



# ÞÓRHILDUR SUNNA ÆVARSDÓTTIR

LL.M IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE

## CONTACT

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## EDUCATION

### LL.M International Law of Human Rights and Criminal Justice

#### Utrecht University

2012 - 2013

Utrecht, The Netherlands

### LL.B International and European Law

#### University of Groningen

2009 - 2012

Groningen, The Netherlands

## LANGUAGES

Icelandic

English

German

Scandinavian

## WORK EXPERIENCE

### Global Director

*Courage International, June 2025*

Leads the relaunch and work of Courage - an international NGO focused on press freedom, privacy, whistleblower protections and freedom of expression.

### Member of Parliament

*Alþingi, Iceland, 2016 -2024*

Chair of the parliamentary group of the Pirate Party 2017-2019 & 2023-2024. Chair of the Constitutional and Oversight Committee 2019 - 2020.

### Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

*Strasbourg, France 2017-2024*

Chair of the Icelandic delegation 2017. Vice Chair 2017 - 2024. Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights 2018 - 2020. Chair of the Sub-Committee on Artificial Intelligence 2021 - 2023. General Rapporteur for the situation of Human Rights Defenders 2022-2023. General Rapporteur for the Situation of Political Prisoners 2023-2024.

### Independent consultant and journalist

*Reykjavík, Iceland 2014 - 2016*

Wrote for Kvennablaðið Media. Main focus was accessible articles on practical human rights protection and critical analysis of police conduct. Wrote reports and legal analysis for Geðhjálp NGO on Mental Health rights. Wrote a comprehensive report on the harmful effects of the war on drugs on human rights for the Harm Reduction NGO Snarróttin.

### Intern

*International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), The Hague, The Netherlands, 2014*

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN ALTHINGI

## **Chairperson**

*Inter-parliamentary Committee for the revision of laws relating to coercive treatment in psychiatric care and health care, 2020 - 2024*

## **Chairperson**

*Parliamentary group of the Pirate Party, 2017 - 2021 and 2023 - 2024*

## **Deputy Chairperson**

*Committee of Economic Affairs and Trade, 2021 - 2024*

## **Chairperson**

*Constitutional and Supervisory Committee, 2019 - 2020*

## **Vice-Chairperson**

*Parliamentary Group of the Pirate Party 2016 -2017 and 2019 -2023*

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN PACE

## **Chairperson**

*Sub-Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, 2022 - 2024*

## **Chairperson**

*Pre-electoral Mission of PACE to Moldova, 2024*

## **General Rapporteur**

*For Political Prisoners in Europe, 2023 - 2024*

## **Observer Representative**

Represented PACE in the Council of Europe Committee on Artificial Intelligence during the drafting of the first international Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, 2023 - 2024

## **General Rapporteur**

*Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Whistleblowers, 2022 - 2023*

## **Rapporteur**

Author of 11 reports and resolutions for PACE on various human rights related subjects. Subjects include the status of political prisoners in Russia, Belarus, Crimea and Azerbaijan, The Detention and Conviction of Julian Assange and its Chilling Effects on Human Rights in Europe and 2 reports on combatting sexism and harassment in parliaments

## **Co-Rapporteur**

*Post monitoring dialogue with Bulgaria, 2022 - 2024*

## **Chairperson**

*Committee of Legal Affairs and Human Rights, 2018 - 2020*

## **Chairperson**

*Icelandic Delegation to PACE, 2017*

# MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

## **In the Parliament of Iceland**

- *Member of the Economic Affairs and Trade Committee, 2021 - 2024*
- *Member of the Judicial Affairs and Education Committee, 2020–2021, 2017–2019 and 2017*
- *Member of the Constitutional and Supervisory Committee, 2019–2020*
- *Member of the Industrial Affairs Committee, 2020 and 2018–2019*

## **In the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

- *Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights 2017-2024*
- *Equality Affairs Committee 2017 - 2024*
- *Monitoring Committee 2010 - 2024*
- *Committee on the Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, 2018 - 2024*
- *Committee on the Selection of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights, 2018 - 2024*
- *Ad hoc sub-committee in carrying out a fact-finding visit to Ukraine, 2022*
- *Bureau and Standing Committee of PACE, 2018 - 2020*
- *Political Affairs Committee, 2017*

# RECENT SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- *International Seminar on Political Prisoners in Europe, Stortinget, Oslo, Norway, October 2024*
- *Roundtable Discussions on the path to democracy in Russia, Paris, France September 2024*
- *Silenced Dissent; The Plight of Political Prisoners and search for Accountability, Public Hearing of the Helsinki Commission in Washington D.C., USA, June 2024*
- *OSCE PA Conference on Security in the Age of AI, Lisbon, Portugal, May 2024*
- *Helsinki Dialogue on a Democratic Future for Belarus, Helsinki, Finland, January 2024*
- *International Scientific Conference On Digitalization, Innovations & Sustainable Development: Trends And Business Perspectives, November 2023, Kuwait City, Kuwait*
- *Parliamentary Conference on Elections in Times of Crisis, Bern, Switzerland, May 2023*
- *Meeting of the Global Parliamentary Network Group on Artificial Intelligence of the OECD in Paris, France, 7. November 2022*
- *Round-table with the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights: Human Rights Defenders in the Council of Europe Area in Times of Crises, in Dublin, Ireland, 24.-25. October 2022*
- *Panel discussion on Violence against Women Politicians, House of Representatives, Washington D.C. United States, 19 September 2019*
- *Side Event at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland on Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians, 10. July 2019*

# MOTIVATION LETTER

*After six years in a leading role within national politics in Iceland, I feel it is time to widen my horizons and gain fresh perspectives and new ideas to take on the various challenges that come with my line of work. Our political culture in Iceland is highly adversarial and I believe that taking a step out of this world and into the cooperative environment of the Yale World Fellowship program will give me much needed clarity of purpose and strengthen my drive to reach my full potential.*

*Growing up, my mother taught me the importance of giving back to the world—a lesson I took very seriously and still do. From a young age, then, my mission was clear: to become an international human rights advocate and advance the cause of human rights where they are least respected. I always pictured myself working for the United Nations as a diplomat for peace or for the Red Cross as a field agent in conflict zones.*

*After completing the first step of my plan and securing an LL.M. degree in international human rights in the Netherlands, I returned home to Iceland, where I worked as a freelance journalist and specialized writer on human rights. My work caught the attention of one of the founders of the Icelandic Pirate Party, Smári McCarthy, who convinced me to join the party and run for parliament. The Pirate Party is a socially progressive, internationally minded, and future-oriented party. They were newcomers in politics at the time, and their focus on civil rights, transparency and combating corruption was a political language I had never heard before in Iceland, full of honesty and humility.*

*After all, Iceland has its problems. Our small community and plentiful resources have given us a relatively high standard of living, but it has also nurtured nepotism, corruption, and oligopoly. I jumped at this opportunity to change my society for the better and was elected to the Icelandic Parliament of Althingi in 2016, at the age of 29.*

*The focus of my parliamentary work has been the advancement of human rights, the protection of civil liberties, and the fight against corruption. Early in my career, I had a decisive role in a parliamentary inquiry that exposed a cover-up implicating the prime minister's father in the pardon of a convicted pedophile. The scandal toppled the government of Iceland in 2017.*

*In 2019, I successfully moved a parliamentary resolution to form an interparliamentary committee to reform Icelandic legislation relating to the coercive treatment of persons with mental disabilities and illness. The work of the committee, which I chair, is ongoing.*

*Already in my first year as an MP I took on a leading role in the Pirate Party. Serving as the chair of the parliamentary group of the Pirate Party from 2017-2019 and deputy chair since that time, I have become a well known and well established politician in Iceland.*

*One of my most important roles within the parliament is membership of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). PACE is the deliberative organ of the Council of Europe that monitors the enforcement of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law within the 46 member states of the organization.*

*During my five years at PACE, I have been entrusted with various notable positions. Currently I am the chair of the Sub-committee on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, General Rapporteur for the situation of Human Rights Defenders, as well as co-rapporteur on the post-monitoring dialogue with Bulgaria.*

*Additionally, I have been appointed rapporteur on eight reports. Most notable are my reports on political prisoners in the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan. Currently, I am writing a report about the wave of arrests against anti-war protesters in Russia.*

*One of the most impactful experiences I have had during my time at PACE was participating in a fact-finding visit to Ukraine last summer. During our stay in Ukraine, we visited Kiev, Irpin, and Bucha and witnessed the devastation caused by the Russian invasion.*

*My mandate as parliamentarian has allowed me to play a key role in the advancement of human rights, as a legislator who writes them into laws but also as an opposition politician, who holds the authorities to account. It has shown me that our political and administrative system suffers from a fundamental lack of understanding and respect for human rights enforcement and protection.*

*Nevertheless, my work in PACE has taught me not to take the rights we do enjoy in Iceland for granted. Fundamental human rights are under severe attack in Europe, and the world at large. They are besieged by autocratic leaders who oppress their population and by dictators who wage war against their peaceful neighbors. And they are seriously threatened by the rise of the far right as well as by our inaction in the climate change crisis.*

*My main objective for applying for the Yale World Fellows program is to become a better politician and above all, a better global citizen. I want to learn new and innovative ways to advocate for human rights and how best to educate people about their importance in an engaging and effective way. Moreover, I need to learn more precise and effective ways to identify and combat corruption. I also hope to be able to set a clearer path into my future career in international diplomacy. In turn, I hope to contribute my extensive knowledge and experience in the field of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law to the program.*

*We all face the challenges of the climate crisis and as we work, we see the devastation already wreaking havoc on some of the poorest and most marginalized nations across the world. Their human rights are being routinely breached by the inaction of the developed world. My generation needs to take the lead on this and I feel sure that my involvement in your program will help equip me with greater experience to tackle these challenges.*