

# KEK GALABRU

“THE AUTHORITIES PUSH THE FAMILY TO TAKE THE POISON, SO THEY DIE, THE MOTHER, THE FATHER, SO MANY CHILDREN, AT THE SAME TIME.”

Born on October 4, 1942, Kek Galabru received her medical degree in France in 1968. She practiced medicine and conducted research in Phnom Penh from 1968 to 1971, and continued her work in Canada, Brazil, and Angola. In 1987–88 Galabru played a key role in opening negotiations between Hun Sen, president of the Cambodian Council of Ministers, and Prince Sihanouk of the opposition. That led to peace accords ending the civil war in 1991, and elections held under the auspices of the United Nations. Galabru founded the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) during the United Nations transition period. LICADHO promotes human rights, with a special emphasis on women’s and children’s rights, monitors violations, and disseminates educational information about rights. During the 1993 elections, LICADHO’s 159 staff members taught voting procedures to 16,000 people, trained 775 election observers, and produced and distributed one million voting leaflets. Since then, LICADHO has remained at the forefront of human rights protection efforts in Cambodia by monitoring abuses and providing medical care, legal aid and advocacy to victims. LICADHO offers direct assistance to victims of human rights violations—especially torture victims, children and women—from its headquarters in Phnom Penh and its twelve provincial offices.



Kek Galabru, ©2000 Eddie Adams

INTERVIEW TAKEN FROM KERRY KENNEDY’S BOOK *SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER*, 2000

When the United Nations took over Cambodia with 20,000 officers, we decided to start LICADHO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights). We didn’t have any money, so we opened a small office at my parents’ home. Word spread quickly about this new organization, and within five or six months we had 180,000 supporters, all volunteers.

We wanted the UN to spearhead the elections and monitor the process, because that was the only way that this work could be protected. When the Royalist Party emerged in Cambodia to campaign for the 1993 election, the CPP (Cambodian People’s Party and the ruling party) began to shoot the Royalist opposition in front of us. We were witnesses, and so was the UN. But the UN could do nothing because according to its mandate, they could only respond if they were attacked. For me it was unbelievable that I was going to be the watchdog of such a regime. But the purpose of LICADHO was to create an environment in which these practices would never occur again. What we saw the regime in Cambodia do was almost the same thing as the Khmer Rouge. Along with the UN, this time we documented the killings. In less than one year, hundreds of people were wounded and scores had died. Even though the ruling party could kill people, they could not stop the UN and the peace accord, and they had to permit the UN to go everywhere.

The UN set up a good network. They organized 50,000 Cambodian volunteers for voter education. We published almost 500,000 booklets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to distribute to people, and a million one-page leaflets showing that you could vote by secret ballot. This was important because the CPP explained to people that they had a satellite that could see in the booths and tell who you were voting for; and that if you didn’t vote for them they would know. The CPP also brought people in front of Buddha and forced them to swear for whom they were going to vote, and as the CPP members were holding guns, people were afraid to vote against them. Then the CPP told them that if they don’t respect their oath, Buddha would punish them with death. But we told them that Buddha is good and respects justice, that he would punish the ones violating human rights, and protect the victims. We said that when they went into the booths they would be alone to vote for whomever they liked, but we warned them not to talk afterwards. Despite the intimidation of the

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CPP, more than 90 percent of the people showed up to vote. And they voted for the Royalist Party, and when it won, they talked. The CPP told them to be careful, to not trust so much in the UN. They said the UN is like a boat: the boat leaves, but they are the port and they will stay here, permanently.

Now we have peace at last, but we have had a civil war since 1970 and, as a result, we have a lot of children in the street, living in bad conditions. Sometimes they are orphans, with no parents at all; sometimes they have only one parent, usually their mother. Their fathers were killed. Or their parents are too poor so the children have to try and live on their own: paint a can to sell so they can get twenty-five cents per day; sleep in the street. They are prey to foreigners who come to Cambodia for sexual tourism, pigs. Asian men in the region prefer young girls; European pedophiles prefer boys. We have many brothels and at night you will pass those brothels and find young children—eleven or twelve years old. We talked to one, only thirteen. She was already in the brothel for two years. Asian men believe that after a certain age, say fifty, if they have sexual relations with a virgin girl they become younger. By having sex with a virgin they take all the energy, all the good things from the virgin, to themselves. Now, since we have the problem of AIDS, they especially want a real virgin, because they don't wear condoms. So they send an intermediary to the village to find a very poor family and buy girls for sex. The intermediary pays the family saying, "Your daughter can work in a restaurant or clean the house of my friend: here, I know that you are very poor, here is a hundred dollars." For them a hundred dollars is a lot of money. They don't even have ten dollars at home. Then the intermediary sells the girl to a client for between five hundred and seven hundred dollars. The man stays with the girl for one or two weeks—it's up to him, but not more than one month, because by then he's used up all the good things from the girl. After, she is sold to a brothel for two hundred dollars. Her life will be a nightmare.

One girl whose mother sold her to a brothel doesn't hate her mother. She said, "This is my karma," meaning that in her previous life she did something very bad and has to pay for the error. The girl explained, "I have to be kind with my mother because my mother is still the person who gave life to me." That girl still sends money to her mother. Government statistics say that there are twenty thousand child prostitutes in Cambodia. But we think you can multiply that number by three or four, maybe five. There are a lot but we cannot go everywhere. As it is illegal, people hide. Still, everybody knows. This is very sad and hard for us.

Child workers are another big problem. The government closes its eyes to the situation and is angry because we denounce child labor. They say, "Do you prefer children dying?" We reply, "It's good if they work, as long as it's not dangerous work." Children should go to school, but the schools are not free because of the low salary of the teachers, who get less than twenty dollars a month. You need at least two hundred dollars to live a normal life in Cambodia. And if you are sick, you borrow the money from somebody and you pay 20 percent interest per month, so people sell all their land, their house, and they become homeless. Or

else the family prefers the children die. When a situation develops like this, the authorities push the family to take poison: and so the whole family dies: the mother, the father, many children at the same time. They prefer dying like that to dying from starvation. It's too hard, you know, when children are crying out, "I'm hungry, I'm hungry." We have very high infant mortality. The highest in the world, I think. A hundred and eighty children out of a thousand die before reaching five years. In your country or in Europe, maybe less than one child dies out of a thousand.

Many times with our work, we were so depressed. Sometimes we felt like asking somebody to take care of LICADHO so we could run away because it's too much for us. It could be easy for us to take our suitcases, pack, and then take an airplane and not look back. But then we said, "Impossible, they trust us." They come and work and don't take money, although they have nothing. When we need them to monitor elections, they are here. And what we do is important—during the coup and after the coup, how many people did we save? When a victim comes to see us, they say, "I know that I would have died if you were not here." That gives us more energy. If we only saved one person—it's a victory.

There are around six to nine hundred people tortured by the police in custody every year to whom we give medical assistance. Every month we help 100,000 to 200,000 people. Without us they would die. In prison, they don't have food. Just one bowl of rice and no protein, ever. Sometimes they don't even have drinking water. People ask why we help criminals in prison. But not everybody in prison is a criminal. And even if they are criminals, they at least have the right to food and medical care. One woman owed fifty dollars, so she got two years in jail. And when she got out, she still could not pay, so she went back for four years. Four years for fifty dollars. We paid for her and she got out.

It's hard sometimes. But as I told my staff, now I have energy to work with you, but please learn how to do the job, as LICADHO is yours and not mine at all. Because one day, I will need some rest. I am fifty-six years old already; some day I will have to take care of my grandchildren. They have to continue the work alone. They have a lot of courage—and for me courage means that despite the intimidation of the ruling party, you do something good for the people, for the grassroots, for your country.

# POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

## KEK GALABRU

LESSON GRADE LEVEL: 6–8  
HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE:  
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

- **Article 21:** Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections

**TIME REQUIREMENT:** 80 minutes

### GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How does the political situation in Cambodia affect the voting rights of its citizens?
- Why is it important to vote in elections?

### OBJECTIVES:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe the political situation in Myanmar, China, North Korea, Iran, and Cambodia.
- Compare and contrast the situation in Myanmar, Cambodia, China, North Korea and Iran using a Venn diagram.
- Analyze a reading on Kek Galabru and evaluate her accomplishments.
- Reflect on the importance of voting.

### COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARDS:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.6
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.9

### CONCEPTS:

- **Political systems**
- **Power**
- **Change**
- **Justice**
- **Decision-making**
- **Civic values**
- **Citizenship**
- **Human rights**

### VOCABULARY:

- **Free elections**
- **LICADHO**
- **United Nations**
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**
- **Cambodian People's Party**

### TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED:

- Computer access
- Internet access
- LCD projector

### MATERIALS:

- *Speak Truth To Power* reading on Kek Galabru: [www.rfkhumanrights.org/](http://www.rfkhumanrights.org/) / **click on Speak Truth to Power / click on “Defenders” tab**
- Map showing countries that are free, partially free, and not free, with human rights ratings: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>
- A series of websites for Cambodia, Myanmar, North Korea and China. These sites are embedded in the activity.
- Venn diagram: <http://maass.nyu.edu/images/venn.jpg>
- “Why Vote”—YouTube video: <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=u-pL3Dα-mec>

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

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### ANTICIPATORY SET:

- Inform students that they will vote to decide if they are going to have an essay assignment next week.
  - Distribute to each student a ballot with YES and NO choices.
  - Ask students to mark their choice and collect the ballots.
  - Regardless of the outcome, tell students that the decision to have an essay was unanimous. This should create questions of fairness, as some students will say that they voted “no.”
  - After an appropriate length of time for discussion, inform students that this was an exercise.
  - Ask students to reflect on the following questions:
    - 1 How did you feel when I announced the results?
    - 2 Would you have bothered voting if you knew your votes wouldn't matter?
    - 3 Can you think of another time in your life when you were supposed to have a say but didn't?
    - 4 What should a fair election look like?
  - Transition statement: Inform students that millions of people around the world live in countries without free elections or political rights.
  - Show students the map of freedom in the world:  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>  
Ask students the following questions:
    - 1 What do you notice?
    - 2 What conclusions can you make from the map

### ACTIVITY 1:

- Assign students to work in groups of four.
- Each group will work on the issue of free elections and political rights in one of the following countries: China, North Korea, Burma, Iran, and Cambodia.
- The teacher will provide brief background on each country by using the information found at the end of this lesson.
- Assign students to complete the activity.
- Groups will use computers to explore the links given below on each country and then answer the following questions:
  - 1 What groups are involved in the political process, both government and non-government?
  - 2 List the ways the government deny the rights of its citizens.
  - 3 What types of intimidation does the government use against its people?
  - 4 Describe how elections are conducted.

### CHINA:

- Freedom House:  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/china>

### NORTH KOREA:

- Freedom House:  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/north-korea>
- New York Times:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/09/world/asia/09iht-north.1.20696199.html>
- CNN:  
<http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/19/world/world-democracy-report/index.html>

### BURMA:

- Freedom House:  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/myanmar>
- Human Rights Watch:  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/87392>

### IRAN:

- Freedom House:  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/iran>
- YouTube:  
<http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=3ZkzERozs4s>
- MSNBC:  
[http://www.nbcnews.com/id/32879756/ns/world\\_news-mideastn\\_africa?hasFlash=true&#.WmUpKJM-eCQ](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/32879756/ns/world_news-mideastn_africa?hasFlash=true&#.WmUpKJM-eCQ)

### CAMBODIA:

- Freedom House:  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/cambodia>
- Human Rights Watch:  
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2010/country-chapters/asia-cambodia>
- Assign students a second country so each group researches two countries.
- Each group will complete a Venn diagram on the information they found on elections for both countries.
- Each group will briefly share the results of their research with the class.

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

### ACTIVITY 2:

- The teacher will introduce the key vocabulary words related to the passage.
- Students will then read the Kek Galabru passage and answer the following questions:
  - 1 Describe how Kek made a difference in the 1993 elections in Cambodia.
  - 2 Explain how the government attempted to influence the elections.
  - 3 List some of the other problems Cambodia has.
  - 4 Write one question you would ask Kek.
  - 5 Discuss how Kek shows us it is possible for one person to make a difference.

### ACTIVITY 3:

- Ask students:
  - What can the countries we discussed and Kek’s struggles teach us about the power of voting?
- Have each group come up with a list and share it with the class.
- Show the short video “Why Vote”:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-pL3Da-mec>.
- Discuss the following questions:
  - What were some reasons given for not voting?
  - What were some reasons given for voting?
  - What are your feelings about voting?
  - How do you think Kek and others would feel about the fact that only 61 percent of Americans voted in the 2008 presidential election?

## INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

Since the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, many other international documents—also called treaties, covenants, resolutions, or conventions—have been drafted to develop these rights further. Countries commit to protect the rights recognized in these treaties by ‘ratifying’ them and sometimes a specific institution is created within the UN to monitor their compliance.

Here are examples of relevant international documents:

### CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

- **Article 9:** Children have a right to family life
- **Article 10:** Right to life and to not be arbitrarily deprived of it
- **Article 19:** Protection from all forms of violence
- **Article 28:** Right to education
- **Article 32:** Freedom and protection from child labor
- **Article 34:** Freedom and protection from sexual exploitation

### INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

### INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

### CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

*For more information, visit the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ website: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)*

## BECOME A DEFENDER

- Students will educate at least 20 people about the importance of voting by using information on the lack of free elections in one of the following countries:
  - China
  - North Korea
  - Myanmar
  - Iran
  - Cambodia
- The goal is twofold:
  - Educate someone about political abuses in another country
  - Encourage people to vote in U.S. elections.
- Students will complete one of the following:
  - Make a brochure highlighting the importance of free elections and voting and distribute it to 20 people of voting age
  - Create a website highlighting the importance of free elections and voting. Forward it to at least 20 people of voting age.
  - Create a Facebook page dealing with the issue of voting and have at least 20 friends join. This page must be updated by the student at least ten times during the year.
- Students will present and defend their project to the class.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### **Vision of Humanity:**

<http://www.visionofhumanity.org/>

Vision of Humanity is a media-monitoring organization that uses the information they acquire to develop a Global Peace Index that aims to understand the accuracy of coverage of peace, violence and conflict by major international television networks. They also serve as an outlet for all major global news stories relating to peace and conflict.

### **Cambodia:**

<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/87393>

A page run by Human Rights Watch to catalog all of the issues facing Cambodia and to keep a historical record of human rights abuses in the past.

### **Burma:**

<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/87392>

Political Prisoners and Human Rights Defenders

A page run by Human Rights Watch to catalog all of the issues facing Burma and to keep a historical record of human rights abuses in the past.

### **Iran:**

<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/87713>

A page run by Human Rights Watch to catalog all the issues facing Iran and to keep a historical record of human rights abuses.

### **North Korea:**

<http://www.hrw.org/en/asia/north-korea>

This entry by Human Rights Watch focuses on the current human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).

### **China:**

<http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/china>

A page run by Human Rights Watch to catalog all the human rights issues currently facing China and to keep a historical record of human rights abuses.