

# Annual Report 2025

*progress  
& change  
Partnerships*

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# A Year of Reckoning

By Florian Irminger, President

At Progress & Change Partnerships we knew what we were up to — and we were ready.

When Donald J. Trump returned to the White House in January 2025, much of the international human rights community was taken aback by the pace at which he dismantled institutions domestically and support for democracy, human rights and humanitarian aid abroad. We spent the previous eighteen months building Progress & Change for precisely this kind of moment: the year confirmed every reason we had for doing so.

2025 was indeed a year of reckoning. The “great capitulation,” whereby foreign governments, institutions and corporations quietly yielded to pressure in the hope of preserving what they could, produced fewer protections than its architects had counted on. The international human rights framework came under sustained attack: foreign aid terminated, withdrawals from institutions and treaties, a normative contagion reaching well beyond the United States. The 2025 Sustainable Development Goals Report confirmed that, at the end of this decade, humanity risks being worse off than at its start. A lost decade for humanity.

To contribute to respond to the moment, we launched Human Rights Compass in March 2025 and Notes from the Faultline in summer 2025. Through Human Rights Compass, we want to give the human rights community a place to think together at a moment when fragmentation was the default. Over the year, more than 150 human rights defenders, experts, and practitioners contributed to six policy briefs that have travelled into the institutions where they were aimed. And we published the 10 Top Human Rights Trends at the end of the year, of which we are particularly proud. We launched Notes from the Faultline to publish the kind of analysis the moment requires: argument-driven, willing to take a position, beginning from practice. The first Dispatch made the case for a woman — a feminist woman — as the next United Nations Secretary-General. We meant it.

In parallel we continued to coordinate the Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan, on behalf of a Steering Committee of Azerbaijani human rights defenders and lawyers. Anar Mammadli, founding member of our Thought Circle, remains in detention. We dedicated our Annual Report 2024 to Anar Mammadli — we are not done and continue to engage to end repression in Azerbaijan.

It was also the year we restructured how we work: the shift from Progress & Change Action Lab to Progress & Change Partnerships, and the establishment of three connected Labs (Research Lab, Strategy Lab, and Action Lab), is a realignment of our methods with what organisations actually need in environments that are working against them.

For me personally, 2025 was a year of confirmation. Every conversation with partners under pressure confirmed that the choice to build Progress & Change for this kind of moment had been the right one.

There were also reasons for hope: Viktor Orbán was defeated at the polls in Hungary in April 2026; Bangladesh held its first credible national election in nearly two decades; Eight million people came out for the “No Kings” protests in the United States; In Georgia, protestors have refused to stop. The response to authoritarian consolidation, it turns out, is the combination of solidarity and the continued exercise of individual agency.

None of this work is ours alone: everything we do is built with partners we trust, alongside human rights defenders whose courage continues to set the standard, and with donors who chose to be in this with us.

Thank you for your trust and your friendship ♥

## Our Board



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## ***Our Thinking***

When the foundations of a field start shifting, the instinct is to do more of what we know.

Looking for a different frame, we went back to a moment when the human rights movement was still fighting for its basic premise, before the norms, before the conventions, before the international architecture we now know.

Yet it was facing as many challenges as it does today.

We looked at the Civil Rights Movement in 1960s United States. And we found a speech from Robert F. Kennedy, in New York in May 1964, that stopped us:

Progress is a nice word.  
But change is its motivator.  
And change has its enemies.

The resistance is not to the destination, it is to the change required to get there; the requirement for changing how we work is even greater in difficult times.

Two years in, we added one word: *Partnerships*. Because change does not move through single actors. It moves through combinations.

Hence the name. And hence the work.

## Our Model

Over the past year, we restructured how we work. What may look like a brand refresh is, in fact, a deliberate realignment of our methods with the realities organisations face today. The international order is more fragmented, political environments are less predictable, and the distance between evidence and impact has grown. In response, we organised our work around three distinct but connected capabilities — research, strategy, and advocacy — each delivered through a dedicated Lab.

Partnership is at the heart of everything we do. We wanted to say so clearly in our name: from Progress & Change Action Lab to Progress & Change Partnerships. The organisations we work with do not need a strategic partner that strengthens their capacity to navigate complexity and act on their own terms.

We believe meaningful change requires strategic clarity, institutional traction, and rigorous foresight.

We want to ensure that we are able to provide support to build institutional resilience and strategic positioning with the partners we engage with, to act effectively in environments that are actively working against them.

### Track 1 — Partnerships



#### Research Lab

##### **Spotting Opportunities, Strengthening Foresight**

We combine foresight and evidence-based research to help you anticipate change, shape regulatory and multilateral frameworks, and strengthen your position in shifting environments.



#### Strategy Lab

##### **Pathways and Resilience for Systemic Change**

We work with you to design adaptive strategies that strengthen your mission, build institutional resilience, and respond effectively to complex and shifting environments.



#### Action Lab

##### **Amplifying Your Voice, Shifting Outcomes**

We design and deliver cross-border advocacy and outreach campaigns that translate policy goals into institutional traction and influence across capitals and multilateral forums.

### Track 2 — Our Initiatives

We initiate in collaboration with civil society.

When we see a gap, we act. Always in collaboration with civil society organisations, we build platforms and spaces the sector needs but no single organisation is positioned to create alone.

## Our Partnerships



### Civic Space in a Shifting Order

#### European Center for Not-for-Profit Law

We partner with ECNL through strategic advice, research, and outreach across four strands of work, including on COP31 and the LEAD Initiative for the protection of environmental human rights defenders, scoping key EU policy frameworks affecting civil society, developing policy and advocacy on civic space in the context of Europe's evolving defence architecture.

» More about ECNL: <https://ecnl.org/>



### Strengthening the Protection of Lawyers in Africa

#### Groupe de Recherche Action sur la Sécurité Humaine

We engaged with the Groupe de Recherche Action sur la Sécurité Humaine of Burkina Faso to develop a concept to strengthen the protection of the legal profession in Africa, inspired by the launch of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer.

» More about GRASH: <https://grash.bf>

### Freedom for Anar Mammadli

#### Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan

Anar Mammadli, chairperson of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center and prominent Azerbaijani human rights defender, has been detained since 29 April 2024. His trial, which opened on 26 May 2025, continues to fall far short of basic fair-trial standards: defendants held handcuffed throughout hearings, motions dismissed after minimal deliberation, and Mammadli's testimony adjourned before he could complete it.

In 2025, Progress & Change Partnerships continued to coordinate the Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan, which started as the Free Anar Campaign, on behalf of a Steering Committee of Azerbaijani human rights defenders and lawyers. In 2025, the work deepened on three fronts.

On documentation, the joint report issued by the Campaign and the International Partnership on Human Rights (IPRH) on Azerbaijan's decade of defiance towards the Council of Europe, launched on 14 January 2025, became the single most cited Campaign output of the year and the backbone of subsequent advocacy.

Trial hearings are monitored and documented in real time; the resulting infographics have become primary material across multilateral fora.

On advocacy, the year opened with a meeting between the Campaign and the Council of Europe Secretary General on 30 January. A communication to UN Special Procedures followed in May. In September, the Campaign coordinated



an open letter to the International Association of Judges, signed by eleven organisations, ahead of the IAJ's annual meeting in Baku. An advocacy round at the European Commission and the European External Action Service in October consolidated the Campaign as an interlocutor of choice on Azerbaijan within EU institutions. This to mention just a few of the Campaign's advocacy opportunities.

The Campaign also continues to have a strong presence on social networks.

On civil society ownership, the Steering Committee was strengthened and expanded. The number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan reached over 400 by December 2025.

In Spring 2026, Anar Mammadli joined Progress & Change Partnerships Thought Circle, contributing to our work from prison.

» More about the Campaign: <https://www.endrepression-az.org/>

# TWO YEARS UNJUSTLY DETAINED

## FREEDOM FOR ANAR MAMMADLI



[www.free-anar.site](http://www.free-anar.site)

## Our Initiatives

### HUMAN RIGHTS COMPASS

Human Rights Compass was launched in March 2025 in response to an urgent and defining moment: the return of Donald J. Trump to the White House coinciding with an accelerating erosion of the international human rights framework. Political instability, foreign policy reversals, and shrinking civic space had left the human rights community fragmented at precisely the point when coordination mattered most. Human Rights Compass was built to fill that gap, as a convening platform where human rights defenders, experts, and organisations could jointly analyse what was happening and translate that shared understanding into concrete policy recommendations.



Over the course of its first year, the initiative has brought together over 120 human rights defenders, policy analysts, and multilateral actors from across the wider European and international human rights community. Participants include frontline defenders and civil society leaders, academics, independent experts, and practitioners with experience at the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the EU.

Endorsed by a number of NGOs and human rights defenders, we also established an Editorial Committee composed of senior figures including former and current leaders from Human Rights Watch and Open Society Foundations. It has provided rigorous oversight of all published outputs.

Through a series of strategic convenings, Human Rights Compass has created a space for structured, closed-door exchange under Chatham House rules, allowing participants to speak candidly about emerging threats and to develop shared analytical frameworks.

These convenings have fed directly into six policy publications, each jointly authored and collectively reviewed. The briefs have addressed some of the most pressing challenges facing the human rights field: the human rights consequences of global foreign policy realignment; the dangerous drift between humanitarian aid and human rights protection; the fragmentation of the multilateral human rights system; the shrinking space and growing dangers faced by human rights defenders; the global rollback of gender equality; and a comprehensive mapping of the top ten human rights trends shaping 2026. Each publication has been accompanied by direct dissemination to institutional mailing lists, media outreach, and op-ed placements.

As Human Rights Compass enters its second year, it is deepening its regional, which applies the same model of joint analysis and coordinated advocacy to one of the most strategically complex and under-served human rights environments in the wider European neighbourhood.

What began as a rapid response to a moment of crisis has become a sustained and growing platform. Human Rights Compass has demonstrated that bringing the right people together — with the right structure, the right analytical rigour, and a shared commitment to action — produces outputs that matter and that reach the people who need them.

**Co-initiated with Palimpsest GmbH's, Human Rights Compass also witnesses Progress & Change Partnerships convening power.**

» More about Human Rights Compass: <https://humanrightscompass.org>

## NOTES FROM THE FAULTLINE

*We live along faultlines: places where rights, power, and principles collide. Some cracks are loud. Others are quiet.*

Notes from the Faultline is the Research Lab's product, offering analysis of the tensions shaping civic space, democracy, multilateralism, planetary justice and fundamental liberties. It is rooted in Progress & Change Partnerships' direct engagement with partners holding the line in difficult environments, which means the analysis starts from practice.

The publication exists on three channels:

On **BlueSky**, Notes from the Faultline maintains a dedicated presence at @faultlinenotes.bsky.social, tracking developments in real time and reaching an audience that is already building an alternative to the more algorithmically driven platforms;

On **LinkedIn**, the newsletter brings longer-form reflection to the professional networks where much of the policy debate on human rights and multilateralism actually happens;

**Dispatches** are the flagship format: substantive, argument-driven publications that take a position. They are not surveys of existing literature, they are contributions to live debates, with concrete recommendations.



### Dispatch #1: Leadership in a Fractured Order

Foreworded by former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia, Vesna Pusić, the first Dispatch, published in October 2025, addressed the 2026 appointment of the next United Nations Secretary-General. The timing was deliberate. As the UN marked its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the multilateral order was under pressure from multiple directions: wars continuing without resolution, a paralysed Security Council, budget cuts forcing reductions in life-saving operations, and rival groupings positioning themselves as alternatives to the existing architecture.

The Dispatch argued that the appointment process itself has become a test of the organisation's legitimacy. Four benchmarks structured the argument: the next Secretary-General must lead credibly on human rights and climate action; after eighty years of all-male leadership, appointing a woman is structural, not symbolic; a woman from the Eastern European Group would close both a gender and a regional gap that has persisted since 1945; and the General Assembly must exercise its revitalised role rather than allowing a return to back-room selection.

The position is clear and intentional. Progress & Change Partnerships does not produce analysis to be cautious about it.

» More about Notes from the Faultline: <https://progresschange.org/notes-from-the-faultline>

## Our Media Coverage

Our work and expertise are regularly featured in international, regional, and national media. From interviews and op-eds to news articles and broadcasts, these appearances reflect the relevance of our causes and amplify the voices of those we work with.



### US Retreat from Multilateralism: Open Doors for Chinese Repression

The 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), opening on Tuesday 9 September 2025 in New York, might mark the end of the UN's human rights pillar as we know it.

» Foreign Policy Centre, 9 September 2025:

<https://fpc.org.uk/op-ed-us-retreat-from-multilateralism-open-doors-for-chinese-repression/>

### “Alaska 2025 must not become Munich 1938 nor Yalta 1945”

On the eve of the summit between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, a coalition of human rights and civil society organizations urges world leaders reject any agreement reached without the consent of both Ukraine and Europe.

» Le Monde, 14 August 2025:

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2025/08/14/alaska-2025-must-not-become-munich-1938-nor-yalta-1945\\_6744372\\_23.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2025/08/14/alaska-2025-must-not-become-munich-1938-nor-yalta-1945_6744372_23.html)



### European rights advocates say Council of Europe has abandoned its core mission

In a strongly worded statement to Turkish Minute, Eleonora Mongelli, vice president of the Italian Federation for Human Rights, and Florian Irminger, president of the Geneva-based Progress & Change Partnerships, accused the CoE of failing to protect those who uphold its foundational values, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

» Turkish Minute, 23 May 2025:

<https://www.turkishminute.com/2025/05/23/european-rights-advocates-say-council-of-europe-has-abandoned-its-core-mission/>



» See our full media coverage: <https://progresschange.org/our-media-coverage>

## Our Way Forward

For us, 2026 is about consolidation and depth, not breadth. The three Labs are operational; the question now is how far each can be pushed.

We are formalising the Thought Circle as a standing group of honorary thinkers and practitioners who contribute to our work without sitting on any governance body. It is not a panel of experts speaking on behalf of Progress & Change Partnerships. It is a group of friends whose judgment we trust, who agree to be associated with the work and to challenge it when it needs challenging. The first members are Oleksandra Matviichuk, Maina Kiai, Dr. Vesna Pušić, and Anar Mammadli, whose membership is our way of stating that detention does not silence him.

### Our Thought Circle



**Oleksandra Matviichuk**  
(Ukraine)



**Maina Kiai**  
(Kenya)



**Dr. Vesna Pušić**  
(Croatia)



**Anar Mammadli**  
(Azerbaijan)



The defining theme of the coming year is exile: as civic space contracts in more countries, the number of human rights defenders who must continue their work from abroad has grown sharply. So has the number of organisations that can no longer operate from the country whose population they serve. For many, it has become the basic condition of their work, and the human rights infrastructure has not adjusted.

We will deepen our engagement with and support to civil society in exile and to organisations needing to operate from abroad. That includes the practical work: how to maintain credibility when no longer on the ground, how to protect the people one represents from association, how to preserve institutional memory when the team is scattered across jurisdictions, and how to keep funders confident through what is often a long transition. It also includes the political work: making the case that exiled civil society is a distinct civil society, with specific needs and a specific value, rather than a diminished version of the one that came before.

At the same time, Human Rights Compass entered its second year applying the same convening model to one of the most strategically complex environments. Notes from the Faultline will publish further Dispatches on the questions the moment forces. The Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan continues its three-pillar work, with Anar Mammadli's release as its central demand.

The conditions for our work in 2026 are unlikely to be easier than those of 2025. We are ready for that as well ♡

## Our Financial Overview 2025

| Expenditure                                     | Total 2025           | Total 2024           |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|
| Human resources                                 | CHF —                | CHF —                |
| Project implementation                          | CHF 29 156.90        | CHF 64 563.70        |
| Communication                                   | CHF 2 578.58         | CHF 3 791.48         |
| General Costs                                   | CHF 12 00.39         | CHF 5 895.24         |
| Financial Costs                                 | CHF 242              | CHF 132.11           |
| <b>Total expenditure</b>                        | <b>CHF 43 977.87</b> | <b>CHF 74 382.53</b> |
| Income  |                      | Total 2024           |
| Donations and legacies                          | CHF 165              | CHF —                |
| Sponsorship                                     | CHF —                | CHF —                |
| Public and private grants                       | CHF 46 533.79        | CHF 73 543.56        |
| Membership fees                                 | CHF 3.00             | CHF 9.00             |
| Other income                                    | CHF —                | CHF 13.50            |
| <b>Total income</b>                             | <b>CHF 46 701.79</b> | <b>CHF 73 566.06</b> |
| <b>Net results for the financial year (+/-)</b> |                      |                      |
|   | <b>CHF 2 732.92</b>  | <b>CHF -816.47</b>   |

## ***Our Thanks***

Special thanks to our partners who trusted us over this year, in particular colleagues at the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL) and Azerbaijani colleagues linked to the Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan and their international partners. We are incredibly honoured to have seen so many human rights defenders and experts trust us and contribute to the Human Rights Compass framework.

We also warmly thank our donors who trusted our work and accepted to finance projects hosted and powered by Progress & Change Partnerships.

We would also like to express special thanks to friends of Progress & Change, who have worked with us on delivering our services throughout the year, especially our International Human Rights Law Advisors Tamar Chanturia and Alexandra Swetzer, our International Campaigns & Communications Advisor Clément Piguet, and designer Rea Zhushi.

We are particularly thankful for the wonderful cooperation with Palimpsest GmbH's Anna Sevortian, co-initiator of Human Rights Compass.

**Annual Report 2025**

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