



2019 Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders at Risk

Dublin, 2 - 4 October 2019

Speech by Elena Jiménez, Board member, Òmnium Cultural, Barcelona, Catalonia (Spain)

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Good evening, thank you so much for your invitation,

I represent Òmnium Cultural, a Catalan NGO which was born in 1961 in the dark days of Francoism. Our organisation was often prosecuted and the dictatorship even shut it down for 3 years, 50 years ago. Its main goal is to revitalize culture, a key element to social cohesion, because culture in Catalonia today is diverse, plural and expressed in many languages. Omnium cultural is today the biggest civil society group in Spain with over 175,000 members, voluntary based, with 100 staff members and no public funding.

I am here today to raise awareness about the growing human rights abuses ongoing in our country, and to explain the situation of Jordi Cuixart, president of Omnium Cultural, And the best way to raise his voice is to read a letter that Jordi has written from prison for all of you.



Dear Human Rights Defenders,

I have been incarcerated since October 2017, charged with sedition and rebellion, crimes which under Spain's law require having committed violence with a view to overthrowing the state, which obviously never occurred. Nonetheless in the coming weeks I face a sentence of up to 17 years in prison for my "crime", which was leading a peaceful demonstration using my right to free speech and freedom of assembly to defend Catalonia's self-determination referendum on 1 October 2017.

I speak as the president of Òmniium Cultural (Culture For Everybody). I'm one of the nine of political prisoners in this political vendetta trial. In my case and that of my colleague Jordi Sànchez, also a civil society leader, Spain is calling for a sentence of 17 years. Both the Spanish government, headed by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, and the highly politicized judiciary are ignoring the opinion of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which o stated that our detention is arbitrary and called for our immediate release. They have also ignored numerous calls for our release and the dropping of charges from groups such as Amnesty International, the World Organisation Against Torture and Front Line Defenders.

The fact that Spain is using the courts and criminal law to undermine basic human rights it is very bad news for Europe as a whole, and for the world. But whatever happens, we will once again exercise the human rights that they condemn.



I am the proud father of four children, one of them a beautiful baby born just a week ago today. But my priority is no longer to get out of prison, but to seek a democratic solution to the political conflict between Catalonia and Spain, through sincere dialogue and negotiation, as Scotland with the United Kingdom and Quebec with Canada have done.

Non-violent action, and as a last resort civil disobedience, are today essential tools for democratic change to build a better world. This has recently been shown by Carola Rackete and Oscar Camps on the European coasts, heeding the call for humanitarian conscience by saving refugees.

715 nights in prison have only strengthened my commitment to human rights: within these walls I have become increasingly aware of the dire situation we are seeing all over the world. The abuse of human rights has stolen lives and futures from hundreds of thousands of people and the humanitarian challenges are enormous: the climate crisis, inequality, indifference to refugees fleeing famine or war and the persecution of political dissidence affect all our struggles. This conference is a source of hope and at the same time of inescapable responsibility.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my most sincere thanks to the organisations defending human rights for their essential daily work, as well as for their support for our freedom, and in particular to Front Line Defenders for allowing us to share our testimony today.

Thank you very much for your time.



In hope for the days to come. Sempre endavant!

Jordi Cuixart

President of Òmnium Cultural

Lledoners prison, Catalonia, 1st October 2019