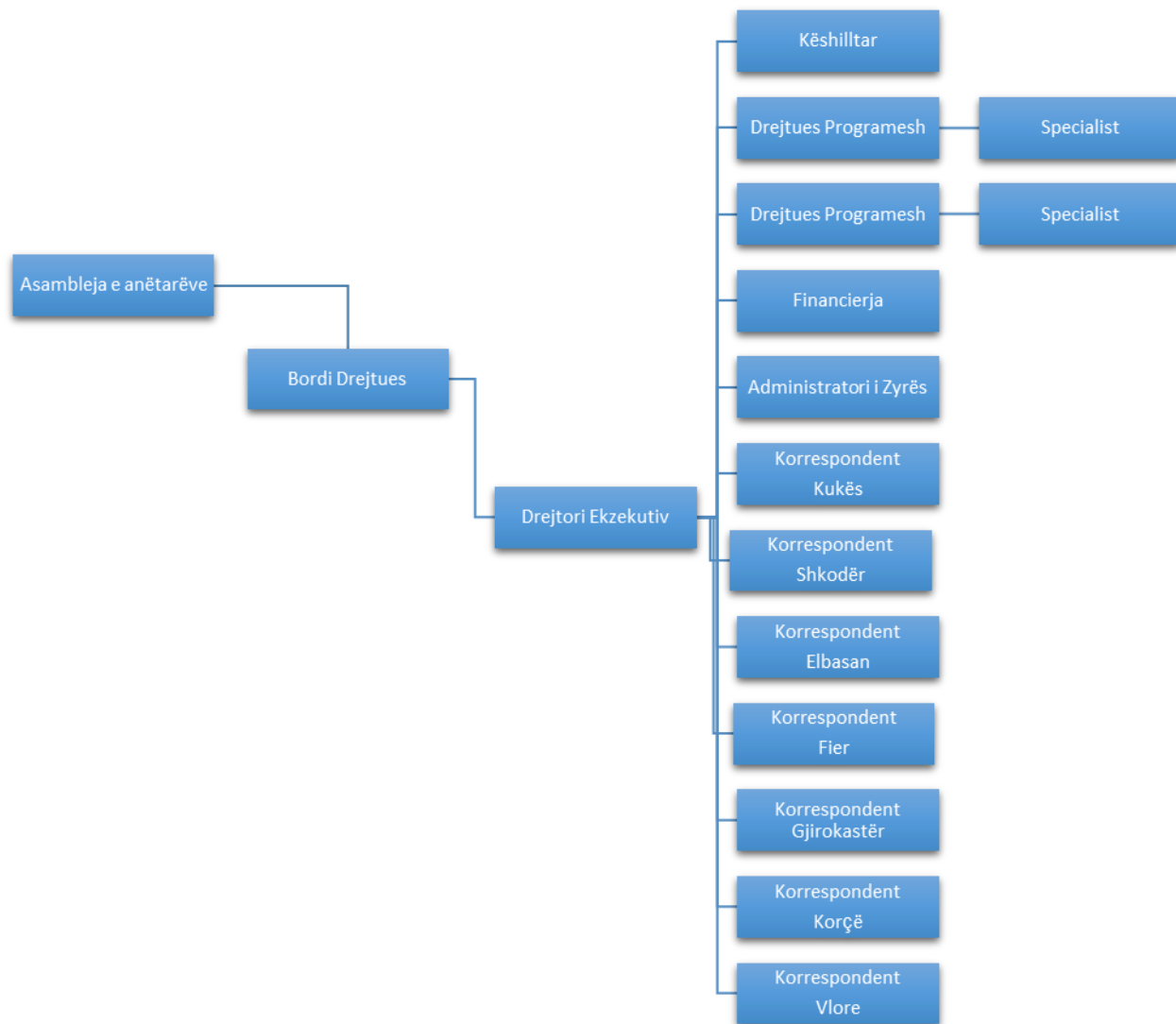
On December 16, 1990, in the context of the first wave of movements for Albania's democratic transformation, a group of public intellectuals founded the Albanian Forum for the Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, which was later named the "Albanian Helsinki Committee" (AHC). AHC was founded from the very start as a membership organization and as a non-profit, non-governmental and non-party subject. The organization initially focused on the rights of persons persecuted by the totalitarian regime that ruled Albania in the second half of the 20th century, and played a leading role in the education of the Albanian society with regard to the international framework of human rights. On March 22, 1992, the AHC became a member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, based in Vienna. During this quarter century, AHC has been and remains the most prominent organization for the protection and promotion of human rights in Albania, as well as a leading partner for other non-government organizations, Albanian public institutions, international agencies and programs that work to advance respect for human rights in Albania.

b. Organization, staff and assets

The highest leading body of the AHC is the General Assembly of Members, composed of 14 members (presently 2 women and 12 men), which elects the Directing Board. The Board consists of 5 members (presently 1 woman and 4 men) and functions as a decision-making body between two Assembly meetings. AHC's work is led by the Executive Director (presently a woman) who is elected by the Directing Board. At present, AHC employs 8 full-time persons (see organogram below) and, based on project needs, hires part-time experts of different areas, selected from among the group of collaborators and trained and qualified organization activists (about 200 collaborators, of which 150 specialize in election monitoring). AHC has also established a network of 7 correspondents (employed part-time) living in Kukës, Gjirokastër, Fier, Vlorë, Korçë, Elbasan, and Shkodër (3 women and 4 men). This network of collaborators observes and monitors respect for human rights in relevant districts and plays the role of the organizer in the implementation of AHC initiatives and events in these districts.

AHC exercises its activity all over Albania, but the organization's office is based in Tirana. AHC has contracted by rent the premises it uses as offices and only owns the office's necessary electronic equipment as well as a vehicle.

Table 1: AHC organogram¹



c. Activities and services

AHC implements the types of activities presented hereinafter in order to achieve its strategic goals:

- **Collection, processing and analysis of data** regarding human rights in the form of annual or thematic reports, monitoring and observation missions on behalf of public opinion, or enhanced research on concrete issues in the area of human rights and the rule of law;

¹AHC correspondents report to the Executive Director or one of the Program Directors, depending on the project they are engaged in.

- **Education and sensitization of the public and the public administration** with regard to certain issues of human rights, including lectures and discussions in public institutions, non-profit organizations, private and academic entities; public awareness campaigns through traditional and social media; as well as contributions by AHC representatives to public debate in these media;
- **Advocacy** on issues in the field of activity of the AHC that range from the assessment of needs for networking with other interested partners to meetings with decision makers and introduction of proposals, remarks and concrete suggestions with regard to lawmaking initiatives or specific public policies and programs;
- **Taking public stances** with regard to urgent human rights issues through press statements and conferences;
- **Providing technical assistance** for lawmaking bodies and other public institutions on problems related to the mission of AHC, which includes discussions, advice, and provision of concrete proposals prepared by AHC experts;
- **Training and capacity building** for public institutions, non-profit, private and academic entities about human rights;
- **Providing free legal assistance** for victims of human rights violations (through AHC's Legal Clinic), which includes following individual cases through all the instances of the Albanian justice system to the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg.

d. Partner organizations

AHC collaborates and coordinates its work with civil society organizations, public institutions, as well as with bilateral, multi-lateral or private international bodies that operate in the field of the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights in Albania. although some of these organizations may be competitors of AHC to some extent and on certain issues, AHC always pursues the path of cooperation and coordination with them. Meanwhile, AHC has signed cooperation agreements with some main public institutions.

AHC is a member of the Network of Free Legal Clinics in Albania; the Albanian Network of Organizations for the Protection of Human Rights; the Council of Europe's Civil Society Solidarity Platform; and the Network of Organizations for the Protection of Human Rights in the Balkans, which stems from this Platform.

The main organizations and institutions that AHC most collaborates with are as follows:

i. *Public Institutions:*

- Parliament of Albania and especially the Special Parliamentary Commission for Justice Reform; the Committee on Legal Affairs, the Public Administration and Human Rights; the Committee on Education and Public Information Means, and the Committee on Productive Activities, Trade and the Environment;
 - High Council of Justice, Ministry of Justice, General Directory of Prisons;
 - General Directory of State Police;
 - Ministry of Education and Sports; Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Environment;
 - Central Election Commission;
 - High State Audit;
 - People's Advocate; Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination;
 - Municipalities of Tiranë, Lezhë, Korçë, Gjirokastër, Fier, and Elbasan, Kukës, Vlorë, Shkodër, etc.
- ii. *Civil Society Organizations:*
- Center for Civic Legal Initiatives, ResPublica, Albanian Human Rights Group, Center for Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma, TILAS, European Institute of Tirana, Human Rights House, “Përthyerja” association, Albanian Center for Human Rights;
 - Albanian Network against Domestic Violence and Trafficking;
 - Albanian Disability Rights Foundation (ADRF) and the network of organizations that ADRF coordinates;
 - Alliance against Discrimination fo LGBT Persons and ProLGBT Albania;
 - Partners Albania; “Eden” association;
 - Children’s Human Rights Center Albania;
 - “Roma for Integration” Association and other associations protecting the rights of the Roma community.
- iii. *Academic institutions:* University of Tirana, “Marin Barleti” University, “Luarasi” University, “Ismail Qemali” University, Vlorë, “Fan Noli” University, Korçë.
- iv. *International programs and organizations:*
- OSCE Presence in Tirana;
 - OSCE/ODHIR;
 - UN Agencies in Tirana;
 - EU Delegation in Albania;
 - KRCT (Kati, Kosovë)

- Helsinki Committee in the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Macedonia, Poland, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria
- In Lande Person (EU project).

Main donors that have supported AHC's work in the last three years include: Civil Rights Defenders; the EU Delegation in Albania; the Council of Europe; Open Society Institute - Budapest; Open Society Foundation Albania (OSFA); UNICEF; National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Embassies of the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States in Tirana.

e. Main achievements during the years 2013 - 2015

The last three years marked a period of intensive engagement of AHC on some priority issues for human rights in Albania. Below is a presentation of the main activities and achievements of AHC during these three years, which consolidated AHC's role as an authoritative, credible and independent institution that protects and promotes the guaranteeing of human rights in our country.

Preparation of the Annual Report on the Situation of Respect for Human Rights in Albania. AHC prepared and published three such reports during the period 2013 - 2015. This annual report, the only one of its kind in Albania, provides a detailed panorama of achievements and challenges with regard to human rights in the country, as well as presents AHC's evaluation of and contribution to certain issues that have been a priority during the year that is being reported upon. AHC's annual reports for 2012, 2013, and 2014 continued to serve as a source of information (in most times, also quoted) for the Albania section of the U.S. State Department's Annual Report on Human Rights, the EU Progress Report on Albania, as well as for other publications and research studies regarding the situation of human rights in the country or monitoring and advocacy initiatives related to them.

Monitoring of the general elections (June 2013) and local government elections (June 2015). Based on its long and successful experience with monitoring elections and in coordination with other associations and groups that monitor elections in Albania, AHC monitored the general and local government elections through its network of observers. AHC prepared and made public preliminary reports and the final reports on election monitoring, as well as statements between them, highlighting shortcomings in the preparation and conduct of elections from a human rights perspective, as well as offered concrete recommendations to address these shortcomings during the respective elections and/or future elections.

Contribution to improving the legal framework on some important issues. During these three years, AHC contributed in an important manner to public discussions and those with groups of experts organized by relevant public institutions and/or the Parliament. AHC presented concrete proposals for some important laws, including the law “On the right to information,” “On public notification and consultation,” “On the inclusion and access for persons with disabilities,” “On the rights and treatment of convicts and detainees,” “On legal aid,” “On State Police,” “On the People’s Advocate,” on the resolution “On recognizing and strengthening the role of the civil society in the process of the country’s democratic development,” as well as for the amendment of the Penal Code and laws “On Prison Police,” “On Internal Control in the Ministry of Justice,” “On medical emergencies,” etc. An important part of AHC’s main recommendations were included in the final version of many of these laws and resolutions.

Contribution to reform of the justice system. During 2015, AHC contributed in a significant and active manner to discussions about and improving the analysis of the justice system and the package of proposals for changes in the organization and functioning of this system, prepared by the group of domestic and foreign experts, in the context of the Special Parliamentary Commission on Justice Reform. AHC research studies and reports on the justice system and on State Police were included in the report on the Justice System Analysis, which was prepared by this Commission. Considering justice reform a major moment with a potentially extraordinary impact on expanding the space for the implementation of human rights and uprooting corruption in Albania, AHC has monitored and continues to monitor the progress of this reform and is a co-initiator of the group of civil society organizations that monitor the conduct of the reform.

Successful protection of victims of human rights violations. During the years 2013 – 2015, AHC’s Legal Clinic provided free legal services to victims of human rights violations in Albania, by following 16 judicial cases, selected in the context of strategic litigation. AHC also handled 1.076 complaints, which it provided legal counseling for 567 of them, conducted verifications for 529 of them, assisted in 72 trial hearings, made 16 public reactions, and intervened in 478 cases with the public and private administration. By giving priority to cases that make a precedent in terms of expanding and implementing human rights in the country, AHC achieved a significant success in the case *Lika Laska vs. Albania*. AHC pursued this case in all levels of the Albanian justice system and then petitioned the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg about it. This court ruled in favor of the gentlemen Lika and Laska. AHC pursued an innovative approach (which involved the engagement as *amicus curiae* of two former Strasbourg Court judges), making this decision of the Strasbourg Court implementable in the country, by breking new ground in judicial practice through the decision of the High Court.

Through this case, AHC created a model for the effective use of Courts in protection of human rights in Albania.

During the period 2013 – 2015, AHC made valuable achievements also in some of its other programs, such as that of *monitoring prisons and pre-trial detention institutions* and the drafting of reports with relevant findings and recommendations, building capacities of employees in these institutions toward the implementation of legislation and better respect for human rights. During this period, AHC also launched some new initiatives in the field of social and economic rights, which it intends to expand further in the coming years.

III. Political, economic and social context

The success of AHC's work in the next three years will depend to a large extent on the political, economic and social context in which AHC operates as well as on AHC's ability to take advantage of opportunities that will be created in order to advance the cause of human rights in the framework of this context. Therefore, the factors and developments outlined below have been seen from the perspective of their influence on the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights in Albania during the period 2016 – 2018.

The progress of the process of Albania's integration into the European Union. The next three years will be decisive for Albania's integration into the EU, given that during these years, it is expected that the EU will set the date for opening negotiations for Albania's accession into the EU. Therefore, it is to be expected that, in spite of the result of the 2017 general elections, Albania's EU integration process will continue to be enhanced. It is likewise to be expected that the EU will set a date for the opening of negotiations with Albania at least within 2018.

Opening of Albania's EU accession negotiations is conditioned by the complete fulfillment of the following 5 priorities:

1. Creation of a professional and depoliticized public administration
2. Strengthening of the independence of justice institutions
3. Fight against corruption
4. Fight against organized crime
5. Protection of human rights

(Per EU recommendations of October 2013)

The process of the country's integration into the EU will continue to be dominating the setting of the political agenda of the country's governance. Therefore, it is to be expected that during the years 2016 – 2018, Albania will see an enhancement of some reforms and processes that are part of Albania's efforts to fulfill EU accession standards. These reforms and processes include:

- Deepening and expanding justice reform;
- Consolidating the public administration and improvement of its performance;
- Escalation of the fight against corruption;
- Cleaning up political institutions from ties to crime ('decriminalization' and concrete results in terms of the fight against criminality);
- Improvement of human rights standards.

Justice reform. This reform, initiated from over a decade ago, has been accelerated and escalated during 2014. A draft of the reform program, which is a collection of the main proposals for key interventions into the justice system, was submitted for review to the Venice Commission

in October 2015, together with some concrete proposals for amendments to the Constitution. In the context of this reform, the next three years are expected to see significant changes in Albania's fundamental legal framework (starting with the Constitution), the organization of the justice system, as well as the manner of interaction of the justice system of other state sectors and with citizens. All of these processes provide ample opportunities and numerous challenges for expanding the scope, improving the standards of and implementing human rights in the country.

Reform in the central and local public administration. The new law on public administration, which entered fully into effect in 2014, ensures higher stability of the administration toward party interventions and post-election changes. This process expands opportunities for the creation and consolidation of a more professional public administration. Meanwhile, after the local government elections, 61 new municipalities were created (instead of the 373 local government units) and these municipalities are expected to assume increasingly more competences to serve citizens. This process of further decentralization will create new dynamics with regard to respect for and implementation of human rights in Albania, particularly but not only with regard to social economic rights.

Continued fight against corruption. It is to be expected that the fight against corruption will be escalated in the next three years in Albania, thanks to the pressure of the EU integration process, as well as of citizens who are tired by over two decades of massive corruption. Yet, corruption may remain the greatest challenge that the Albanian society will face in its efforts to integrate into the EU. The success or failure in the fight against corruption in the justice system, as well as in all other segments of the public sector, will expand or limit space for respect for human rights in Albania.

Strengthened role of the civil society. The enhancement of the process for Albania's integration into the EU will be accompanied with increased responsibilities and role of the civil society in the political, economic and social life of the country, given that this increasing role is an inseparable part of the EU integration process. A good foundation for a strengthened role of the civil society was created by the approval in 2014 of the laws "On the right to information" and "On public consultation." In this regard, the creation of the National Civil Society Council will be an important step, expected at the start of 2016. This Council will be the highest forum of interaction between the government and civil society on issues of mutual interest. The increase of the role and responsibility of the civil society in political, economic and social developments in

the country creates ever increasing opportunities for the civil society to become a main actor in the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights in Albania.

Parliamentary elections of 2017. These elections, which will be held in the context of expectations with regard to the opening of Albania's negotiations with the EU, will be particularly important for consolidating the standard of free and fair elections in Albania, but also for marking a clear step forward in terms of a real detachment of political institutions from crime and corruption. These elections may also be a good opportunity to put an end to the atmosphere of conflict in the country's political life and to build a more constructive relationship between the majority and opposition, given that this is a repeated appeal from the EU, but also an increasing expectation of the majority of citizens.

Unclear future of economic development. At present, Albania is undergoing an anemic period of economic development, with a growth of 3% of the GDP envisioned for 2015 and a slight increase in the following years.² Although the resolution of some significant problems is expected during the next three years with regard to private property ownership (conclusion of the legalization of illegal construction, resolution of ownership titles on land, etc.), it is difficult to foresee an acceleration of economic growth in Albania, in the conditions of an economic crisis in the region and the world, especially in two leading economic partners of Albania such as Italy and Greece, whereby hundreds of thousands of Albanians live and work. An anemic economic growth with stringent public budgets could have a negative impact on the expansion of respect for human rights, in particular in terms of the state's making available necessary human and financial resources for the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights and freedoms in Albania.

Closer regional cooperation and increased role of Albania in the region. In the last two or three years, we notice that Western Balkan countries have intensified their relations, mainly as a strategy to accelerate their integration into the EU as a group. This process is expected intensify in the next three years. Albania has tried to assume a leadership role in this initiative for closer regional cooperation, a role that is likely to be strengthened in the following years. This closer regional cooperation creates an opportunity for expanding regional cooperation between public, non-governmental and private, institutions also in the area of protection of human rights.

Developments in the EU and regions around Europe. The Euro crisis, closely linked with the severe economic crisis in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy, as well as the crisis of refugees

²<http://data.worldbank.org/country/albania>, accessed on October 6, 2015

from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries in conflict that rushed toward the EU during 2015 have placed the EU in front of tough challenges. These crises and their repercussions will continue to be felt in the two or three coming years. Armed religion-based conflicts in northern Africa and the Middle East do not appear to be heading toward the end soon. This process will have considerable impact in a complex manner in EU's approach to Western Balkan countries seeking EU membership. All options are open: the possibilities for these crises to strengthen the EU, but also its will to expand in the Balkans, as well as the possibilities that these crises would shut the EU in itself and thus prolong without end the process of the integration of the Western Balkans in it.

Euro-skepticism, potential religious and ethnic conflicts. The crises that the EU is faced with, a potential loss of EU's attention to the Western Balkans, as well as the prolonged economic crisis, which will likely continue to a certain extent in the next three years, could ferment increased skepticism toward the EU or encourage ethnic or religious-based conflicts in the Balkans. These developments would worsen the situation of human rights in these countries, with the effects spreading also to Albania, especially in terms of the potential radicalization of certain social segments, under the influence of conservative religious practices in the face of a fading model of an EU that is uninterested in countries like Albania. These dangers are not entirely out of place, especially in the context of a tendency to limit human rights in some countries in Europe (such as Hungary) or other countries close to Europe (such as Turkey and Azerbaijan).

Focusing development policies on some 'new' issues. Sustainable Development policies, launched by the UN in September 2015,³ reflect some priority issues for the world in recent years; these issues are often within the sphere **of economic-social rights** and **collective-developmental human rights**.⁴ Protection of the **environment**, increase of **the role of women in decision making**, including in the economic sphere, increase of the **role of youth in political life**, guaranteeing full rights for **discriminated communities**, such as LGBTI persons or persons with disabilities, are some of these issues, which will be important also for initiatives for the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights in Albania in the next three years.

³<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>, accessed on October 6, 2015

⁴<http://www.globalization101.org/three-generations-of-rights/>

Expansion of the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in the country's development. Albania is part of the digital revolution: the majority of the population has access to the Internet, uses online platforms and social networks, while public institutions and private ones increase every year the volume of information and services that they provide through the Internet and mobile phones. This tendency is set to expand in the next three years because of the expansion of the use of smartphones and the reduction of price of mobile telephony packages. Meanwhile, the current government is engaged in further expanding public services through the Internet ('e-governance'), a process that began vigorously in Albania in 2006. The increase in the use of ICT in all spheres of activity marks a great opportunity for progress for the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights in Albania. This process will be accompanied by some challenges that have to do with access to information and public services through the Internet for marginalized groups as well as with the issue of protection of personal data and privacy.

At the end of 2013, 61% of Albanians had access to the Internet.

<http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm>

IV. Strategic Direction

a. Vision

AHC believes in and works to achieve a phase of development of the Albanian society whereby citizens, in spite of their peculiarities or differences, freely and equally exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms, in keeping with constitutional and international standards, in all aspects of life.

AHC believes that progress in the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights is realized through constructive engagement and collaboration among citizens, as well as between them and other public, private, and non-profit institutions that believe in this vision.

b. Mission

AHC's mission is to contribute to respect for human rights, strengthening the rule of law, and the conduct of free and fair elections, in accordance with the Constitution and international acts applicable to the Republic of Albania.

AHC's mandate, in the framework of fulfilling its mission, is to:

- i. Inform and sensitize Albanian citizens and all other actors about their rights and freedoms;
- ii. Monitor, advocate for and protect, in a proactive manner, together with other civil society actors, national and international organizations, respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms in Albania and beyond;
- iii. Prepare alternative reports for the implementation of human rights in Albania;
- iv. Provide legal critique and expertise to improve legislation and harmonize it with EU's "acquis communautaire" and its implementation in practice, by reinstating violated rights;
- v. Provide free legal services, in the context of strategic litigation, to assist victims whose human rights have been violated;
- vi. Help strengthen the rule of law through better implementation of legislation in force, strengthening the capacities of the public administration and exercising pressure on it, through democratic means;
- vii. Encourage accountability of the public administration for the correct and effective implementation of legislation through public denunciation of violations of human rights and freedoms, or committed violations and, depending on the case and competence, referral to justice bodies;

- viii. Play an active role in the heart of civil society in order to encourage the participation of citizens in this issue of public interest.

c. Values

AHC bases its work on the following values:

Commitment to the mission of protecting and promoting human rights, led by respect for international and national standards of human rights, as well as by respect for the dignity of every human being;

Independence from political party attitudes, by not accepting funding from party and state institutions, and by not supporting narrow political party interests;

Professional and human **integrity** of work, employees and close collaborators of AHC who give their individual example and citizens who abide by the law and promote respect for the rights of every citizen;

Professionalism, which means that the entire work of AHC for the protection of human rights, for investigating their violations and for searching ways for addressing these violations is based on facts, accurate facts obtained from different sources or verified by the organization's staff, on methodologies of international standards, and is led by the highest ethics of professional ethics;

Transparency, which means that AHC carries out its work in accordance with laws in force, in keeping with the most advanced standards of good governance as a non-profit organization and provides unlimited access to information that is related to its work, taking into consideration limitations deriving from the right to privacy of victims of human rights violations, etc.;

Focusing on the impact that AHC work has on improving the situation of human rights in Albania and beyond, by paying particular attention and by treating with full respect victims of human rights violations;

Cooperation with all citizens, collaborators and national and international civil society actors, the public sector, the private sector and academia, to increase the impact of AHC initiatives for the good of protection, promotion and guaranteeing of human rights for every citizen in Albania.

Inclusion of the gender perspective in all AHC work to address the needs, interests and access of women/girls and men/boys in the context of protection and implementation of human rights.

d. Competitive advantages

The table below presents a summary of internal and external opportunities and challenges for achieving AHC’s strategic goals in the next three years. This analysis is particularly useful for the realistic setting of strategic goals and activities planned for the years 2016 – 2018.

AHC strengths	AHC internal challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The good reputation of AHC, known for professionalism, impartiality, objectiveness and seriousness; • Long experience with working with human rights in Albania; • AHC staff: diverse in terms of age, gender and education; combination between full-time and part-time personnel; broad network of 200 experts and collaborators; engagement of students; • Transparency of work and finances of AHC; • Enjoys the trust of beneficiaries of its work; • Positive relations with domestic and international partners, inside and outside the country; • Constructive relations with the Constitutional Court and the Parliament; • Access to closed institutions such as prisons, detention facilities and police commissariats; • Addresses human rights through different means and from different standpoints: from monitoring respect for them to providing free legal assistance to victims; • Good organizational form; association; • Very good analytical and research capabilities of the staff and experts; • Relatively sound funding: accumulation of some financial reserves; • Clear AHC management procedures and their implementation; • High visibility of AHC work in public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making structures of AHC do not always function efficiently; • It is not adequately proactive in its rapport with partner organizations and institutions inside and outside the country; • Lack of structured relations with the media; • Lack of sustainable financial resources; • Focuses on some human rights areas, leaving aside some others that may be more current; • Large workload compared to the human resources available to AHC; • Need for further qualification of the staff; • Results of AHC work are not always presented in an effective and attractive manner; • Relatively limited diversity of advocacy means that AHC employs.
Challenges in the environment AHC works in	Opportunities for AHC work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rented premises; • Competition from Ministry of Justice’s free legal services; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional and global economic, political and religious challenges that emphasize the need for the protection and promotion of human rights;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of limited opportunities for monitoring public institutions; • Risk of limited access to some public institutions also because of limited capacities of the public administration; • Risk of regress in the consolidation of achievements vis-à-vis the public administration, e.g. the prosecutor's office, if the staff of these institutions is reshuffled; • Potential staff changes at AHC; • Difficulties in securing funds: some donors leave Albania, while the EU integration process is enhanced, as well as clientelism among some donors; • Poor media coverage of some issues that AHC works on due to lack of interest of the media and its politicization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress in Albania's integration into the EU; • Enhancement of justice reform; • UN's 2025 agenda, adopted by Albania in November 2015; • Enhancement of reform in the public administration; • Increased awareness about their own rights among discriminated groups such as LGBTI persons and Roma community; • Emphasis on the fight against corruption; • Increase of ICT reach, including social networks; • Implementation of the law on the right to information and that on public participation.
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V. Strategic objectives and programs for 2016 – 2018

The strategic objectives and programs of AHC presented in this section of the Strategic Plan reflect: (i) the vision, mission and values of AHC; (ii) analysis of key factors in the political, economic and social context that will influence the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights in Albania in the next three years; (iii) analysis of AHC's competitive advantages; and (iv) knowledge of plans of other civil society organizations, public institutions and international programs operating in Albania in the area of human rights.

During the period 2016 – 2018, AHC will work to achieve these strategic objectives:

1. Higher level of public knowledge about the broad scope of human rights;
2. Improved legal framework on human rights, with a special focus on the right to life, the right to family life, the right to due legal process, the right to vote, and the right to live free of torture and inhuman treatment;
3. Concrete improvements in respect for and implementability, free of discrimination, of the right to life, the right to family life, the right to due legal process, the right to vote, and the right to live free of torture and inhuman treatment, especially for categories in need, juveniles, LGBT persons and women;
4. Enhancement of AHC sustainability.

During the period 2016 – 2018, AHC will undertake the following programs in order to fulfill its strategic objectives. AHC will implement these programs by making use of all of its methods of work summarized in section II.c of this Strategic Plan.

Program 1: Public Education on Human Rights and Freedoms

Need: Education of the public and special segments of it, which are considered categories in need, with regard to human rights, suffers from three problems: (i) it is inadequate; the idea exists that such education has already been exhausted in the first years of the transition to a democracy; (ii) it has not been properly instrumentalized as programs for the continued training of the public administration, the middle and higher education institutions, and for interested citizens, are lacking; (iii) it suffers from a limited concept of human rights solely as civic-political rights, ignoring economic-social rights and collective-developmental rights; (iv) different subjects carry out training programs or short public education campaigns with regard to the rights of different groups but the complex perspective of human rights in general is missing.

Main groups in focus: High school and university students; categories of citizens in need; public administration; police and prison employees; NGOs and the media.

Geographic focus: Cities where there are universities; central public administration and staffs of municipalities that are priorities of AHC work.

Main directions of activity:

- ❖ Presentations and discussions with university and high school students;
- ❖ “My Rights” competition with high school students;
- ❖ Public education campaign through social networks with regard to human rights;
- ❖ Advocating for the incorporation of a full training module on human rights in training programs for the public administration, police and prison administration;
- ❖ Advocacy for the incorporation of a full module on human rights in university curricula in new courses;
- ❖ Providing technical assistance for the preparation of the above modules;
- ❖ Advocacy and cooperation for opening a summer school or short training courses on human rights.

Program 2: Protection and Strengthening of Respect for the Right to Life

Need: The right to life, which incorporates a wide variety of issues (reproductive rights, safety, working conditions, control of food quality, etc.), has a decisive influence on everyone's life. This is an area of rights that has been narrowly addressed in Albania to date, while the attention of international institutions, including the UN, toward this group of rights has increased considerably in recent years.

Groups in focus: All citizens and responsible institutions, media.

Geographic focus: Local government institutions; citizens in municipalities that are priorities for AHC activity.⁵

Main directions of activity:

- ❖ Advocating in cooperation with women's rights organizations regarding improvement of legislation on reproductive rights, including selective gender-based abortion and new fertility techniques;
- ❖ Advocacy in cooperation with environmental protection organizations to improve legislation and practices to guarantee public information regarding environmental problems and the protection of health from environmental pollution factors and problematic food products;
- ❖ Following strategic litigation cases with regard to this right;
- ❖ Public education and sensitization with regard to the broad scope of the right to life;
- ❖ Building AHC capacities to address 'new' issues in the area of the right to life, such as safety of life and the right to a clean environment.

Program 3: Protection and Expansion of Respect for the Right to Due Legal Process

Need: The right to due legal process and redress is one of the fundamental human rights that is most frequently violated in Albania. Meanwhile, justice reform, which has escalated during 2015, creates a unique opportunity for improving the legal framework for this right and its effective implementation.

Groups in focus: Ministry of Justice and the Parliament; persons whose right to due legal process is violated, justice bodies.

Geographic focus: At the level of local government institutions; persons in focus in priority municipalities for AHC work.

⁵ These are, first of all, the seven municipalities where AHC correspondents work.

Main directions of activity:

- ❖ Technical assistance for relevant government institutions and the parliament with regard to justice reform, including amendments to the Constitution, the fight against corruption and necessary improvements to procedural legislation;
- ❖ Advocacy for improving citizens' access to the justice system, including access to the prosecutor's office, speed of adjudication, free defense for persons in need and reduction of judicial tariffs; fighting the phenomenon of corruption in justice bodies;
- ❖ Free legal counseling offered by AHC for persons whose right to due legal process is violated and redress. Strategic litigations in this area.
- ❖ Increasing the capacities of AHC staff with regard to this right and its implementation in practice.

Program 4: Protection and Expansion of Respect for the Right to Family Life

Need: Legal and practical treatment of the right to a family life is very limited in Albania. Some major issues, such as children's rights, particularly of the Roma community, LGBTI persons, the elderly, or protection of privacy are almost entirely beyond the attention of responsible public institutions, but also of civil society organizations, while some of these social groups, e.g. the elderly, are a growing group. Meanwhile, justice reform creates the opportunity to improve some main legal documents that are related to the right to family law.

Main groups in focus: Children, LGBTI persons, the elderly, youth, paying special attention to the Roma community, emigrants and the poor.

Geographic focus: At the local government institutions level; groups in focus in priority municipalities for AHC work.

Main direction of activity:

- ❖ Advocacy in cooperation with other organizations regarding the need to revise the Family Code and other laws focused on the legal regulation of marriage and the institution of custody and other concepts related to juveniles;
- ❖ Technical assistance for relevant ministries and the Parliament with regard to the revision of the Family Code and other laws as well as the legal framework on privacy;
- ❖ Public education campaign with regard to the right to family life through social networks and round table discussions with groups in focus and the media;

- ❖ Provision of legal assistance, through strategic litigation, for cases of violation of the right to family life.

Program 5: Protection and Expansion of Respect to the Right to Vote

Need: Improvement of standards to ensure free and fair elections remains a fundamental imperative for Albanian democracy, given that there are still important problems that recur from one election to the next. AHC has a wealth of experience in this regard. It is necessary for initiatives on these problems to become more effective and the area of functioning of the citizen's right to vote to be expanded, to include the exercise of the right to referenda and the separation of elected officials from crime.

Groups in focus: The parliament, the election administration; municipalities; youth; emigrants; convicts; persons with disabilities.

Geographic focus: Central government institutions; priority municipalities for AHC work.

Main directions of activity:

- ❖ Leading work to guarantee an independent evaluation of candidates for MP by civil society in terms of their human and professional integrity;
- ❖ Technical assistance for the Parliament and the Central Election Commission to improve the electoral process, including improvements to the Electoral Code, as well as depoliticization and increased professionalism of the electoral administration;
- ❖ Monitoring and research regarding the need and potential for exercising the right to vote and the right to a referendum;
- ❖ Advocacy for improving the legal basis regarding the exercise of the right to vote and the right to a referendum;
- ❖ Public education campaign in priority municipalities for AHC work with regard to the use of referenda at the local government level;
- ❖ Advocacy together with other civil society organizations with regard to voting by emigrants and to improving conditions for the participation of persons with disabilities and inmates in voting;
- ❖ Monitoring the 2017 general elections, preparation of the report with the relevant findings and recommendations.

Program 6: Prevention of and Protection From Torture and Inhuman Treatment

Need: Albania has made progress in protecting citizens from torture and inhuman treatment. Yet this violation of human rights remains a problem in some closed public institutions, including police commissariats, prisons, detention facilities and psychiatric hospitals. Victims of these violations are particularly discriminated groups in Albania, such as victims of trafficking, LGBT persons, the Roma, or persons with disabilities; therefore, these groups deserve special and continued attention. AHC has long experience in providing protection for these categories.

Groups in focus: Prisons, police commissariats, detention facilities, psychiatric hospitals, the military, emigrants assembly points, shelters for victims of trafficking, Roma and LGBT persons, juveniles, and women.

Geographic focus: At the national level.

Main directions of activity:

- ❖ Research for the revision of legislation regarding these issues, per suggestions by the Strasbourg Court: to include inhuman treatment even outside public institutions (by teachers in a private school, for instance); to address problems in new areas; and to empower prevention of human rights violations in this area through indirect and direct measures;
- ❖ Preparation of alternative reports for the Council of Europe and the UN Committee of Human Rights regarding violation of human rights in this area;
- ❖ Provision of free legal assistance for victims of torture and inhuman treatment, through work on strategic litigation;
- ❖ Provision of technical assistance and training programs for employees of the justice system and other institutions related to the right to protect against torture and inhuman treatment;
- ❖ Monitoring prisons, detention facilities, psychiatric hospitals and police commissariats, as well as preparation of reports and publication of their findings and recommendations.

Program 7: Strengthening the Organization's Sustainability and Efficiency

Need: The need for more expansive and more specialized work in the area of protection, promotion and implementation of human rights will increase in the context of enhanced democracy in Albania, and the acceleration of the country's EU integration process. Meanwhile, the nature of sources of funding for the organization to work to protect human rights may

change fast given that EU funding from the EU will take increasing precedence. Taking into consideration this dynamic context and this ambitious strategic plan, AHC needs to strengthen its sustainability and modernize its functioning.

Geographic focus: AHC in Tirana and its collaborators in different municipalities.

Main directions of activity:

- ❖ Conduct of an evaluation of AHC's organizational and decision-making capacities;
- ❖ Reorganization and renewal of AHC's decision-making structures for the purpose of strengthening collaboration and better interaction between them;
- ❖ Drafting and implementing a plan for continued training and qualification and the promotion of AHC staff;
- ❖ Drafting and implementing a plan for securing funds in support of implementing this Strategic Plan and strengthening AHC's reserve funds;
- ❖ Increase of capacities for managing projects funded by large donors and of regional projects;
- ❖ Preparation and implementation of an AHC Plan of Information to focus on modernizing and expanding public relations and work to educate the public, including the broader and more effective use of ICT;
- ❖ Strengthening capacities and means for more efficient relations with the public.

VI. Monitoring and evaluation

AHC devotes special attention to the evaluation and monitoring of its activity. The Executive Director oversees work for the effective evaluation and monitoring of AHC activity, while staff members Responsible for AHC Programs are responsible for implementing all plans for the evaluation and monitoring of AHC programs and projects.

AHC will monitor work for the implementation of the 2016 – 2018 Strategic Plan through the following activities:

- i. Drafting and Implementing the Evaluation and Monitoring Plan (EMP) in the context of the organization's general activity, with special support from Civil Rights Defenders and other donors;
- ii. Preparation and implementation of evaluation and monitoring plans for every program or activity funded by donors, in accordance with the relevant donor's requirements for evaluation and monitoring;
- iii. Preparation and presentation to donors of reports on AHC's activities pursuant to every project, according to the timeline and requirements set in the grant agreement with the relevant donor;
- iv. Preparation of annual reports on AHC's activity and their submission for review and approval first by the Directing Board and then by AHC's General Assembly;
- v. Collection and processing of data for EMP indicators on the basis of a concentrated database;
- vi. Conduct of an annual observation (through SurveyMonkey) regarding the opinions and suggestions of collaborators and beneficiaries of AHC with a goal to improving the Committee's work;
- vii. Preparation of success stories that illustrate the concrete influence of AHC's work to improve, protect and implement human rights in Albania;
- viii. Conduct of annual financial audits by specialized companies of every project implemented by AHC and the entire financial activity of the Committee.