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THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

APRIL 2025

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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This report documents key human rights developments at a national and regional level during 2024, as well as presenting a global analysis of ongoing critical human rights challenges. It includes entries on countries or territories whose human rights situation Amnesty International has monitored during 2024.

The absence of a particular country or territory does not imply that no human rights violations of concern to Amnesty International took place there during the year. Nor is the length of a country entry any basis for a comparison of the extent and depth of Amnesty International's concerns there. This report does not cover extensively the use of the death penalty as Amnesty International issues a separate annual global report on death sentences and executions.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

APRIL 2025

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ABBREVIATIONS

AI
Artificial intelligence

ASEAN
Association of Southeast Asian Nations

AU
African Union

CEDAW
UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CEDAW Committee
UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CERD
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

CERD Committee
UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

COP29
The 29th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

ECOWAS
Economic Community of West African States

Escazú Agreement
Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

EU
European Union

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture
European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

European Convention on Human Rights
(European) Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

ICC
International Criminal Court

ICCPR
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ICRC
International Committee of the Red Cross

ILO
International Labour Organization

International Convention against enforced disappearance
International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

INGO
International non-governmental organization

LGBTI
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex

MP
Member of parliament

NATO
North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDC
Nationally determined contribution

NGO
Non-governmental organization

OAS
Organization of American States

OCHA
United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR, the UN human rights office
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OSCE
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

UN
United Nations

UN Convention against Torture
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

UNDP
UN Development Programme

UN Refugee Convention
Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

UN Special Rapporteur on climate change
UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change

UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions
UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty
UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression
UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

UN Special Rapporteur on racism
UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

UN Special Rapporteur on torture
UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls
UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

UNESCO
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF
United Nations Children's Fund

UPR
UN Universal Periodic Review

WHO
World Health Organization

PREFACE

The world is at a historic juncture. Unprecedented forces are hunting down the ideals of human rights for all, seeking to destroy an international system forged in the blood and grief of World War Two and its Holocaust. This religious, racial, patriarchal crusade, which aims for an economic order predicated on even greater inequality between and within states, imperils hard won equality, justice and dignity gains of these past 80 years.

A multiplicity of assaults – against human rights accountability, against international law, and against the UN – have been but some of the hallmarks of the first 100 days of US President Donald Trump's "reign" in 2025.

But those reckless and punishing offensives, against efforts to end global poverty and undo long standing racial and gender-based discrimination and violence, did not start this year. Red lines don't turn green overnight.

Since his second inauguration, President Trump's actions are accelerating in directions that Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have already flagged – our warnings were dismissed; our appeals, ignored. His trajectory is continuous with, and the product of, systemic, deliberate and selective decisions taken over the past decade but reaching new depths in 2025.

Make no mistake. This is not merely about President Trump. The roots are far deeper. And, unless there is concerted and courageous resistance, this historic juncture will mutate into an historic transformation: not merely an era of change but a change of era.

A NIGHTMARE THAT BEGAN IN SLOW MOTION

For a decade or more, the world has witnessed a steady spread of authoritarian laws, policies and practices, shrinking civic space and eroding enjoyment of freedom of expression or association. Policy choices have deepened inequality, increased poverty and nourished billionaires. The Covid pandemic laid bare the greed, racism and selfishness of powerful states prepared to let millions die. And confronted with the climate crisis, states largely failed to live up to their promises made in Paris in 2015.

With multiple red lights flashing critical warnings, there then came, in 2024, genocide.

2024: GENOCIDE LIVE-STREAMED AS IT HAPPENED

Since 7 October 2023 – when Hamas perpetrated horrific crimes against Israeli citizens and others and captured more than 250 hostages – the world has been made audience to a live-streamed genocide. States watched on as if powerless, as Israel killed thousands upon thousands of Palestinians, wiping out entire multigenerational families, destroying homes, livelihoods, hospitals and schools.

2024 will be remembered for how Israel's military occupation grew ever more brazen and deadly, for the way the USA, Germany and a handful of other European states supported Israel; the way the USA,

under the Biden administration, repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire and states continued arms transfers to Israel.

In 2024, Israel and its powerful allies, first among them the USA, claimed that or acted as if international law did not apply to them, wilfully ignoring orders of the International Court of Justice and indictments of the International Criminal Court.

In 2024, President Vladimir Putin continued the systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, killing more civilians than in 2023. Destroying or occupying the majority of Ukraine's thermal energy power plants, Russia caused regular blackouts for thousands. It illegally tried scores of Ukrainian prisoners of war in Russia and in areas of Ukraine it occupied.

In 2024, thousands of Sudanese deaths from conflict and hunger, in the midst of the largest forced displacement crisis in the world, were met with near-complete global indifference as was the lethal escalating violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Niger or Myanmar. The associated opportunities for arms trade were not ignored, and calls for arms embargoes fell on deaf ears.

2024 demonstrated states' willingness to deploy propaganda to the service of armed conflicts, amplified by social media algorithms and powerful voices, and without regard to accuracy or hate-ridden consequences.

In sum, 2024 dehumanized us all.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND MULTILATERALISM

South Africa, however, signalled that other choices can be made. Its International Court of Justice case against Israel for allegedly breaching the Genocide Convention is a crucial step towards justice. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issuance of arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military chief Mohammed Al-Masri for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity was a historic breakthrough.

Yet countries that vigorously supported the ICC in its prosecution of President Putin for the alleged abduction of Ukrainian children took a very different response when it came to Israel. A number of US senators threatened the ICC Prosecutor in 2024 and President Donald Trump later sanctioned the Prosecutor in 2025.

The time has passed for lamenting the double standards of the architects of the post-World War Two rules-based system. Before 2024 was over, many states were actively undermining that system's institutions and working against its values, resulting in a situation where little more than a shell of its original intentions was left standing.

President Trump is just a super-accelerator of trends already well advanced.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE MEDIA: CANARIES IN THE COAL MINE

In 2020, Amnesty International warned of authoritarian tendencies emerging across and within countries. We were right to be worried. In 2024, more authoritarian laws and practices were adopted. Attacks against political dissent intensified, including through mass arrests and enforced disappearances. More NGOs and more political parties were forcibly disbanded, suspended or targeted arbitrarily as "extremist". There were disproportionate responses to civil disobedience and unprecedented criminalization of human rights defenders, climate activists, students and others expressing solidarity with Palestinians; many were labelled as "terrorists". Feminists and other campaigners for the rights of women and LGBTI people continued to face massive backlash. At least 21 states brought forward laws or bills aimed at suppression of free speech or banning media outlets. The number of journalists killed in 2024 reached new heights: according to the NGO the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 124 journalists and media workers were killed last year, nearly two thirds of them Palestinians killed by Israel.

"DRILL, BABY, DRILL" MEETS "BURN, BABY, BURN"

In 2024, no region was left unscathed by the climate crisis. An intense heatwave in South Asia was followed by devastating floods affecting millions and forcing the displacement of thousands. Record wildfires in South America destroyed Amazon rainforests and imperilled ecosystems stretching across entire countries. In Somalia, droughts and floods destroyed communities, collapsed local economies, and displaced families and communities.

2024 was the first calendar year in which the global average temperature rose to more than 1.5°C above the 1850-1900 average.

Blazing temperatures demand trail-blazing climate action. Yet on top of states' failures to phase out use of fossil fuels, COP29 negotiations delivered a miserly financing agreement that risks trapping lower-income countries in a cycle of indebtedness.

President Trump's mantra of "drill, baby, drill" merely echoed what was already underway, with his 2025 decision to withdraw the USA from the Paris Climate Agreement welcomed by other fossil-fuel dependent states.

And so, across the world, communities will keep burning, drowning, dying.

A TOXIC MIX FOR MILLIONS

In 2024, the World Bank warned that "global poverty reduction slowed to a near standstill during the past five years, raising concerns that 2020–30 would be a lost would be a lost decade" in its report *Poverty, Prosperity and Planet: Pathways out of the Polycrisis*.

The toxic mix of manufactured poverty, conflict, political oppression and the climate crisis displaced an estimated 110 million people in 2024. Yet rather than address root causes, many governments and political movements weaponized xenophobic and racist rhetoric, inciting hatred. Ignoring or circumventing judicial orders, they used

extreme and violent measures to push back irregular arrivals at their borders.

GENDER EQUALITY? ATTACKS ON WOMEN'S AND LGBTI RIGHTS

In Afghanistan, 50% of the population, namely women and girls, were condemned to what many have described as a "slow death". The Taliban government criminalized the public existence of women and girls, passing so-called vice and virtue laws, denying their rights to work and education. Dozens of women protesters were forcibly disappeared or arbitrarily detained.

In Iran, new compulsory veiling laws intensified oppression of women and girls, imposing flogging, exorbitant fines and harsh prison sentences, while officials and vigilantes who violently attack women and girls for defying the law continued with impunity.

Violations of LGBTI rights escalated in many places, while governments from Argentina to Russia introduced laws and/or policies that restricted access to sexual and reproductive health services. In the USA, Meta and TikTok removed certain abortion information online. Meanwhile, gender-based violence including femicide, and sexual violence in armed conflict were reported on the rise in many parts of the world.

THE END OF AN ERA?

Powerful states are deriding our history. They pretend that the lessons of the 1930s and 1940s – from the Genocide Convention to the Geneva Conventions to the UDHR and the UN Charter – can be set aside, forgotten, erased. With Donald Trump's election and significant corporate capture of his administration, we are turbo-thrusted into a brutal era where military and economic power trumps human rights and diplomacy; where gendered and racial hierarchies and zero-sum thinking shape policy, where nihilistic nationalism drives international relations.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

In 2024, all 193 member states of the UN General Assembly agreed to pave the way for a first ever treaty on crimes against humanity. In 2024, the UN General Assembly also agreed to create a Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, paving the way for international cooperation to stop tax abuse and potentially providing essential funding for rights realization. In 2024, the Gambia rejected a bill to repeal the 2015 Women's Amendment Act which bans female genital mutilation. Poland adopted a consent-based definition of rape, becoming the 19th European country to do so, and the Bulgarian parliament voted down a bill to create a Russian-style foreign agents registry. In 2024, Belgian national courts recognized the country's responsibility for crimes against humanity committed during colonization. And early in 2025, the Filipino authorities handed over former President Duterte to the ICC to face crimes against humanity charges for his deadly war on drugs.

The UN Summit for the Future in September 2024 had its limitations. However, states agreed to create a more equitable international system by enabling greater representation within the Security Council, especially for Africa, transforming the international financial architecture, addressing the debt crisis and increasing development funds.

Crucially, the year of elections – 64 took place across the world in 2024 – did not result in a victory lap for anti-human rights forces. Around the world, a large number of citizens voted for a different path, demonstrating that the rise of authoritarian practices is not inevitable, that it can be resisted.

The future is not set, but the world is at a critical juncture. One hundred days into the Trump administration, some states are rising to the challenge, but the majority are not. Instead, many pretend the new emperor is honourably garbed; many are adopting the new emperor's clothes. The naked reality is very different: the silencing of dissent, attacks on academic freedom, escalating military budgets, plundering of aid allocations, trade retaliations: these are the see-through garments of a world in deep crisis.

Yes, we must address the international system's systemic failures to uphold human rights. But today, we are facing re-energized forces that are working to impose a new system altogether: not one better equipped for equality and justice, but one without human rights protections; not one better serving the rule of law, but one designed to serve the rule of profit over justice.

Organized resistance against those forces is not merely essential; it is our only legitimate recourse. As they have always done when states fail to uphold human rights, community organizers and human rights defenders are standing up. They are resisting these regimes of power and profit that recklessly imperil our common dignity. They are showing once again that civil society is the front line of defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Resist we must. Resist we will.

Agnès Callamard
Secretary General
April 2025

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

GLOBAL ANALYSIS AND REGIONAL OVERVIEWS

GLOBAL ANALYSIS

Amnesty International's research in 2024 highlights several key themes shaping current global human rights trends: violations of international humanitarian law during armed conflicts, repression of dissent, discrimination, economic and climate injustices, and the misuse of technology to infringe on human rights. Despite some limited positive developments, many of these trends represent setbacks that risk being exacerbated in 2025 and beyond, as states, particularly powerful ones, continue to undermine the international rules-based system and authoritarian practices spread across different continents.

ARMED CONFLICT VIOLATIONS

Civilian populations faced war crimes in different countries and genocide in Gaza in 2024 and have continued to do so in 2025. While international justice mechanisms have taken important steps towards accountability in some cases, powerful governments have repeatedly blocked attempts to take meaningful action to end atrocities.

CRIMES UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

Armed conflicts have devastated the lives of millions of people around the world, including in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. Parties to the conflicts – both government forces and armed groups – have committed war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, such as direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and indiscriminate attacks that have killed and injured civilians.

Many people, particularly those from marginalized communities, have been denied their rights to education, food, water, adequate housing, healthcare and security. In August 2024, the UN declared famine conditions in Zamzam camp for internally displaced people in Sudan. With 11 million internally displaced people in 2024, Sudan faces the largest displacement crisis in the world. As Russia has continued to target civilians and civilian infrastructure in population centres in Ukraine with missiles and drones, basic living conditions have plummeted for Ukrainian civilians, with children, older people and other at-risk groups paying a particularly high price. Russia has also subjected detained Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war to enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment.

Israel's actions in Gaza have taken a catastrophic toll on Palestinian civilians and amounted to genocide. Meanwhile, Israel's system of apartheid and unlawful occupation has become increasingly violent in the occupied West Bank, marked by a sharp increase in arbitrary detentions, unlawful killings and state-backed attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian civilians.

There was an alarming surge in cases of conflict-related sexual and other gender-based violence in some countries in 2024. In CAR, more than 11,000 cases of gender-based violence were reported in the first half of the year. In Sudan, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan found that members of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) perpetrated widespread sexual violence.

Some violations in armed conflict settings have had a disproportionate impact on women and girls. In Gaza, multiple waves of forced displacement have contributed to inhumane conditions for over a million Palestinians, but particularly impacted pregnant and breast-feeding women. In north-east Syria, thousands of women and girls have been detained for more than five years without charge or trial in camps or detention facilities because of their male relatives' suspected affiliation with the Islamic State armed group.

Systemic racism has fuelled conflicts. In Israel, political leaders have used dehumanizing rhetoric against Palestinians. In Myanmar, the Rohingya have continued to face racist attacks, causing many to flee their homeland in Rakhine State. In Sudan, some RSF attacks on civilians have been ethnically motivated. Meanwhile, Russia has sought to change the demographics of the Ukrainian territories it has occupied and suppressed Ukrainian and other local languages and cultures.

Millions of people worldwide have protested against the crimes committed by parties to armed conflicts. However, multilateral institutions, notably the UN Security Council, have often been unable or unwilling to pressure parties to armed conflicts to comply with international humanitarian law or to ensure humanitarian assistance matches the scale of the needs of civilians. As a result, these institutions are losing legitimacy, and their continued existence is being questioned.

Throughout 2024, governments – individually and multilaterally – failed repeatedly to take meaningful action to end atrocities. The USA, the UK and many EU states publicly backed Israel's actions in Gaza. The USA abused its veto power, with the consequence that for months the UN Security Council was not able to take any effective action, only calling for an immediate but limited ceasefire on 25 March 2024. Even then, the USA undermined the Security Council by declaring the resolution non-binding, in an effort to shield its ally from compliance. Stronger action was taken by the UN General Assembly, which adopted, in September 2024, a resolution calling for an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine within 12 months and, in December 2024, another two resolutions calling for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages and the full, rapid, safe and unhindered entry of humanitarian assistance into and throughout Gaza, and reaffirming full support for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). In November 2024, Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution demanding an end to attacks against civilians in Sudan and calling for facilitation of humanitarian assistance to millions in desperate need there.

Governments should reform the UN Security Council so that permanent members cannot use their veto power to block action aimed at ending and redressing atrocity crimes. They should also increase humanitarian aid for civilians in need.

ACCOUNTABILITY

While its actions have been inadequate in some countries, such as Afghanistan and Nigeria, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has taken important steps towards accountability in Israel and the OPT, Libya and Myanmar. In October 2024, the ICC announced arrest warrants against six leaders, senior members and affiliates of the al-Kaniat armed group in Libya for war crimes. In November 2024, the ICC Prosecutor sought an arrest warrant for Senior General Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity against the Rohingya people during military operations in 2017. In the same month, the ICC issued arrest warrants against Israeli and Hamas leaders on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Some states clarified that they would enforce the ICC arrest warrants against Israeli officials. However, a number of Israel's allies have announced they will not. Similarly, Mongolia failed to fulfil its obligation as a party to the Rome Statute to arrest Russian President Vladimir Putin, for whom the ICC had issued an arrest warrant for war crimes in March 2023, when he visited the country in September 2024.

In 2024, the International Court of Justice issued three sets of provisional measures in the case brought by South Africa against Israel under the Genocide Convention and issued an advisory opinion finding that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory is unlawful. Some states, including Belgium and Spain, have complied with calls by UN experts to suspend arms exports to Israel. Litigation by civil society actors has challenged arms transfers in countries such as Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the UK. The USA has continued to be by far the largest exporter of arms to Israel, and some European states, including the Czech Republic, France

and Germany, have continued to transfer arms to states where there was a lack of accountability for past abuses and a substantial risk they could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations, including Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Governments should support the ICC, protect it and its staff from sanctions and other threats, and enforce its warrants. They should also stop irresponsible arms transfers.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

Authorities in a broad sweep of countries have employed authoritarian practices and introduced new measures to restrict freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. They have used these and existing laws and regulations to clamp down on human rights defenders, critics and opponents, or as a way to evade accountability and entrench power.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In 2024, new restrictive regulations on the right to protest were approved or proposed in Argentina, Georgia, Nicaragua, Pakistan and Peru. In some countries, including Türkiye, authorities imposed blanket bans on protests.

Security forces often brutally and lethally dispersed protests, as well as using mass arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances to suppress them. In 2024, killings and/or mass arrests of scores of protesters were documented in countries including Bangladesh, Egypt, Georgia, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Senegal. In Bangladesh, the armed forces were deployed against student protests and "shoot-on-sight" orders issued, resulting in close to a thousand deaths, with many more injured.

Across the world, including in Canada, Egypt, Fiji, Finland, Germany, India, Italy, Malaysia, the Maldives and the USA, advocates for an end to the war in Gaza and Palestinian rights have faced violence, harassment or arrest.

The deployment of lethal and less lethal weapons against protesters has continued to lead to deaths and injuries across the world. However, the global civil society campaign for an international, legally binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty has been developing its global reach, drawing state attention to the need for a treaty and gaining vocal support from a number of UN Special Procedures.

In positive moves, in July 2024, the ECOWAS Court ruled that Nigeria had violated #EndSARS protesters' rights; in May, regulations in the UK enhancing police powers to restrict protests were struck down as unlawful.

When the president of South Korea suspended fundamental rights, including the right to peaceful assembly, following a declaration of martial law in December 2024, popular protests successfully challenged the move. The National Assembly quickly reversed it and the president was suspended from office.

Governments should stop unlawfully deploying lethal and less lethal weapons against protesters and redouble efforts towards negotiating and adopting a UN Torture-Free Trade Treaty.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

In 2024, authorities introduced or sought to introduce new restrictions on the right to freedom of expression. States including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burkina Faso, China (including Hong Kong), Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, India, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Moldova, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam brought forward laws or bills that risked suppressing free speech or the banning of media outlets.

Authorities in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guinea, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Russia, Rwanda, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda and Venezuela, among other countries, took new measures to restrict freedom of association. Measures included disbanding or suspending NGOs or political parties, or labelling them "extremist".

More broadly, rampant attacks on the rights to freedoms of expression and association have continued. Governments' repressive tactics have included arbitrary detention, torture and unjust prosecution of critics and opponents, as well as the deployment of spyware. In some cases, they have unlawfully killed or forcibly disappeared critics or sentenced them to death. Among those targeted have been journalists, online commentators, political and trade union activists, and human rights defenders – including campaigners for the rights of women, LGBTI people and marginalized communities. In 2024, in countries including Belarus, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Türkiye, individuals were convicted and sentenced to prison terms on charges related to "terrorism" or "extremism", following unfair trials, solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association, including on social media.

Governments should repeal laws and end practices that violate the rights to freedom of expression and association.

DISCRIMINATION

Racial and other forms of discrimination have driven many countries' approaches to asylum and migration and affected the rights of marginalized groups. Meanwhile, marginalized groups have been scapegoated and presented as a threat to political or economic stability to legitimize further restrictions on human rights and allow those in power to strengthen control. In 2024, there were advances and setbacks in the domains of LGBTI rights and sexual and reproductive rights.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Racism and other forms of oppression have continued to drive many countries' approaches to asylum and migration. Discriminatory policies and practices disproportionately affect racialized groups of migrants, refugees and other non-citizens.[1] Several countries including Canada, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have continued operating visa schemes that are shaped by racism and tie migrant workers to a specific employer, increasing the risk of labour exploitation. States and non-state actors have also deployed and misused abusive digital technology in migration management and asylum systems.[2]

Governments around the world have taken extreme and violent measures to prevent and push back irregular arrivals. These have included actions to shift the responsibility for refugees and migrants to other countries, border closures and mass returns. In 2024, Egypt arbitrarily detained hundreds of Sudanese refugees before forcibly returning them to Sudan; they were among the more than 3.2 million Sudanese refugees living in neighbouring countries, often in dire conditions. Pakistani authorities forcibly returned hundreds of thousands of refugees to Afghanistan in pursuit of an unlawful deportation policy. The USA suspended the entry of asylum seekers at the USA-Mexico border, exposing them to extortion, abduction and sexual and gender-based violence. Belarus continued to force refugees and migrants across its borders with the EU, resulting in some deaths in perilous conditions. Other European countries and the EU failed to reduce dependence on third countries for migration management or expand safe and legal routes for refugees.

Governments' abusive responses to irregular migration have also undermined the rule of law, as they have ignored and circumvented judicial orders upholding the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Greece has consistently ignored judgments from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). For example, its coastguard's use of firearms during border control operations has remained of concern despite an ECtHR ruling in 2024 that Greece had violated the right to life during an interception at sea in 2014. In 2024, the UK sought to overturn a 2023 Supreme Court ruling that Rwanda was not a safe country as it pursued a scheme to enable the enforced removal of asylum seekers there; the scheme was scrapped following a change of government.

By contrast, community sponsorship groups across the world kept countering such racism and exclusion with concrete expressions of solidarity.

Governments should adopt migration policies that effectively address inequality and exclusion.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Racialized, ethnic, minority and other marginalized groups have continued to face systemic discrimination and entrenched inequalities, deeply affecting their human rights.

In 2024, in a positive move, Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan won the right to use their Indigenous names, rather than Mandarin language versions, in official documents. However, respect for Indigenous Peoples' rights suffered setbacks in several countries. The New Zealand government enacted new laws that undermined the rights of Māori. Governments in countries including Bolivia, Indonesia and Malaysia proceeded with extractive or development projects on land claimed by Indigenous Peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.

Racial profiling and institutionalized racism in areas such as law enforcement and welfare have persisted, highlighting the pervasive nature of these injustices. In the Americas, law enforcement actions have targeted, or disproportionately affected, Afro-descendants in countries including Brazil, Ecuador and the USA. In Asia, ethnic and religious minorities such as non-Han ethnic groups in China and the Pamiri minority in Tajikistan have faced persecution and systemic discrimination. In Europe, Norway and Switzerland have used discriminatory racial profiling, while in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden automated welfare systems have led to discriminatory practices against racialized people, as well as women and low-income individuals.

In the UK and other countries, the amplification by social media platforms of harmful content played a role in racist and xenophobic violence.

Experts, activists and organizations working on the legacies of colonialism have continued to call for governments to address their colonial past and the ongoing impact on human rights. In August, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recognized that structural racism and racial discrimination posed barriers to the full enjoyment of the rights of Afro-descendant people and tribal communities and called on states to implement comprehensive reparatory justice. In November, experts from the African continent and its global diasporas called on European governments to address their colonial past and ongoing impacts at the Dekoloniale Berlin Africa Conference, a decolonial counter-version of the 1884-1885 Berlin Africa Conference 140 years earlier.[3]

Governments should end the racial discrimination built into laws and practices, address the question of reparatory justice for slavery and colonialism and challenge the legacy of these historical injustices in contemporary forms of racism and inequality.

GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Opposition to gender equality has escalated in many contexts. Gender-based discrimination and violence against women, girls and LGBTI people remain pervasive, particularly for those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. In Afghanistan, where women and girls have continued to be subjected to gender persecution (a crime against humanity), the Taliban imposed yet more severe restrictions in 2024, completely cutting them off from public life and effectively limiting all aspects of their life. In Argentina, a femicide was reported every 33 hours in 2024. In Iran, authorities intensified their brutal crackdown on women and girls who defied compulsory veiling.

Despite setbacks, some progress on LGBTI rights occurred in 2024. Thailand became the first country in South-East Asia to achieve marriage equality for LGBTI people, while a ban on same-sex marriage was ruled unconstitutional in Japan. Same-sex marriage was legalized in Greece and the Czech Republic. Courts in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan made advances in recognizing the rights of transgender people with regard to gender-affirming practices. In Namibia, the High Court struck down legislation outlawing consensual same-sex sexual conduct, although the government then appealed the decision.

At the same time, the backlash against LGBTI rights continued through the proliferation of discrimination and repressive laws driven by anti-rights and anti-gender movements.[4] In Ghana, Malawi, Mali and Uganda, legislative or judicial authorities took steps to, respectively, criminalize or uphold bans on consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. Georgia adopted legislation on "family values and the protection of minors" that contained numerous homophobic and transphobic measures, seemingly following much of the blueprint Russian "gay propaganda" law. Bulgaria banned "LGBTI propaganda" in schools. Violence and denial of human rights protections severely affected transgender people globally.

In 2024, several countries introduced policies that increased access to sexual and reproductive health services. In Europe, France became the first country in the world to explicitly include abortion as a guaranteed freedom in its constitution, while several other countries backed measures to protect patients and healthcare providers from harassment outside abortion clinics. However, other countries, including Afghanistan, Argentina, Chile, Puerto Rico and Russia, introduced policies in law or practice that reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services. Meanwhile, social media companies like Meta and TikTok removed information about abortion online.

Barriers in accessing abortion care persisted in many countries and those defending abortion rights remained under attack. Activists, advocates, healthcare workers and others were exposed to stigmatization and threats and were criminalized through unjust prosecutions, investigations and arrests.

Governments must end gender-based discrimination and violence, repeal repressive laws and ensure access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, including safe abortion.

ECONOMIC AND CLIMATE INJUSTICE

Governments have failed to demonstrate the ambition needed to address the ever-increasing human rights costs of climate change. Meanwhile, high levels of inflation, debt repayment and tax abuse have undermined economic and social rights in countries at all levels of income, but particularly the lowest. In addition, in the context of the transition to renewable energy, demand for so-called "critical minerals" has increased significantly, posing new human rights risks.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Governments have utterly failed to meet their obligations to protect human rights within and beyond their borders in the face of accelerating climate change. The UN Environment Programme has reported that the world is on track to reach roughly 3 degrees Celsius of warming above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century. In May 2024, it was reported that the average temperature for the previous 12 months had been more than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.[5]

2024 showed that, even at current levels of warming, the human rights costs of climate change are unacceptably high. Climate change has made more severe and more likely unnatural disasters like hurricanes, cyclones, wildfires and heavy rainfall, leading to increased death, forced displacement, famine and other human rights harms. Flooding in Bangladesh and India displaced hundreds of thousands in 2024. Climate change drove more people from their homes in Africa, adding to the millions already forcibly displaced there.[6]

Some governments have chosen to grow their economies through investment in economic sectors and projects that harm human rights, including the right to a healthy environment. Such investments are often poorly regulated and encourage corporate actors to maximize their profits irrespective of the "collateral" damage to human rights. For example, governments have provided significant direct and indirect taxpayer-funded subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, despite its responsibility for significant human rights harms all over the world; in unproven solutions to the climate crisis that may entail human rights abuses in their implementation, such as carbon capture and storage and hydrogen production; and in large-scale tourism projects. In some cases, these projects have entailed forced evictions, significant pollution and other human rights harms.

The countries that have generated the most carbon emissions have only contributed paltry amounts of climate finance for adaptation in the lower-income countries that are on the front lines of climate harm. Climate adaptation can help to minimize death and other human rights harms, through the implementation of robust early warning systems, resilient health systems and emergency response infrastructure. Some financing has relied on loans that further indebt low-income countries.

Activists and communities have demanded climate justice. Some have used domestic or international judicial mechanisms to force governments to commit to a faster phase-out of fossil fuels, though governments have not always implemented resulting judgments. Three decisions issued by the ECtHR in April 2024 clarified states' human rights obligations in the context of the climate crisis.[7] One ruled that Switzerland had failed to comply with its obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but the Swiss parliament voted to reject it. Meanwhile, the International Court of Justice began hearings for an advisory opinion on climate change that was initiated by student-led efforts on the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu.

All governments should implement a fast, fair and funded phase-out of fossil fuels and stop subsidizing the fossil fuel industry. Historic emitting countries and other countries in a position to do so should provide grant funding for climate adaptation in lower-income countries most harmed by climate change.[8]

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Worsening climate change has been set against a backdrop of global conflicts, high inflation and debt repayment, poor corporate regulation and pervasive tax abuse.[9] In 2024, lower-income countries' debt payments hit their highest levels in 30 years, dwarfing budgets for health and education in many countries. Unfair tax systems and the failure to rein in corporate and individual tax avoidance and evasion have further deprived governments of much needed revenues for rights realization. As a result, extreme poverty and inequality have continued to deepen. Poverty and conflict, combined with climate change-related drought and other unnatural disasters, have meant that hundreds of millions have experienced severe food

insecurity. In 2024, famines were declared in Gaza, Haiti and Sudan. Globally, humanitarian responses provided less than half the funding required to meet immediate needs.

Challenging this situation, activists and communities have protested and engaged in civil disobedience to express cost-of-living concerns, even in the face of increasing criminalization of protests. In addition, 2024 saw the adoption of the terms of reference for drafting a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation. This convention has the potential to lay the groundwork for a more equitable global tax system that prevents the abuse that undercuts government capacity to invest in the rights to health, education and social security. An overwhelming 110 countries voted in favour, with only eight voting against and 44 abstentions.

Governments should move quickly to draft, adopt and implement the UN tax convention, and take steps to prevent tax abuse in the interim.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Efforts by corporate actors to influence law and policy, poor government regulation of corporate actors and company failures to meet their human rights responsibilities have enabled a vast range of rights violations, such as companies polluting the drinking water, fishing grounds, farmland and air of nearby communities and trampling the rights to information and consent.

In the context of the transition to renewable energy, demand for so-called "critical minerals" has increased significantly, posing new human rights risks. Leading electric vehicle makers have not demonstrated that they are meeting international human rights standards or even putting their own policies into action.[10]

However, there has been some progress. Most notably, the EU introduced a new corporate accountability regulation in 2024 that requires large corporations to respect new rules on human rights, environmental impacts and climate. While the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive faces major challenges, it remains the world's most significant attempt yet to introduce mandatory human rights due diligence rules in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The EU should reject efforts to weaken the human rights, environmental and climate protections in the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, and other regional blocs should follow suit with their own due diligence laws.

TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The elections in the USA in 2024 highlighted the immense power of Big Tech companies over technological deployments and regulatory discussions, as well as their ability to facilitate violations of the rights of migrants, LGBTI people and others, and ultimately underscored the urgent need for binding human rights technology regulation around the world. Without adequate regulation, governments have increasingly abused spyware and other surveillance tools, and have entrenched inequalities by relying on new AI technologies in public sector settings. Meanwhile, social media companies have continued to enable the spread of hateful and violent content.

ABUSE OF TECHNOLOGY

Facial recognition technologies have had a chilling effect on the right to protest in many regions of the world. In some countries, the police have monitored peaceful protesters with highly advanced cameras on drones and video surveillance cars. This practice violates the right to privacy, has a chilling effect on the right to peaceful assembly and may have discriminatory effects.

There has been widespread use of spyware technologies in an increasing number of countries across the world. New digital security threats such as the abuse of online ad tracking, the process of gathering data on how internet users interact with adverts, have emerged. Meanwhile, lack of transparency and regulation has continued to obscure the murky trade in surveillance technology such as spyware. In 2024, evidence was exposed of sales and deployment of highly invasive spyware and surveillance products to companies and state agencies in Indonesia, while mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students studying abroad continued to be subjected to surveillance while using Chinese and other apps and digital platforms. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, sometimes facilitated through surveillance, posed a growing threat to women and LGBTI activists in countries including Thailand and Uganda.

Civil society activists, including Amnesty International, as well as some states, have sought accountability for spyware-related abuses. In 2024, litigation against spyware firm NSO Group continued in countries including Thailand and the USA, despite efforts by Israel to undermine this. However, at the multilateral level, efforts to address spyware have tended to focus on voluntary codes of conduct. For instance, in 2024, France and the UK launched the Pall Mall Process to bring together states, the private sector and civil society to address issues around commercial cyber intrusion. Meanwhile, Amnesty International has continued to create and make available new tools for activists to protect themselves.[11]

Governments should prohibit unlawful surveillance and unlawful surveillance tools and put in place robust safeguards to protect against abuses and provide remedy to victims.

INADEQUATE REGULATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Governments have stepped back from commitments to regulate new technologies, partly triggered by changes in the US administration and heavily influenced by industry interests. States have increasingly integrated AI technologies into public sector functions and enabled the development and expansion of AI-powered systems in welfare, policing, migration and military contexts. Often these technologies are deployed under justifications of government efficiency, cost savings or other austerity measures but, in reality, compound existing discrimination, reinforce gender inequalities and entrench racial, socio-economic systems of power.[12]

States' continued reliance on automated tools in the provision and supervision of social protection has led to discriminatory and unfair outcomes.[13] These harms are in part caused by the flawed implementation of new but increasingly common techniques such as "entity resolution", by which states, such as India, identify and link personal records across different databases.[14]

Regulation of AI has been held back globally by narratives that position the USA and China as competitors in an arms race and thus promote rapid unchecked AI development both for national security reasons, and under a false dichotomy between regulation and innovation.

Governments should do more to regulate AI technologies and companies that produce them, ensuring that human rights are integral to the design and deployment of new technologies.

BUSINESS MODEL OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES

Social media companies operating with unchecked power have rolled back protections aimed at preventing harms to the most marginalized and at risk. They have also continued to operate a business model that systemically prioritizes engagement over everything else, therefore enabling the spread of hateful and violent content. This has kept young people in particular hooked on their platforms, despite harmful knock-on effects. In 2024, globally, youth activists faced threats and harassment online.[15] In the Philippines, Amnesty International documented state-backed "red-tagging" attacks that targeted youth activists for their activism.

The EU set a mixed precedent on tech regulation. Its landmark Digital Services Act, which fully came into force in February 2024, placed obligations on online platforms and search engines to ensure respect for human rights.[16] The European Commission then decided to investigate TikTok over the possibility that it had breached the regulation for failing to protect young users.[17] The EU's AI Act, which entered into force in August 2024, set limits to some of the most rights-violating uses of AI, although it failed to put people and their rights at its centre.[18]

In other positive news, in Ethiopia, victims of human rights abuses continued to make progress in their efforts to hold Facebook to account, in courts accessible to them, for the harms that Facebook had caused or contributed to. However, elsewhere, proposed legislation to address the harms of social media was often overly broad or sought to limit children's and young people's access to social media without addressing the underlying issues of the social business companies' model or adequately considering the opinions of children and young people.

Governments should adequately regulate social media companies to protect human rights. The companies themselves should move away from their unlawful, surveillance-based business model.

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AFRICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

While Africa's armed conflicts caused relentless civilian suffering, including increasing levels of sexual and gender-based violence, and death on a massive scale, international and regional responses remained woefully inadequate, with civilians feeling forgotten.

The cost-of-living crisis deepened as prices of food, fuel and other basic necessities spiralled. High taxation levels, unsustainable public debts, widespread and unchecked corruption, escalating conflicts and extreme weather events exacerbated the crisis.

Protesting meant putting one's life in danger. Demonstrations were too often brutally and lethally dispersed and attacks on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association remained rampant. Repressive tactics used by governments included enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests and detentions of opponents, human rights defenders, activists, journalists and their critics.

Conflict and climate-induced shocks remained the main drivers of forced displacement, and Sudan continued to suffer the largest displacement crisis worldwide. The number of refugees from conflict zones continued to soar; many refugees lived in squalid conditions or in fear of forced return.

Discrimination and gender-based violence – fuelled by societal norms – remained a daily reality for women and girls.

High income countries with primary responsibility for causing climate change failed to make adequate funding available for loss and damage and for adaptation measures. Consequently, communities continued to bear the brunt of protracted droughts, recurrent floods and extreme storms and heat which were likely exacerbated by climate change.

A culture of impunity continued to embolden perpetrators of crimes under international law and other serious or gross human rights violations.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

Unlawful attacks and killings by government forces and armed groups were reported across the region, including in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

Operations by government forces often left a trail of civilian death. In Burkina Faso, the military reportedly killed at least 223 civilians, including at least 56 children, in the villages of Soro and Nodin in February. Hundreds of civilians were reportedly killed in May by the military and its proxy forces during a supply operation against besieged towns in the east. In Ethiopia, following armed clashes in January between government forces and militias in Merawi town, Amhara region, government forces rounded up scores of civilian men from their homes, shops and the streets and executed them.

In several conflicts, airstrikes or drone attacks by government forces resulted in civilian casualties. In Mali, army drone strikes killed at least 27 civilians, including 18 children in March, and eight civilians, including six children, in October. In Niger, an army drone strike in January reportedly killed around 50 civilians in the village of Tiawa, Tillabéri region. In Nigeria, military air strikes in Kaduna state killed 23 people in a village, including worshippers at a mosque and shoppers at a market. In Somalia, two strikes in March by Turkish-made drones, supporting Somali military operations, killed 23 civilians, including 14 children, in the lower Shabelle region.

Armed groups were responsible for some of the deadliest attacks against civilians. In Burkina Faso, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) reportedly killed around 200 people, including civilians, in Barsalogho in August. In the DRC, most civilian killings occurred when armed groups, including the March 23 Movement, the Cooperative for Development of the Congo and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), battled with government forces in the east and west. In June the ADF killed more than 200 civilians in two separate attacks. In Somalia, the UN Assistance Mission reported that Al-Shabaab was responsible for 65% of the 854 civilian casualties recorded in the country between January and September. In Sudan, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continued its attacks on civilians, some of which were ethnically motivated. In October the RSF launched retaliatory attacks on towns and villages in eastern Gezira state, after one of its commanders defected to the Sudanese Armed Forces, killing at least 124 civilians in seven days according to the UN.

Armed groups frequently targeted places of worship, schools, hospitals and other civilian objects. In Burkina Faso, an armed group killed 15 worshippers at a Catholic church in Essakane, Sahel region on 25 February. On the same day, another armed GSIM group killed at least 14 worshippers at a mosque in Natiaboani, Est region. In August, GSIM killed 26 civilians at a church in Kounla, Boucle du Mouhoun region. In February, armed groups in Mozambique burned down three churches and two schools and set fire to a hospital in the Chiúre district.

Parties to armed conflicts must respect international humanitarian law, including by protecting civilians and religious and educational institutions and other cultural property, and ending targeted and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

There was an alarming surge in cases of conflict-related sexual violence. In CAR, more than 11,000 cases of gender-based violence were reported in the first half of the year. In the DRC, the number of reported cases doubled in the first quarter of 2024, in comparison to the same period in 2023. In Sudan, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan found that RSF members perpetrated widespread sexual violence during attacks on cities in the Darfur region and in Greater Khartoum. They frequently raped and gang-raped women and girls in front of their family members, particularly in the Darfur region and in Gezira state. Conflict-related sexual violence was also prevalent in Somalia and South Sudan. In one incident in Somalia, two members of the Somali National Army allegedly raped two sisters aged 15 and 16 years.

Parties to armed conflicts should issue clear orders to their members or forces, prohibiting acts of sexual and gender-based violence.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

RIGHT TO FOOD

Large proportions of the region's population continued to face hunger. In the Southern Africa region, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe were affected by the worst El Niño-induced drought in a century, and some of which responded by declaring a state of emergency. The drought destroyed crops and livestock, threatening food security for millions. In August the Southern African Development Community announced that 17% of the population of the Southern Africa region (68 million people) needed aid.

Severe food insecurity was experienced in other parts of Africa, including in CAR, Somalia and South Sudan. In CAR, more than 2.5 million people were affected, with more than 50% of the population in Mbomou, Haute-Kotto and other regions living in a situation of emergency or crisis food insecurity. In Somalia, at least 4 million people faced crisis or emergency food insecurity, and an estimated 1.6 million children aged between six and 59 months faced acute

malnutrition. In South Sudan, approximately 7.1 million people (56.3%) were projected to face crisis-level or more severe food insecurity during the year, and more than 2.5 million children and women experienced acute malnutrition.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

While the AU committed to build resilient education systems, conflict and insecurity kept millions of children out of school. In violation of the Safe Schools Declaration (an intergovernmental agreement for the protection of education in armed conflict), hundreds of schools in conflict zones were destroyed in attacks or became shelters for the displaced. In Sudan, more than 17 million children remained out of school, with Save the Children reporting in May that attacks on schools had increased fourfold since the start of the conflict in April 2023. In West and Central Africa, UNICEF reported that more than 14,000 schools were closed due to conflict as of September, affecting 2.8 million children. In Burkina Faso, conflict forced the closure of 5,319 schools as of March, affecting nearly one million children.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Governments continued to fail to uphold their pledges made in the Abuja Declaration over two decades earlier to allocate 15% of their national budgets to healthcare. With governments spending on average only 7.4% of national budgets on healthcare, public health systems struggled to deliver quality services. Meanwhile, healthcare costs remained high, while the WHO warned in December that governments' heavy reliance on people to pay for their own healthcare was pushing more than 150 million people into poverty across the region. In Kenya, a new national health insurance system created difficulties in accessing healthcare for many patients. On a positive note, Ghana expanded its malaria vaccine roll-out while the Niger government announced a 50% reduction in patients' fees for medical treatment, laboratory tests, imaging and medical and surgical procedures, and abolished fees for childbirth and dialysis in public hospitals.

An Mpox outbreak affecting countries including Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Congo, the DRC and South Africa, caused alarm throughout the region. By 30 July, 14,250 Mpox cases and 456 deaths were reported in 10 countries, representing an increase of 160% and 19% respectively, in comparison to the same period in 2023. The DRC accounted for over 96% of all cases and deaths reported. In August the WHO declared the region's Mpox outbreak "a public health emergency of international concern".

FORCED EVICTIONS

Thousands of people were left homeless and destitute after governments carried out forced evictions in several countries, including Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya. In Congo, residents of Mpili, Kouilou department, were forcibly relocated to make way for potash extraction by a Chinese company. In Kenya, the government demolished the homes of at least 6,000 households in the Mathare and Mukuru Kwa Njenga settlements of Nairobi amid heavy rainfall and flooding.

Governments must immediately act to address socio-economic hardships, including by taking swift action to prevent hunger, and addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity; endorsing and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration and ensuring access to education for children in conflict zones; prioritizing public spending on healthcare in line with the Abuja Declaration; ending forced evictions and adopting moratoriums on mass evictions pending the establishment of adequate legal and procedural safeguards for those threatened with eviction.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Excessive use of force by security forces was common. Police killings and mass arrests of protesters were documented in countries including Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Senegal. In Guinea, a 17-year-old protester was shot dead in February during a trade union strike. In March, two boys aged eight and 14 were shot dead when a power cut in the city of Kindia sparked protests. In Senegal, security forces killed four people, including a 16-year-old boy, during protests in February objecting to delayed presidential elections. In Kenya, the national human rights institution documented 60 deaths in June and July during anti-Finance Bill protests. More than 600 protesters were arrested between June and August. Following Mozambique's disputed October elections, security forces unleashed the worst crackdown on protests in years. At least 277 people died, including children and bystanders. In Nigeria, at least 24 people were killed during the #EndBadGovernance protests in August while more than 1,000 were detained.

Brutal repression of protests by security forces was also reported in Angola, Benin, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and Uganda. In other countries, including Chad, Tanzania, Togo and Zambia, authorities banned protests. In Tanzania, more than 500 people affiliated to the opposition Chadema party were arrested in August for allegedly violating a ban on a youth conference. In September the police announced a ban on all Chadema protests. In Togo, demonstrations and meetings planned by opposition political parties and civil society to discuss proposed constitutional changes were routinely banned.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Governments targeted critics with intimidation, arrest and judicial harassment. In Cameroon, the minister of territorial administration banned in October "any media debate on the state of the President" following rumours about President Biya's health. In Eswatini, authorities continued to use a 2008 anti-terrorism law to target government critics. In Madagascar, authorities used Predator spyware to monitor political opposition members. In Senegal, politician Ahmed Suzanne Camara was arrested and charged in July with "offending the head of state" after he called the president and the prime minister liars. Another politician, Cheikhna Keita, was arrested in September after speaking on TV about tensions between the president and the prime minister.

In Uganda, eight musicians were arrested by military officials in April when they were overheard during a public event complaining about a speech by President Museveni. Also in April, a court barred social media activist Ibrahim Musana from mentioning on social media the names of several government officials, including President Museveni, pending the determination of a case against him on charges including promoting hate speech. In July a court sentenced Edward Awebwa to six years' imprisonment for sharing videos mocking the president. In Zambia, authorities filed flimsy charges against several critics for exposing allegations of corruption or criticizing government officials. For example, Raphael Nakacinda, secretary general of the opposition Patriotic Front party, was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for "defaming the president" under a law that was repealed in 2021.

Several governments sought to introduce new restrictions on the right to freedom of expression. In Equatorial Guinea, parliament began debating in March a cybercrime bill that would introduce new restrictions on social media use. In Gambia and Lesotho, there were fears that cybercrime bills before the respective parliaments would lead to abuses of and restrictions on the right to freedom of expression if passed without amendments. In Niger, authorities reinstated jail sentences for defamation and related offences, reversing progress previously made on the right to freedom of expression.

Governments ignored a call by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in March to refrain from interrupting telecommunication and internet services and/or blocking access to digital platforms. Such practices were reported in countries including Comoros, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal and Sudan. In Sudan, a near-total telecommunication blackout in February posed serious risks to the coordination of emergency assistance and humanitarian services to millions of people caught up in conflict.

MEDIA FREEDOM

Crackdowns against journalists fostered a climate of fear leading to self-censorship. Journalists were threatened, physically assaulted and/or arbitrarily arrested in Angola, Chad, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Tanzania, Togo, Zimbabwe and other countries. As of 10 December, eight journalists had been killed in Africa, five of them in Sudan, according to the International Federation of Journalists. Chadian journalist Idriss Yaya was murdered, together with his wife and four-year-old son, in March after receiving threats, likely linked to his reporting of escalating communal conflicts in the Mongo region.

More than two decades after Eritrea's free press was dismantled, there remained no form of registered, privately owned media. In Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Tanzania, Togo and elsewhere, authorities suspended or threatened to suspend the operations of media houses and newspapers. In Burkina Faso, authorities suspended the broadcasters TV5 Monde, BBC and Voice of America, as well as access to the websites of nine Burkinabe media organizations, for two weeks in retaliation for their reporting on the Nodin and Soro massacres. In Guinea, the government ordered the revocation of operating licences for several radio and TV stations for alleged "non-compliance with content specifications". In Tanzania, regulatory authorities suspended for 30 days the digital platforms of The Citizen, claiming that the platforms had published material that disrupted "national unity and social peace" in connection with a video about missing or murdered people. In Togo, authorities suspended the accreditations of all foreign journalists for the coverage of the April elections.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Civil society organizations' ability to organize and freely conduct their activities were curtailed. In Côte d'Ivoire, the government adopted an ordinance regulating such organizations' activities, sparking fears that it would be used to interfere in their finances and control their activities. The Ethiopian authorities arbitrarily suspended the licences of five national human rights organizations and four of the suspensions were still in place at the end of the year. In Guinea, the government suspended the renewal of NGOs' operating licences for four months pending an assessment of their activities. In Rwanda, a new law imposed restrictions on budgeting and management decisions of national NGOs.

In Uganda, an amendment to the NGO law paved the way for the dissolution of the semi-autonomous NGO Bureau and its re-establishment as a department within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, signalling a move towards centralized decision-making, control and increased government oversight of NGO affairs. In Zimbabwe, the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill 2024 – pending before the Senate at the year's end – contained provisions that could be used to restrict civic space and threaten the existence, independence and operations of civil society organizations.

Governments must ensure law enforcement agencies comply with international human rights law and standards, including on the use of force; end all forms of harassment against those exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly; and create a safe and enabling environment for civil society organizations to function.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Arbitrary arrests and detentions of opposition activists and human rights defenders were witnessed in many countries, including Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Angola, the health of detained activists Adolfo Campos and Gildo das Ruas deteriorated drastically when they were denied medical care. In Chad, following the killing of opposition leader Yaya Dillo in February during an assault by security forces on his party headquarters, 25 of his relatives were arrested, most of whom were detained in a high-security prison without access to legal representation or medical care. In July, 14 were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and 10 others acquitted, while one remained in detention without charge. However, in November and December, they were all released without explanation. In Mali, the gendarmerie arrested 11 politicians in June for holding a meeting in Bamako, the capital. Accused of "disturbing public order and plotting against the state", they were released in December.

Elsewhere in the region, authorities increasingly used mass arrests, rounding up hundreds of people. In Congo, 580 people were arrested in May and June after Brazzaville authorities launched Opération Coup de Poing to combat crime. In Ethiopia, hundreds of people were arrested nationwide on the pretext of enforcing a state of emergency. In the Amhara region, the federal army and security forces launched a new mass arrest campaign in September, detaining thousands of people in four days. In Mozambique, hundreds were arrested ahead of the October general elections for their support or membership of the opposition Optimist Party for the Development of Mozambique. Thousands more were arrested in the post-election period. In Zimbabwe, authorities intensified their crackdown on peaceful dissent, arresting more than 160 people, including opposition members, union leaders, students and journalists, ahead of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community held on 17 August in Harare, the capital. Earlier, in June, police had arrested 78 people during a raid on a private gathering at the home of Jameson Timba, party leader of the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change.

Enforced disappearances remained pervasive, including in Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. In Kenya, the Law Society reported that at least 72 people were forcibly disappeared in connection with the anti-Finance Bill protests. In Guinea, Omar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah, members of the National Front for the Defence of the Constitution, arrested in July, and journalist Habib Marouane Camara, arrested in early December, remained forcibly disappeared at the year's end.

Governments must end the use of arbitrary arrests and detentions, and enforced disappearances of human rights defenders, activists, journalists, opponents and government critics; immediately and unconditionally release anyone detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights; and disclose the fate and whereabouts of anyone subjected to enforced disappearance.

RIGHTS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE, REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

With more than 11 million internally displaced people, of whom 8.6 million had been displaced since April 2023, Sudan suffered the largest displacement crisis in the world. Other countries with staggering numbers of internally displaced people included the DRC (7.3 million), Burkina Faso (2 million), South Sudan (2 million), Somalia (552,000), CAR (455,533) and Mali (331,000). Living conditions in internally displaced people's camps remained deplorable, with

continuous attacks by armed groups exacerbating the situation. In August, the UN declared famine conditions in Zamzam camp for internally displaced people in Sudan's North Darfur region.

The number of refugees from conflict zones continued to soar. Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries exceeded 3.2 million. They lived in dire conditions, including in Egypt where hundreds were arbitrarily detained pending their forced return to Sudan. Between January and March, Egyptian authorities forcibly returned an estimated 800 Sudanese nationals.

More than 20,000 migrants from various countries were expelled from Algeria to Assamaka, a town in Niger's Agadez region, between January and August. In May, several people died of apparent exhaustion en route to or on arrival in Assamaka.

Governments must end the arbitrary detention of refugees and migrants on the basis of their migration status and protect them from forced returns and mass expulsions.

DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALIZATION

The rape and murder of seven-year-old Heaven Awot in Ethiopia and the death of three girls after undergoing female genital mutilation (FGM) in Sierra Leone became emblematic of the prevalence of sexual violence against women and girls across the region. However, positive developments were recorded in several countries. In Côte d'Ivoire, the National Assembly adopted an amendment to the Criminal Code to allow abortion in cases of incest. Equatorial Guinea's government adopted a declaration outlining measures to address gender disparities and promote women's empowerment. Gambia's parliament rejected a bill to overturn the ban on FGM. Sierra Leone enacted a law banning early and child marriage. In South Africa, the High Court in Pretoria declared sections of a law dealing with sexual offences unconstitutional for providing a subjective test for criminal intent where sexual violence is not criminalized if a perpetrator wrongly and unreasonably believed that the complainant consented.

As activists marked the 10th anniversary of the ACHPR resolution 275 on protection from violence of LGBTI people, authorities continued to weaponize legal systems to target and discriminate against them. In Mali a new Criminal Code was adopted under which consensual same-sex sexual conduct was punishable by imprisonment and a fine. In Burkina Faso, a draft family code threatened to criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations. Ghana's parliament passed a bill which further criminalized LGBTI people. In Malawi and Uganda, courts ruled to uphold bans on consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. In Eswatini, the government continued its refusal to register an LGBTI organization. In contrast, positive developments elsewhere included the introduction in Botswana of a constitutional amendment bill that could protect intersex people from discrimination. The Namibian High Court struck down legislation outlawing consensual same-sex sexual conduct.

Governments must combat all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence against women and girls, including by addressing the root causes, and increasing efforts to eliminate harmful practices. Governments must repeal anti-LGBTI laws and refrain from efforts to criminalize consensual same-sexual conduct.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

High income countries with primary responsibility for causing climate change failed to make adequate funding available for loss and damage and for adaptation measures. Consequently, millions of people endured drought while thousands were affected by torrential rain and floods. Deaths from flooding were reported in countries including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mali and Niger. In Niger and Mali, at least 339 and 177 people died in floods,

respectively. In Madagascar, Cyclone Gamane resulted in 18 deaths, displaced 20,737 people and damaged vital infrastructure including roads and bridges.

The securing by several governments of funding to address the climate change crisis came at the cost of increasing debt burdens. Côte d'Ivoire secured USD 1.3 billion to improve its climate resilience and transition to renewable energy. Namibia secured USD 10 billion to develop so-called "green hydrogen". Meanwhile, the South African government announced the establishment of a climate change fund to respond to the impacts of climate change and build resilience. In Madagascar, the government committed to a 28% reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2030. Other developments included the Congolese government's suspension of operations at the Metssa Congo recycling company in Vindoulou, Pointe-Noire department, due to potential risks to the health of the surrounding populations and environment. Senegalese authorities suspended until mid-2027 all mining activities along the Falémé river because of health and environmental concerns relating to the use of chemicals during mining.

Governments must take immediate measures to protect against the effects of climate change and strengthen their preparedness for extreme weather events, including by seeking international assistance and climate finance from higher income countries, especially those most responsible for climate change.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Impunity remained entrenched in many countries. In Eswatini, the government failed to investigate extrajudicial killings carried out between 2021 and 2024, including the killing of human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko in 2023. In Ethiopia, the government continued to dismiss crimes documented by human rights bodies while its "transitional justice" initiative, limited to reconciliation, remained largely a paper exercise. In Senegal, an amnesty law passed in March halted prosecutions for the killings of 65 protesters and bystanders between March 2021 and February 2024.

However, measures to promote justice and accountability for crimes under international law were recorded in several countries. In CAR, the UN-backed Special Criminal Court arrested two suspects and issued an international arrest warrant for former president François Bozizé for alleged crimes against humanity linked to actions by his presidential guard between 2009 and 2013. Gambia's National Assembly passed laws in April to establish the Special Accountability Mechanism and the Special Prosecutor's Office. In December, ECOWAS agreed to establish the Special Tribunal for the Gambia, demonstrating progress towards accountability for crimes committed under former president Yahya Jammeh. In South Sudan, laws to establish truth and reparations commissions were enacted, but the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan remained stalled.

In a few cases, prosecutions of suspected perpetrators resulted in convictions. In Guinea, the Dixinn Criminal Court convicted eight people, including former president Moussa Dadis Camara, for crimes against humanity in connection with the September 2009 stadium massacre. The ICC sentenced Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz to 10 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Mali between May 2012 and January 2023.

Governments must strengthen measures to prevent and combat impunity by undertaking prompt, thorough, independent, impartial, effective and transparent investigations into crimes under international law and other serious or grave human rights violations and abuses, bringing suspected perpetrators to justice and ensuring victims' access to an effective remedy.

AMERICAS REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Human rights defenders in the Americas were stigmatized, harassed and attacked, including through arbitrary detention, defamatory campaigns, enforced disappearances, forced displacements, illegal surveillance, killings, threats, torture and unfair trials.

Freedom of expression was at risk due to attacks on and harassment of the press, including the killing of journalists and unlawful surveillance of the population. Restrictive regulations and repression by law enforcement posed obstacles to the right to protest.

States failed to investigate and redress gross human rights violations and crimes under international law, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions. There were some limited developments in accountability for political repression and crimes committed in the past. The Inter-American human rights system continued to be a key player in the region's efforts to achieve truth, justice and reparation.

Unfair trials and arbitrary and mass detentions continued to be a daily occurrence as a form of repression or as part of public security strategies. In some countries, unfair trials were held before tribunals and courts lacking independence.

Anti-Black racism and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples continued to be prevalent in the region. Discrimination against LGBTI people was recorded throughout the region. Violence severely affected transgender people.

States failed to take the necessary actions to minimize the human rights impacts of the climate crisis. Wildfires, rising sea levels, coastal erosion and floods affected communities in several countries.

States did not fulfil their obligations to guarantee economic and social rights, which particularly affected groups that suffer discrimination. Poverty and inequality were prevalent in the region. Health services were inadequate and underfunded, and food insecurity affected millions.

Gender-based violence, including femicide and sexual violence, continued unabated and unpunished throughout the region. Access to abortion was hindered in law and practice, mainly affecting people facing multiple forms of discrimination. Several countries introduced policies in law or practice that reduced access to reproductive health services.

Indigenous Peoples continued to be subjected to violence, discrimination and marginalization, and several states denied them their right to free, prior and informed consent. Abuses by state and non-state actors were often linked to land tenure, titling issues and extractive industries.

Thousands of people continued to leave their countries and move across the region seeking international protection, due to persecution, human rights violations, insecurity and the adverse effects of climate change. Many migrants, refugees and asylum seekers faced violence, xenophobia and racism, and legal and bureaucratic obstacles to exercising their rights.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The Americas continued to be dangerous for human rights defenders, with violations including arbitrary detention, defamatory campaigns, enforced disappearances, forced displacements, illegal surveillance, killings, threats, torture and unfair trials. Across the region, the most vulnerable human rights defenders belonged to particular groups, such as women, Afro-descendants, Indigenous persons and LGBTI people. Women searching for disappeared people faced high levels of risk.

Land, territory and environmental defenders were at particular risk of attacks and harassment by governmental authorities and non-state actors including in Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. In Bolivia, park rangers protecting the Madidi National Park were subjected to threats and attacks, while in Peru, four land, territory and environmental defenders were killed, including three Indigenous leaders.

Governments failed to guarantee adequate protection mechanisms for human rights defenders. In Brazil, the Protection Programme for Human Rights Defenders operated in fewer than half the country's states. In Honduras, local organizations raised concerns over the weakness and ineffectiveness of the national protection mechanism. In Peru, the Ministry of the Interior continued to lack a protocol to coordinate the protection of human rights defenders with the police. Despite this trend, there were some limited advances in Guatemala where the government reactivated the official body responsible for the analysis of risks to human rights defenders.

States must guarantee that human rights defenders are able to carry out their work safely and without fear of reprisals. NGOs and other human rights associations and movements must be respected and allowed to conduct their work.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Civic space as an intersection of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly was threatened by governments in the region in a concerning and growing trend.

Freedom of expression was at risk due to attacks on and harassment of the press in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. In Colombia and Mexico, a number of these attacks resulted in violent deaths. In Argentina and El Salvador, female journalists experienced digital violence, including sexual harassment.

Journalists were criminalized and stigmatized by state authorities in several countries. In Cuba, between September and October at least 20 journalists were summoned by the authorities, threatened with criminal prosecution and forced to record videos incriminating themselves. Their mobile phones and laptops were confiscated. In Nicaragua, media outlets had their assets confiscated; in Venezuela, radio stations continued to be shut down and the government hindered access to social media platforms. In Mexico, at least four journalists were killed and the personal information of 324 journalists provided to the presidency for accreditation purposes was leaked and posted on a website.

Some governments continued their efforts to control, restrict or close down NGOs. Paraguay and Venezuela approved bills that would increase control over civil society organizations and lead to arbitrary restrictions, including closure and criminal proceedings against their members. A similar bill was proposed in Peru but was still pending approval at the end of the year.

Unlawful surveillance and other privacy violations continued. In Argentina and Chile, there were reports of mass surveillance through facial recognition and other technologies. In the USA, similar concerns were raised about a mobile application with facial recognition and GPS tracking, which was mandatory for migration and refugee processes. In Colombia, there was controversy around the alleged purchase in 2021 of Pegasus, highly invasive spyware that enables full and unrestricted access to a device, and its use.

Repression and the obstruction of protest continued to be a concern in the region. Protests were repressed by law enforcement in Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, the USA and Venezuela, among others. In Canada and the USA, peaceful university demonstrations against Israel's genocide in Gaza were met with violence from law enforcement officials. According to the NGO the Venezuelan Observatory on Social Conflict, between 29 and 30 July, 915 protests were registered in the country, out of which 138 were repressed by security forces and pro-

government armed groups. New restrictive regulations on the right to protest were approved or proposed in Argentina, Nicaragua and Peru, highlighting the deterioration of civic space.

States must protect civic space and repeal laws and practices that hinder the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and prohibit unlawful surveillance by state and private actors.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

States failed to investigate and redress enforced disappearances in the region. In Argentina, the executive ordered the closure of the Special Investigation Unit for the search of children appropriated and forcibly disappeared during the 1976-1983 military regime. In Peru, a law instituting a statute of limitations to crimes against humanity and war crimes committed before 2002 came into effect. New cases of enforced disappearances occurred in Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Venezuela.

Unlawful killings were committed with impunity; some cases might constitute extrajudicial executions. In Ecuador, the Public Prosecutor's Office noted a spike in reports of possible extrajudicial executions during the first half of the year. In Mexico, military personnel attacked and killed people in several states, including migrants and children. In Venezuela, at least 24 people died as a result of government repression of protests after a contested presidential election. Detainees in Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Venezuela experienced torture and other ill-treatment in prisons.

In Haiti, abuses by criminal gangs continued unabated. Gangs were responsible for countless abuses, including killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions and denial of humanitarian access.

Lack of accountability for human rights violations during protests and other political repression in previous years continued in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela. Some positive developments were registered during the year, however, including the start of criminal proceedings in recent cases of repression in Chile and Peru. In Brazil, five military police officers were charged with kidnapping and false imprisonment in the case of Davi Fiuza, who was forcibly disappeared in 2014. In October, two men were convicted for the 2018 killing of councillor and human rights defender Marielle Franco and her driver Anderson Gomes. In Paraguay, a former police officer was sentenced to 30 years in prison for torture committed in 1976, during the military regime.

Truth and reparation mechanisms were fruitful but remained insufficient. In Brazil, memory and truth policies were partially resumed, including the Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances. In Mexico, the Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification presented two reports addressing grave human rights violations between 1965 and 1990. In Peru, a court order initiated the process of comprehensive reparations for victims of forced sterilizations during the 1990s. The ICC authorized the resumption of the investigation into alleged crimes against humanity in Venezuela.

The Inter-American human rights system continued to be a key player in the region's efforts to achieve truth, justice and reparation. Among other issues, it expressed concern about mercury poisoning of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, promoted land recovery for the Garifuna community in Honduras and issued protection orders for people arbitrarily detained in Nicaragua. It also determined Colombia responsible for a campaign of persecution against the Lawyers Collective "José Alvear Restrepo" and Argentina responsible for failing to adopt reasonable measures to prevent the 1994 attack at the headquarters of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association centre.

States must guarantee truth, justice and reparations for human rights violations and crimes under international law and bring all those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian tribunals.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Unfair trials and arbitrary detentions continued to be a daily occurrence as a form of repression or as part of public security strategies. In Cuba, 14 people were convicted for participating in peaceful protests in 2022 in the municipality of Nuevitas. In Guatemala, former prosecutor Virgina Laparra was declared guilty in an unfounded criminal proceeding shortly after being released in another arbitrary proceeding, which forced her to go into exile. The Mechanism for the Recognition of Political Prisoners in Nicaragua documented at least 151 individuals in the country detained for political reason. In the USA, Leonard Peltier, a Native American activist, continued to serve two life sentences despite serious concerns about his conviction and sentencing. In Venezuela, human rights defenders and journalists continued to be criminalized and arbitrarily detained, but people from all walks of life were at risk with at least 2,000 arbitrary detentions recorded after the elections, including 200 children.

Mass detentions, as well as detention without due process, in relation to security strategies continued to be a concern. In Ecuador, thousands of possible arbitrary arrests were carried out by law enforcement with apparently little justification. A report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) confirmed that the state of emergency in El Salvador had led to mass arbitrary detentions. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention expressed concern regarding the systematic use of arbitrary detention in Mexico, including the use of *arraigo* (precautionary detention without charge) and automatic pretrial detention. Despite this, the Mexican Congress increased the list of offences to which automatic pretrial detention applies. In the USA, authorities expanded the system of arbitrary mass immigration detention.

In some countries, such as Venezuela, arbitrary arrests were accompanied by short-term enforced disappearances and often followed by unfair trials before courts lacking independence. The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers expressed concern for the right to independent and impartial judges in Bolivia, after judicial elections were delayed for more than a year. During a country visit to Guatemala, the IACHR pointed out that unfounded criminalization was evidence of a lack of judicial independence in the country. Mexico amended its constitution to incorporate the election of judges at all levels, undermining judicial independence.

Authorities must take all the necessary measures to put an end to arbitrary detentions and to guarantee the right to a fair trial.

DISCRIMINATION

Anti-Black racism and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples continued to be prevalent in the region. In August, the IACHR recognized that structural racism and racial discrimination posed barriers to the full enjoyment of the rights of Afro-descendant people and tribal communities and called on states to implement comprehensive reparatory justice.

Law enforcement actions were targeted against, or disproportionately affected, Afro-descendants in Brazil, Ecuador and the USA. In Canada, the Federal Court heard an application to certify a class action brought by current and former federal public service workers against the government for anti-Black racism in recruitment. In the Dominican Republic, racial discrimination remained widespread and structural, particularly towards Dominicans of Haitian descent and Haitian asylum seekers seeking protection.

In Brazil, 537,941 Indigenous individuals faced food insecurity, according to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples. In Canada, the police killed nine Indigenous People in separate incidents in one month. In Colombia, Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities continued to experience disproportionate impacts from human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law and were disproportionately affected by large-scale forced displacement.

Discrimination against LGBTI individuals was recorded in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, the USA and Venezuela. Violence severely affected transgender people. In Brazil, in a report published in 2024, the human rights group Grupo Gay da Bahia reported 257 violent deaths in 2023, mainly affecting young Black transgender individuals. In Colombia at least 21 transgender women were killed, according to the NGO Affirmative Caribbean. In Mexico, the media and civil society organizations reported at least 59 femicides of transgender women.

States must take the necessary measures to end racism, discrimination and other forms of intolerance and ensure redress for victims.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

States failed to take the necessary actions to minimize the human rights impacts of the climate crisis. Governments did not properly address their commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and phase out the use of fossil fuels. Countries including Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela increased oil extraction and gas flaring. Canada and the USA, both high-income and high-emitting countries, failed to address the use of fossil fuels in the production of energy and remained major emitters of greenhouse gases. They also blocked agreement on an adequate new climate finance target at COP29.

Fires in the region, especially in the Amazon basin, caused massive loss of fragile ecosystems and affected the ability of carbon sinks to mitigate global warming. There were extensive wildfires in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and the USA. The response of governments to the effects of fires on ecosystems and human rights, including those of Indigenous Peoples and rural communities, was insufficient.

The worsening effects of climate change, including rising sea levels, coastal erosion and floods, affected communities throughout the Americas region. Flooding in Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil affected 2.3 million people and displaced 600,000. In Honduras, communities in the Gulf of Fonseca reported negative impacts on their livelihoods caused by rising sea levels. In Mexico, families from the El Bosque community, who had been evacuated in 2023 due to sea level rises attributed to climate change, were relocated and received new homes following legal actions by community members.

Governments must urgently address the effects of the climate crisis on human rights by taking local, national and region-wide action, including phasing out fossil fuels and by seeking international assistance and climate finance when needed. High-income, high-emitting countries must provide adequate climate finance.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

States did not fulfil their obligations to guarantee economic and social rights, which particularly affected groups that suffer discrimination. Poverty and inequality remained problematic in the region. In Argentina, the introduction of austerity measures had a disproportionate impact on children and older people.

Health services were inadequate and underfunded, affecting access to services and medicines in Brazil, Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela. In Brazil, dengue fever cases surged leaving 6,041 dead, compared with 1,179 deaths in 2023. In Haiti, the health system faced serious challenges that brought it to the brink of collapse. In Puerto Rico, the health and lives of people dependent on electrical equipment were put at risk by the inadequate electricity supply. In Uruguay, access to mental health services was insufficient in the face of growing demand. Despite the recommendation of a 6% GDP health expenditure by the Pan American Health Organization, Mexico allocated only 2.9% of GDP and Paraguay only 4%, to name two examples.

Food insecurity affected millions, including children, in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and Venezuela. In Argentina, the minimum pension benefit failed to cover the cost of living. In Cuba, the government significantly reduced the supply of subsidized "basic food baskets" and people had to stand in long lines to access groceries. Almost half the population in Haiti needed humanitarian assistance, with alarming levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food visited Venezuela and reported that nearly 53% of the population was exposed to extreme poverty with insufficient income to purchase a "basic food basket".

States must take all necessary measures to tackle poverty and inequality and to meet their human rights obligations regarding economic, social and cultural rights.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence, including femicide, continued unabated and unpunished throughout the region. A variety of sources reported alarming numbers of femicides in the region, including in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela. Neither Cuba nor the Dominican Republic had legislation making femicide a specific criminal offence.

In Argentina, a femicide was reported every 33 hours; despite this, the government implemented budgetary cuts to policies addressing gender-based violence. There were limited developments in Guatemala as the government acknowledged state responsibility for the feminicides of Maria Isabel Véliz Franco and Claudina Velásquez in the early 2000s, as ruled by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

Other forms of violence also affected women and girls in the region. In Brazil, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office was actively monitoring cases of gender-based political violence against women. In Canada, organizations called on the Ontario state government and municipalities to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. In the Dominican Republic, the media reported sexual and gender-based violence during immigration operations. In Haiti, sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, increased in the first half of the year. In Peru, the government registered 12,924 cases of rape against women and girls. In the USA, government data indicated that American Indian and Alaska Native women were 2.2 times more likely to experience sexual violence than non-Indigenous women.

Authorities must end impunity for violent crimes against women and girls and increase efforts to prevent them.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Access to abortion continued to be hindered in law and practice, disproportionately affecting people facing intersecting forms of discrimination. The Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua continued to prohibit abortion in all circumstances. Partial criminalization of abortion remained a source of concern. In Brazil, the Ministry of Women reported that the prohibition of abortion disproportionately affected women living in poverty. In Peru, only therapeutic abortion was legal and access to such abortions was inadequate. Venezuela made no progress in improving sexual and reproductive rights, and abortion remained criminalized.

Several countries introduced policies in law or practice that reduced access to reproductive health services. In Argentina, the National Directorate of Sexual and Reproductive Health announced that there was a shortage of essential supplies for abortion services. In Chile, healthcare institutions and professionals refused to perform abortion services on the grounds of their moral or religious views, undermining pregnant people's right to access abortion. In Puerto Rico, the Senate approved Bill PS 495, introducing restrictions on abortions for minors,

requiring the authorization of a parent or guardian for the procedure. In the USA, bans and restrictions on abortion threatened people's rights to life and health, and exacerbated barriers to abortion for Black and other racialized people, Indigenous Peoples, undocumented immigrants, transgender people, rural residents and people living in poverty. Medical professionals increasingly left states with severe abortion bans, increasing regional inequality in access to reproductive healthcare and particularly affecting rural and low-income areas.

Nevertheless, some progress was registered with health authorities in Colombia publishing regulations granting access to lawful abortion services up until 24 weeks of pregnancy, as mandated by a 2022 Constitutional Court ruling. In Mexico, seven states adopted legislation decriminalizing abortion, although another one reduced it from 12 to six weeks.

Authorities must guarantee access to safe abortions and other sexual and reproductive rights.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Indigenous Peoples continued to be subjected to discrimination and marginalization, and states failed to respect their rights. The right to free, prior and informed consent was denied in several countries. The Bolivian government failed to implement meaningful processes to guarantee consent for extractive projects affecting Indigenous territories. Canada negotiated a free trade agreement with Ecuador without consulting with Indigenous Peoples in the country.

Abuses by state and non-state actors were frequently linked to land tenure and titling issues. In Brazil, hundreds of conflicts affecting Indigenous Peoples largely stemmed from the lack of land demarcation and the demarcation process advanced slowly. In Guatemala, dozens of peasant (*campesino*) and Indigenous communities were at risk of forced evictions. In Paraguay, the Tekoha Sauce Indigenous community of the Avá Guaraní Paranaense people were still waiting for the restitution of their ancestral territory, appropriated by the Itaipú Binational hydroelectric dam. The IACHR expressed concern about the ongoing impacts of illegal mining on the life, health and survival of the Yanomami people in Venezuela.

Indigenous Peoples continued to face harassment and violence throughout the region, including a lack of state protection against violence in Brazil, harassment by law enforcement officials in Chile, and internal forced displacement in Mexico and Nicaragua. In Colombia, the Ombudsperson's Office reported that 50% of children recruited by armed groups were Indigenous People. In Canada, the report of the Independent Special Interlocutor acknowledged that Indian Residential Schools were "colonial institutions of genocide". In the USA, the Department of the Interior published its final report on the Federal Indian Boarding School initiative, identifying at least 74 marked and unmarked burial sites at 65 schools and at least 973 confirmed deaths.

States must respect and protect Indigenous Peoples' rights, including ownership and control over their lands and resources, and take measures to eliminate discrimination and violence against them.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Thousands of people continued to leave their countries and move across the region, due to persecution, human rights violations, insecurity and the adverse effects of climate change. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers faced xenophobia and racism in the Americas. By the end of the year, more than 7.89 million Venezuelans had fled the country since 2015, while people also fled from Cuba, El Salvador, Haiti and Honduras due to violence and human rights violations. In June, the IACHR noted with concern that many states' responses to migration included externalization and militarization of borders and deportation without due process.

Refugees and migrants faced legal and bureaucratic obstacles to exercising their rights. In Canada, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program continued to tie migrant workers to a single employer who controlled their legal status and labour conditions, putting migrant workers at heightened risk of labour exploitation. In the Dominican Republic, authorities failed to inform new arrivals about the asylum process, imposed undue barriers for visas and residence permits, summarily and collectively expelled Haitians and implemented racist migration policies. In Mexico, the National Institute of Migration failed to expedite humanitarian visas to asylum seekers, preventing them from accessing their rights to health, education and work. In Peru, authorities continued to expel migrants and refugees without the guarantee that another country would receive them. The USA suspended the entry of asylum seekers at the USA-Mexico border, violating their right to seek safety and forcing them to wait in Mexico where they were exposed to extortion, abducted, and experienced discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence.

Refugees and migrants continued to face violence, harassment and threats. In the Dominican Republic, violence and excessive use of force were recurrent in raids, according to local NGOs. In Chile, Congress continued to discuss bills proposing the criminalization of refugees and migrants.

Authorities must cease unlawful deportations and respect the principle of non-refoulement. States must combat racism and xenophobia and guarantee all internationally recognized rights to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Political turmoil, repression and armed conflict contributed to a worrying human rights picture in the region. Yet despite huge risks, human rights defenders and activists continued to claim their rights and speak out against oppression.

New laws curtailed rights further, including to freedom of expression. Protests were frequently responded to with unlawful force often resulting in casualties. Political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists and others were subjected to surveillance, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment and unlawful killing. These and other violations were facilitated by impunity, although a court decision and truth commission recommendations offered hope of reparations for victims in Japan and South Korea.

Extreme weather, rising sea levels and other slow onset events caused more devastation, yet governments again failed to take the urgent action needed to tackle climate change and adapt to climate-related harms.

A significant escalation in the armed conflict in Myanmar resulted in further grave violations of international law. Rights, particularly those of women and girls, became even more restricted under Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and severe repression of dissent continued in China and North Korea.

There was progress towards recognition of LGBTI rights in some countries. However, systematic gender-based discrimination and violence against women, girls and LGBTI people remained pervasive. The rights of Indigenous Peoples and of ethnic and descent-based minorities were routinely ignored during extraction and development projects. Violations of economic and social rights, including to housing and education, remained high. People fleeing conflict and repression were too often put at risk by forcible deportations or indefinite arbitrary detention.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The space for freedom of expression continued to shrink across the region. In countries including Indonesia, Nepal and Papua New Guinea, media workers faced violence and intimidation. In Afghanistan, more media outlets were banned, including two private TV stations that were suspended for criticizing the Taliban. Journalists in Myanmar were sentenced to long prison sentences. In Pakistan, at least seven journalists were killed in targeted attacks and dozens of others were arrested and charged under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act.

New laws restricting the right to freedom of expression came into effect in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and Viet Nam. Sri Lanka's new Online Safety Act contained vaguely defined crimes and broad powers leading to fears that it would be used to further restrict free speech. In India, new laws replacing colonial-era legislation were also restrictive and the crime of sedition, used to suppress government critics, was retained. The Chinese government introduced new measures to prevent mainland internet users from using slang and other "obscure expressions" to evade online censorship. In Hong Kong, authorities rubber-stamped the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance which introduced broad definitions of "national security" and "state secrets" already applied in mainland China, along with stronger enforcement powers and harsher penalties.

Government critics faced prosecution in many countries. In Thailand, trials and imprisonment of pro-democracy activists under lese-majesty and other restrictive laws continued. In Cambodia, a journalist, internationally recognized for exposing human rights abuses in cyber scam compounds, was arrested and charged with incitement. In Singapore, government critics, including opponents of the death penalty, were required to post

"corrections" for spreading "online falsehoods". In Laos, two artists were detained for satirical social media posts criticizing poor road conditions, while in China, a renowned artist was detained for decades-old works criticizing the Communist Party leadership.

Tight control over on- and offline communications in some countries further restricted access to information and excessively limited freedom of expression. The North Korean government's ban on contact with the outside world continued. Arbitrary internet restrictions were imposed in Pakistan. In Bangladesh and India authorities imposed temporary internet blackouts ostensibly to maintain law and order, but in practice they were used to suppress dissent. In Malaysia, two filmmakers of a previously banned film were charged with "wounding religious feelings".

Concerns about the use of surveillance technologies continued. In Indonesia, Amnesty International documented the extensive sale and deployment of highly invasive spyware to and by state agencies and private companies. In Thailand, a court dismissed a case brought by a pro-democracy activist against cyber intelligence company NSO Group for its role in facilitating the use of its Pegasus spyware to hack his phone.

Attempts to silence critics abroad by some governments became more pervasive. Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students studying overseas continued to be subjected to surveillance. Hong Kong authorities issued further arrest warrants and cancelled the passports of pro-democracy activists living overseas, and offered financial rewards for information which could lead to arrests. A human rights lawyer who worked on political cases and was forcibly returned to China from Laos in 2023, was detained pending trial.

Governments must repeal or amend laws that violate the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, take measures to protect the expression of political and other opinions, including to safeguard media freedoms.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

Governments in the region responded to protests with repression. In Bangladesh, student protests sparked by the reinstatement of a law reserving a quota of government jobs for descendants of independence war veterans, were met with unlawful force. As anti-government demonstrations spread, the armed forces were deployed and "shoot-on-sight" orders issued, resulting in close to a thousand deaths – many more were injured. In Indonesia, police used excessive and unnecessary force against crowds protesting against changes to the election law. Although the proposed amendments were subsequently withdrawn, many demonstrators were injured and hundreds arbitrarily arrested.

In Nepal, protests were forcibly dispersed and peaceful demonstrators detained. Police in the capital, Kathmandu, used tear gas and water cannons to break up demonstrations on several occasions. In India, excessive force by police against farmers' protests resulted in at least one death. Hong Kong authorities deployed police to prevent commemorations of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. As in previous years, several people were arrested for participating in such events. In Papua New Guinea, police arrested and charged several men protesting against their eviction from an informal settlement in the capital, Port Moresby. Following a declaration of martial law by the president of South Korea, fundamental rights including the right to assembly were suspended – a move that was quickly reversed by the National Assembly. He was subsequently suspended from office and a warrant for his arrest was issued at the end of December.

Advocates for an end to the war in Gaza and Palestinian rights faced harassment and arrest. In Fiji, police banned demonstrators from carrying Israeli and Palestinian flags and intimidated peaceful protesters. Authorities in Singapore investigated several people for protesting against arms sales to Israel and charged three others who were attempting to deliver a petition against the war to the Presidential Palace. In the Maldives, two women were arrested at

demonstrations demanding boycotts on Israeli products. In Malaysia, police detained pro-Palestinian protesters outside the US embassy in the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

The right to freedom of association also came under further attack. In Thailand, a court ordered the disbandment of the opposition Move Forward Party, which had won the highest number of seats in the 2023 parliamentary elections. Eleven of the party's executives were also banned from running for office. In the Philippines, the government continued to target "red-tagged" activists and organizations accused of links to banned communist groups by charging them with terrorism-related offences. In Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, garment workers were prevented from exercising their right to freedom of association to address low wages and extreme informalization of labour. In Bangladesh, at least one garment worker was killed and dozens of others injured when police fired on a protest for higher wages.

Governments should ensure the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association are protected. Unlawful use of force against protesters must be prevented and laws, policies and practices that violate the rights of peaceful assembly and association reviewed and changed.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Extreme weather, slow onset events and toxic air pollution exacerbated by climate change had devastating consequences across the region, disproportionately affecting the poorest and most marginalized. High income, high emitting countries in the region worked with other higher income countries to block agreement at COP29 on an adequate level of climate finance that was being demanded by lower income countries.

South Asia was again impacted by extreme heat and severe floods which affected the lives of millions. In India's Assam state, floods resulted in the deaths of at least 113 people. In Bangladesh, 500,000 people were displaced. Flooding and landslides in Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan also resulted in hundreds of deaths and displaced thousands. Air pollution in India's capital, Delhi, and in cities in Pakistan reached record levels causing deaths in both countries, particularly among members of marginalized communities.

Some progress towards reducing carbon emissions or improving environmental protections was evident, but overall, the regional response to climate change and environmental degradation was insufficient. In China, capacity to generate energy from non-fossil fuel sources exceeded that from fossil fuels for the first time. However, the pace of China's construction of coal-fired power plants abroad remained concerning. In Papua New Guinea, 30% of land was allocated for conservation, although the country remained heavily reliant on fossil fuels. A landmark court decision in South Korea required the government to revise greenhouse emissions targets to protect the rights of future generations. Pacific Island nations supported the start of hearings by the International Court of Justice on states' obligations and responsibilities surrounding climate change.

Many other governments failed to meet fossil fuel reduction and other targets, even when they had committed to them. Japan's investment in overseas liquefied natural gas projects continued to undermine global efforts to reduce fossil fuel use. Australia undermined progress with its plans to increase, rather than scale down, coal and gas production by 2030. A new law in New Zealand weakened environmental protections, and a draft energy law and regulation in Indonesia were criticized for failing to facilitate the transition to net zero emissions. Despite suffering severe climate-induced harms, India's climate change targets continued to be rated "highly insufficient".

Environmental human rights defenders continued to be targeted for their work. They included a leading figure in the climate change movement imprisoned in Viet Nam, who went on hunger strike for the third time to protest against deplorable detention conditions. In

Cambodia, 10 environmental activists associated with the Mother Nature movement were convicted of "plotting" and "insulting the King".

Governments must increase investment in disaster preparedness and adaptation and prioritize the protection of marginalized and other groups disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, including by seeking international assistance and climate finance, if needed. Higher income and other high-emitting countries must take the lead in climate mitigation, including by stopping the expansion of fossil fuel production, ending fossil fuel subsidies, and ensuring that their climate policies are consistent with keeping global warming within 1.5°C.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS, AND TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Human rights defenders, political activists and others were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention in many countries in the region. Those detained often faced torture and other ill-treatment.

In Afghanistan, more than 20,000 people, including 1,500 women, were reportedly imprisoned. They included perceived political opponents and individuals accused of violating the Taliban's morality code. Detainees were at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Extrajudicial killings of detainees were also reported. North Korean authorities continued to hold thousands of people in political prison camps, where they faced inhuman conditions and torture and other ill-treatment including sexual violence.

In China, labour rights activists and citizen journalists were among those sentenced to prison terms for advocating for human rights. In Hong Kong, 45 pro-democracy activists were sentenced to up to 10 years in prison after being found guilty of "conspiring to commit subversion" for organizing unofficial election primaries. Prisoners in Viet Nam serving long sentences for opposing the government suffered ill health and were denied access to medical care. In Pakistan, more than 100 civilians were held in military custody for participating in protests against the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan in 2023; 85 were sentenced to prison terms by military courts. Senior opposition leaders remained in detention awaiting trial. The Sri Lankan government's much criticized and highly abusive anti-drugs campaign continued, leading to the arbitrary detention of tens of thousands of people, mainly from marginalized socio-economic groups.

Authorities must refrain from misusing the justice system against political opponents and others exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression, peaceful protest and other human rights. States must release and compensate those who are arbitrarily detained and prohibit and criminalize torture and other acts of ill-treatment.

IMPUNITY AND THE RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Despite some progress towards justice for victims of human rights violations in several countries, impunity continued to be the norm in the region and fuelled further violations.

In Pakistan and the Philippines, where there has been little or no accountability for long-standing patterns of enforced disappearances, labour and land rights activists, political opponents and journalists were among those forcibly disappeared during the year. Lack of access to justice in Afghanistan further enabled the culture of impunity and continued human rights violations. The Chinese government took no steps towards establishing accountability for possible crimes against humanity against members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The Indian government not only failed to intervene to stop ethnic violence in the state of Manipur, but also did not pursue prosecutions

against members of armed vigilante groups responsible for human rights abuses during the violence. In Papua, Indonesia, unlawful killings of civilians continued with impunity in the context of the armed separatist struggle.

There were also moments of hope. In Japan, the Supreme Court ruled that victims of a former "eugenics" law, under which more than 16,000 people with disabilities or chronic illnesses were forcibly sterilized, should receive compensation. A report issued by a truth commission in South Korea on the coerced adoption of thousands of babies between 1961 and 1987 recommended reparations for victims. In Bangladesh, the new interim government established a commission of inquiry to investigate enforced disappearances of activists, political opponents and others between 2009 and 2024.

However, justice efforts faltered elsewhere. In Nepal, newly adopted legislation intended to advance justice for atrocities committed during the armed conflict era was not fully consistent with international standards and could shield some perpetrators from prosecution. In Sri Lanka, civil society rejected proposed legislation to establish a new truth and reconciliation commission, including because of lack of meaningful consultation with victims, and the government's failure to implement recommendations made by previous investigative bodies.

Governments must strengthen efforts to fight impunity by undertaking prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigations into crimes under international law and other serious human rights abuses, bringing suspected perpetrators to justice, and ensuring effective remedy for victims.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

As the armed conflict in Myanmar escalated, the military and some armed opposition groups were accused of committing war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. The military campaign of indiscriminate and direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure intensified bringing the death toll to over 6,000 since the 2021 coup. Shipments of aviation fuel continued to reach the military despite international measures to halt supplies. The armed opposition group Arakan Army was accused of burning the homes of and killing Rohingya civilians, causing many to flee their homeland in Rakhine State.

In Afghanistan, attacks by armed groups including the Islamic State of Khorasan Province, predominantly targeting Shia-Hazara communities, resulted in more civilian casualties. Civilian casualties were also reported following Pakistan military aerial bombardments of Taliban positions along the border.

All parties to armed conflicts must respect international humanitarian law, including by ending direct attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and indiscriminate attacks.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan worsened. According to the UN, over half the population required humanitarian assistance, with 85% living on under USD 1 a day. Access to healthcare was a problem for all, but especially for women and girls with the EU warning that only 10% had access to basic health services. In North Korea, 40% of the population was reportedly undernourished. Taliban and North Korean government policies and actions were a significant contributory factor to these dire humanitarian situations.

Authorities in several countries continued to carry out forced evictions and house demolitions in violation of the right to housing. In India the Supreme Court ruled that forced demolition of property was illegal, but only after thousands of homes had been destroyed in previous years in a continuing government campaign to "punish" Muslims for past communal violence. In Mongolia, authorities forcibly evicted almost 2,000 households from land in the

capital, Ulaanbaatar. In Nepal, families, often from marginalized Dalit and Tharu communities, living in informal settlements were forcibly evicted. There was no remedy for thousands of people forcibly evicted from the Angkor World Heritage site in Cambodia in previous years. Many others continued to live under the threat of eviction.

Tens of millions of children in the region continued to be denied their right to education. The Taliban maintained their ban on girls' education beyond primary school. Millions of children in Myanmar were out of school because of the armed conflict and deliberate attacks by the military on education facilities. Further school closures by the Chinese government threatened Tibetan culture and language. Reduced spending on the education sector was among the concerns raised by OHCHR, the UN Human Rights Office, in relation to declining public investment in social services in Laos.

Reports of forced labour and poor working conditions also continued. The UN described forced labour in North Korea as widespread and institutionalized and said that the systematic use of forced labour in prisons may amount to the crime against humanity of enslavement. Malaiyaha Tamil tea plantation workers accused the Sri Lankan government of failing to protect workers from forced labour, debt bondage and other human rights abuses.

Governments must act to ensure economic, social and cultural rights, including to food, healthcare, housing and education to all people without discrimination, and end the practice of forced labour.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls was pervasive across the region. In Afghanistan, where women and girls were already experiencing the crime against humanity of gender persecution, the Taliban imposed yet more restrictions effectively limiting all aspects of their life. Many were arrested for non-compliance with dress codes and there were reports of rape and other forms of sexual violence against detained women and girls. Levels of gender-based violence increased sharply; women's rights groups reported that more than 300 women and girls were killed during the year.

Elsewhere, governments failed to take adequate action to address high rates of rape, sexual abuse and harassment, and other forms of violence against women and girls. In South Korea, the growth of online deepfake non-consensual images and videos was deemed by women's groups to constitute a "national emergency". In the Maldives, the government failed to act on UN treaty body recommendations to make female genital mutilation and domestic violence specific crimes.

In India, the rape and murder of a trainee doctor in her workplace sparked nationwide protests. Caste-based discrimination in India also continued to fuel sexual and other violence against Dalit women. In one instance a woman was burnt alive after she filed a sexual harassment complaint in Madya Pradesh state. Impunity for violence against Dalit women and girls also persisted in Nepal.

Governments must implement comprehensive measures to address discrimination and gender-based violence against women and girls, including by tackling root causes of intersectional gender-based discrimination, ensuring access to justice, protection and other support for survivors, and ending impunity for perpetrators.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Thailand became the first country in South-east Asia to achieve marriage equality for LGBTI people; court rulings in several other countries also advanced LGBTI rights. In South Korea, the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples were entitled to the same healthcare as heterosexual couples. In China, a court awarded child visiting rights to a woman in a same-sex

relationship. In Japan, two separate high court decisions ruled that the ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. In Nepal, a Supreme Court ruling recognized the right of a transgender woman to have her gender identity recognized in official documents.

However, LGBTI people continued to be subjected to violence, discrimination and, in some countries, criminalization. Consensual same-sex sexual relations remained punishable by death in Afghanistan. In China, LGBTI activists were at risk of arbitrary detention. Transgender people remained at particular risk of violence. In Fiji, there was outcry by human rights groups when the authorities failed to effectively investigate the death of a transgender sex worker after she was kidnapped and violently assaulted.

Governments should strengthen protections for LGBTI people, including by decriminalizing consensual same-sex sexual relations, adopting comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, and ensuring access to legal gender recognition. All reports of violence and other abuses against LGBTI people should be effectively investigated and perpetrators brought to justice.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS, AND ETHNIC AND DESCENT-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Indigenous Peoples' rights suffered setbacks in several countries and Indigenous Peoples and ethnic and descent-based minorities continued to be disproportionately affected by marginalization and discrimination across the region.

In a positive step, Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan won the right to use their Indigenous names, rather than Mandarin language versions, in official documents. In contrast, the New Zealand government enacted new laws and proposed others that undermined the rights of Māori, prompting countrywide protests. In other countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia, development projects on land claimed by Indigenous Peoples continued without their free, prior and informed consent. In Mongolia, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples expressed concern about the negative impact of mining activities on the lives and livelihoods of herder communities.

In Australia and New Zealand, Indigenous Peoples were significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system. In the former, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children suffered high rates of incarceration – three Aboriginal boys were reported to have died in detention in Western Australia. In Viet Nam, Montagnard Indigenous Peoples continued to face discrimination, and more than 100 were convicted of terrorism charges in unfair trials in relation to attacks on police posts in 2023.

The Chinese government continued its repression of non-Han ethnic groups, including by arbitrarily detaining cultural and religious figures. Hundreds of hate crimes were reported against Muslims and other religious minorities in India, where over 100 people were convicted of torching Dalit homes in 2014.

Authorities must take concrete measures to guarantee the rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as those of ethnic and descent-based minorities, including by repealing or amending legislation and policies that discriminate against them, prioritizing policies and programmes to eliminate structural discrimination in the criminal justice system and elsewhere, and ensuring meaningful consultation on and free prior and informed consent for development and other projects and decisions that affect them.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Australia, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand were among the countries that continued to allow the indefinite arbitrary detention of refugees and migrants. In Malaysia, concerns were raised about the continued detention of children and there were ongoing reports of dire conditions and abuse in immigration detention centres. In Thailand, the UN found that the appalling detention conditions of a group of more than 40 Uyghur asylum seekers, who had been held for over 10 years, could amount to torture or other ill-treatment.

People fleeing armed conflict and repression were at risk of forcible return. Border guards in Bangladesh unlawfully returned Rohingya people fleeing armed conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State; Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh continued to suffer appalling conditions. Thai authorities were suspected of collaborating with the Vietnamese government to arrest several Montagnard refugees, including one human rights defender who faced potential deportation to Viet Nam where he would be at risk of human rights violations. Pakistan authorities pursued a deportation policy, forcibly returning hundreds of thousands of refugees to Afghanistan despite calls to provide international protection to Afghans fleeing systematic discrimination and oppression there.

Migrant workers in several countries lived and worked in unsafe conditions. Human trafficking also remained a concern in the region. In South Korea, a factory fire killed 23 people, mostly migrant workers. In Taiwan, Indonesian workers were found to have worked on a fishing vessel for over a year without pay or contact with the outside world before the authorities intervened. In Cambodia, concerns persisted about human trafficking and forced labour in scam compounds, while a UN treaty body raised concerns of sex trafficking in Laos.

Governments must cease detaining asylum seekers simply on the basis of their immigration status and allow them to seek international protection. Unlawful deportations should be immediately halted and the principle of non-refoulement respected. Protections against human trafficking and forced labour should be strengthened and survivors of human trafficking provided with legal and other support.

DEATH PENALTY

Pressure for the abolition of the death penalty in Japan intensified after the death sentence of an 88-year-old man, who had spent more than 45 years on death row, was overturned after a judge found that evidence in his original trial for murder was fabricated. Public executions continued in Afghanistan, and there were reports that the Taliban may resume the stoning to death of women for "adultery".

Executions of people convicted of drug-related offences continued in several countries, including China and Singapore. The extent to which the death penalty was used in China, North Korea and Viet Nam remained unknown, but was believed to be extensive. A new law in China placed further restrictions on disclosing information about the practice and new judicial guidance encouraged the use of the death penalty against individuals supporting Taiwanese independence.

Governments retaining the death penalty must take urgent steps to abolish it and, in the meantime, establish an official moratorium on executions.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Russia's continuing aggression against Ukraine dominated an embattled rights landscape, with the region at the forefront of the global downswing against human rights. The war and increasingly authoritarian practices saw a growing number of countries move in tandem as they rejected their human rights obligations and undermined national and international institutions. Champions of human rights were left under siege.

Russia's relentless violations of international humanitarian law and crimes under international law, including direct attacks on civilian infrastructure, saw an incessant loss of life and a dramatic drop in basic living conditions in Ukraine, along with growing suffering among children and other at-risk groups.

Impunity persisted for these crimes, as well as for violations in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and many governments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia led audacious assaults on human rights with little prospect of accountability. Civil society was under direct attack and shrank in many countries, operating in a climate of fear and secrecy. Rights defenders were jailed or forced into exile. Peaceful protesters braved growing repression despite unprecedented violence. Notwithstanding the courageous efforts of many, the impact of the human rights community visibly declined.

The abuse of extremist and terrorist legislation, and official rhetoric of "traditional values", stifled gender and sexual and reproductive rights, in particular. Monitoring activities, including by international organizations, were increasingly constrained. Transnational persecution of exiled activists increased, exposing further the weakness of national and international mechanisms in protecting human rights.

Freedom of religion and belief saw setbacks. Justice systems were blatantly weaponized to suppress dissent, and torture and other ill-treatment remained endemic. Gender-based violence increased. The rights of refugees and migrants continued to be eroded.

Fossil fuel production and consumption grew, contributing to air pollution, which blighted human health.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Russia continued to systematically attack civilian infrastructure and commit war crimes in Ukraine. Civilian casualties were higher than in 2023. As Russia continued to target population centres with missiles and drones, basic living conditions plummeted for Ukrainian civilians, with children, older people and other at-risk groups paying a particularly high price. Russia destroyed or occupied up to 70% of Ukraine's thermal energy generation capacity, causing regular rolling blackouts. Scores of Ukrainian prisoners of war were illegally tried in Russia and in areas of Ukraine it occupied, for participating in hostilities.

Russia reported hundreds of civilians dying from Ukrainian strikes on its own territory, but the numbers and circumstances could not be verified independently.

Impunity continued for past violations in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. The European Court of Human Rights ruled Russia to be in violation of the right to life and other human rights while establishing and policing the boundaries of the breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia.

All allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity should be subject to impartial and independent investigations, including through the principle of universal jurisdiction.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Dissenting voices were increasingly suppressed under charges of treason and threatening national security, via designation as "foreign agents" and by the use of counter-extremist, counter-terrorist and homophobic legislation, propped up by rhetoric around "traditional values". Not one was spared, from human rights defenders to artists, journalists, playwrights and lawyers.

Belarus's "List of persons involved in extremist activities" exceeded 4,700 names, and the number of online, printed and broadcast materials banned as "extremist content" almost doubled in 2024. Harassment and violence escalated against dissenting voices in Georgia, with many activists and protesters suffering vicious attacks by unidentified assailants, in some cases seemingly encouraged or instigated by authorities.

Dozens of independent journalists, activists, bloggers and social media commentators in Kyrgyzstan faced criminal prosecution ostensibly in retribution for criticism. Moldova extended the scope of its anti-treason legislation to peacetime. Tajikistan adopted a law prohibiting clothing that was "alien to national culture". Uzbekistan's latest draft of its Information Code prohibited dissemination of information promoting "separatism" and "religious extremism" or displaying disrespect towards the state.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The operating environment for civil society organizations was stymied, stigmatized and imperilled. Building on the long-standing Russian model, Kyrgyzstan adopted "foreign agent" style legislation. It obliged NGOs receiving foreign funding and engaging in vaguely defined "political activity" to register as "foreign representatives", forcing many organizations to reduce activities or stop operating as NGOs. Similarly, Georgia enacted the Transparency of Foreign Influence law compelling organizations with over 20% foreign funding to declare themselves agents of foreign influence and comply with onerous and intrusive requirements.

In Azerbaijan, independent NGOs and the media continued to face arbitrary restrictions, including denial of registration and burdensome reporting requirements. Tajikistan continued to shut down NGOs, further to 700 closed in recent years. In Russia, 55 more organizations, including those of Indigenous Peoples, were arbitrarily labelled "extremist", and the list of individuals and organizations labelled as "foreign agents" grew by 169.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The already negligible space for peaceful assembly shrunk dramatically further, via unduly restrictive legislation and the use of unlawful force against protesters. This, alongside the crackdown on freedom of association, discouraged participation in human rights activities, including by those who could form the next generation of leadership.

In Georgia, police did not stop at beating, injuring and detaining hundreds of protesters, but also searched and arrested activists in their homes and offices.

In Russia, following the sudden, suspicious death of prominent opposition leader Aleksei Navalny in prison, hundreds were arrested and dozens received severe administrative penalties including fines and detention, for publicly mourning him. In Armenia, police used unlawful force against demonstrators on several occasions during large-scale protests in April and May calling on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to resign. In Kazakhstan, "offences" under assemblies-related legislation allowed authorities to jail protesters long after the event.

Governments must repeal laws and end practices that hinder the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and stop using pretexts to crush dissent and stifle discussion of their human rights records.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Freedom of religion and belief saw setbacks across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Ukraine legislated to ban "religious organizations affiliated with centres of influence" in Russia. At the same time Orthodox priests in Russia who expressed anti-war sentiment were defrocked or otherwise reprimanded, and imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses continued. Religious figures in Belarus not aligned with government policy faced harassment and arrests. In Tajikistan, the Pamiri minority continued to suffer a full-scale assault on the right to practise their faith and the preservation of their culture.

Governments must take effective measures to implement legal and policy reforms to fully protect, promote and guarantee freedom of religion or belief without discrimination.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained endemic, with its perpetrators overwhelmingly enjoying impunity.

Independent UN experts condemned Russia's "coordinated state policy of torturing Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war"; survivors reported severe beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence, sleep deprivation and mock executions. Exceptionally, the Council of Europe publicly denounced Azerbaijan's refusal to address long-standing concerns about widespread torture and other ill-treatment by police. In Belarus, five of those jailed under politically motivated charges died in 2024, while others endured incommunicado detention so prolonged that it amounted to enforced disappearance. Most of the 400 people detained in Georgia during protests in November and December reported mistreatment; scores were hospitalized with serious injuries and many were denied medical care. In Tajikistan, the unfairly imprisoned Pamiri human rights lawyer Manuchehr Kholiknazarov was among those whose health seriously deteriorated and who was denied adequate medical treatment, while the authorities ignored international calls for his release. In Kazakhstan, accountability remained elusive for widespread allegations of torture by security forces during protests in January 2022.

Governments must act urgently to end torture and other ill-treatment, bringing all those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in fair trials.

UNFAIR TRIALS

In a rare positive development, 22 defendants in the so-called Kempir Abad case in Kyrgyzstan were acquitted of politically motived charges. In a growing number of countries, however, judicial systems were weaponized to persecute dissent. The number of cases of those convicted in their absence grew.

Belarus targeted political opponents, human rights defenders and lawyers with lengthy prison sentences: 20 exiled political analysts and journalists affiliated with opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya received 10 to 11-and-a half years' imprisonment for crimes against the state and "extremism". In Russia convictions for treason and espionage rose significantly. In Georgia the authorities blatantly instrumentalized the justice system to crackdown on anti-government protest, and courts routinely ignored evidence of torture. In Tajikistan members of arbitrarily banned opposition groups faced imprisonment, while lawyers suffered severe retaliation for their work.

Authorities must guarantee rights to a fair trial and refrain from abusing the justice system to persecute dissent.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Protections for survivors of domestic violence were strengthened in Armenia and Kazakhstan. Elsewhere, however, gender-based violence was on the rise. Ukrainian authorities reported an 80% increase in domestic violence cases compared to 2023. In Kyrgyzstan the number rose

37% over the previous year. In Turkmenistan, amendments required courts to prioritize reconciliation of spouses in cases of divorce, even if domestic violence was involved.

Governments must urgently combat all forms of gender-based violence and address their root causes.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI people's rights were in decline, in tune with a growing emphasis on "traditional values".

Georgia adopted legislation on "family values and the protection of minors" containing numerous homophobic and transphobic measures, seemingly adopting much of the blueprint Russian "gay propaganda" legislation. Belarus updated its definition of pornography to include "non-traditional sexual relations and/or sexual behaviour". A petition for legislation to criminalize "LGBTI propaganda" in Kazakhstan, however, caused such an outcry that hearings on the proposed law were postponed.

Consensual sexual relations between men remained a crime in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Governments should repeal laws, policies and practices that discriminate against LGBTI people, including by decriminalizing consensual same-sex sexual relations.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Children increasingly were deprived of adequate human development conditions. UNICEF reported that 78% of Tajikistani children suffered food poverty, including 34% in severe poverty. Half of the Kyrgyzstani population could not meet basic nutritional requirements, with children disproportionately affected.

Children's right to quality education was violated in Russia and Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, with the school curriculum including indoctrination lessons glorifying Russia's war against Ukraine. Russia also legislated to deny children of migrants enrolment in school unless they passed a Russian-language test and were in Russia legally.

Governments must ensure the rights of everyone to an adequate standard of living, and access to quality education.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The rights of refugees and migrants continued to be eroded. Over 100,000 ethnic Armenians displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia remained without the prospect of a safe and dignified return. In Kazakhstan, activists from Uzbekistan's autonomous Karakalpakstan Republic faced the threat of forcible return and the risk of torture and long prison terms. Belarus's authorities continued to force refugees and migrants across its borders with the EU. Russian authorities engaged in anti-migrant rhetoric and Russian regions passed laws banning migrants from working in certain occupations.

Governments must ensure all those fleeing persecution and human rights violations have access to safety and international protection, and that no one is returned to a real risk of serious human rights abuses.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Azerbaijan hosted COP29 and failed to advance regional and global climate justice. Its authorities excluded Azerbaijani human rights defenders and activists from the summit, persecuting them before and after the event, and creating a climate of self-censorship and intense surveillance. Output of oil and gas continued to grow, while most countries failed to demonstrate a commitment to either addressing climate change or reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

Air pollution continued to blight human health and was worsened by continued burning of fossil fuels. A World Bank study found that air pollution in the Uzbekistan capital, Tashkent,

accounted for around 3,000 premature deaths annually.

Advocates protesting harm caused by natural resource extraction in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were silenced by authorities.

High-emitting countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia must take the lead in climate mitigation, including by stopping the expansion of fossil fuel production and subsidies. Governments must take immediate measures to protect individuals and communities against the risks and impacts of climate change and extreme weather conditions.

WESTERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

Discrimination, profiling, stigmatization and harassment based on identity including race, religion, gender and sexuality were themes that permeated every aspect of human rights protection and guarantees. Reports of hate crimes spiked.

Overly broad and vague counterterrorism laws were used to suppress freedom of expression, association and assembly. Unnecessary or excessive force was used by police against peaceful protesters, with some deprived of liberty for peaceful acts of civil disobedience. Surveillance technologies were used extensively to chilling effect.

An arsenal of hostile, repressive laws was also deployed to deter and punish solidarity with Palestinians or criticism of Israel's genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. The commitment of governments across Europe to international law was tested and came up short, with some officials taking measures to shield the state of Israel from accountability. Despite the International Court of Justice and UN experts demanding that countries stop all arms transfers to Israel, some continued to export weapons and parts.

Control of borders took precedence over the rights of refugees and migrants. Torture and other ill-treatment, particularly of migrants and people with disabilities, remained a concern. Challenges persisted in accessing gender-affirmative care. Gender-based violence remained widespread. Access to housing, social security and healthcare was eroded. Disasters exacerbated by climate change wreaked havoc, particularly in southern European states.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination remained a persistent concern. Women, Black, Arab, Roma and other racialized people and groups, and people on low incomes, faced direct discrimination, affecting their access to social security, political representation, employment and education. Anti-immigrant and Islamophobic hate crimes surged after stabbings in Germany and the UK. France, among other countries, saw a rise in antisemitic, Islamophobic and racist crimes. Portugal dismissed most hate crime investigations.

Norway and Switzerland used discriminatory racial profiling. In Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden automated welfare systems led to discriminatory practices against women, racialized people, and low-income individuals. France imposed discriminatory bans on sports hijabs, including during the 2024 Paris Olympics and Paralympic games.

Same-sex marriage was legalized in the Czech Republic and Greece, and bans on conversion practices were pending in the UK. LGBTI people, however, continued to face significant challenges. Legal gender recognition remained difficult in Bulgaria and Serbia, and stalled in North Macedonia. Violence and discrimination persisted in Poland and Slovakia, with Poland lacking specific hate crime legislation. Türkiye continued to unlawfully ban LGBTI pride marches.

Despite local action plans for Roma integration in some countries, Roma faced discrimination, segregation and social exclusion. Italy violated the European Social Charter regarding the right to housing for Roma. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights highlighted structural racism in the treatment of Roma in Ireland and Serbia. Slovakia's

segregation of Roma children led to a European Commission complaint, and segregation also persisted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Roma in Croatia and Roma refugees from Ukraine in Romania struggled to access essential services.

Governments should meaningfully address systemic discrimination including against Jewish, Muslim, Black, Roma, LGBTI people and migrants.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Various states adopted measures curtailing freedom of expression connected to solidarity with Palestinians or voices critical of Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Germany criminalized the slogan "from the river to the sea," leading to convictions. The UK government curtailed freedom of expression related to Palestine, while France investigated numerous individuals for "apology for terrorism. Spain investigated Palestinian solidarity activists for "glorification of terrorism".

While Spain approved an Action Plan on Democracy to reform legislation limiting freedom of expression, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) were deployed in Bulgaria and Serbia, a new authority in Hungary targeted civil society, and criminal prosecutions continued against those who peacefully opposed the government in Türkiye.

The right to peaceful assembly came under severe attack as states increasingly stigmatized and criminalized peaceful protesters, imposing unjustified and punitive restrictions and resorting to ever more repressive means to stifle dissent. People protesting against Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people were particularly targeted, as were those demonstrating about climate change.

In positive moves, regulations in the UK enhancing police powers to restrict protests were ruled unlawful and a court in Italy acquitted eight activists after recognizing their motive to take climate action. Efforts continued, however, to ban climate-related and pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Excessive restrictions were placed on such protests in France, and in Finland, Germany and Italy there were reports of unnecessary or excessive force against people participating in such demonstrations. Türkiye imposed blanket bans on protests. In the Netherlands, drones and facial recognition technology were used against peaceful protesters. Serbia, Greece and Türkiye saw excessive force by police and/or arbitrary arrests during demonstrations.

The space for all to exercise the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly must be protected from state overreach under various pretexts.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

Several European states were complicit in irresponsible arms transfers, with the Czech Republic, France and Germany continuing arms exports to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. However, civil society challenged arms transfers in Denmark and Montenegro; the Netherlands halted the export of F-35 fighter parts to Israel due to legal concerns; and Spain and Belgium complied with calls by UN experts and the International Court of Justice to suspend arms exports to Israel.

Governments should halt weapons transfers to countries where there is a substantial risk of them being used to commit or facilitate serious human rights abuses.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Europe continued to grapple with its past colonial history and ensuring justice and reparations for crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. A number of countries signing the 2023 Ljubljana – The Hague Convention, which seeks to narrow the accountability gap for such crimes. A court in Belgium recognized the state's responsibility for crimes against humanity during colonial rule in Congo, ordering reparations.

However, politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to publicly deny genocide and glorify war criminals. Serbia made no credible efforts towards accountability for all crimes under international law, focusing instead on weakening a UN resolution on the Srebrenica genocide. In Croatia, most victims of wartime sexual violence remained unregistered for special status benefits. The UK faced legal challenges over the Northern Ireland Legacy Act, with courts finding it incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Officials in some European countries openly stated or suggested that they would not implement the ICC arrest warrants issued against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, former Israeli defence minister.

All allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide should be subject to impartial and independent investigations, including through the principle of universal jurisdiction.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

European countries and the EU failed to introduce policies and practices to prioritize protecting the lives of refugees and migrants over the control of borders, take credible steps to deliver accountability for violations, reduce dependence on third countries in the area of migration management or expand safe and legal routes. Italy attempted to detain asylum seekers rescued at sea in Albania, to have their claim examined outside of the country. The EU's cooperation with Egypt and Tunisia persisted despite evidence of human rights violations in these countries. Reports continued of violence at borders and unlawful returns from Greece to Türkiye, Cyprus to Lebanon and from Türkiye to Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

NGOs and human rights defenders remained the target of criminalization measures. In Greece, defenders faced ongoing prosecution for assisting refugees and migrants. Three UN experts raised concern about Italy's restrictions on the activities of human rights defenders rescuing lives at sea.

Refugees and migrants experienced a regression in their rights within their host country. Ukrainian refugees in Hungary lost state support for housing, while Belgium and Ireland left thousands of asylum seekers without accommodation.

Governments must ensure all those fleeing persecution and human rights violations have access to safety and international protection, and that no one is returned to a real risk of serious human rights abuses.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment of migrants and people with disabilities remained a concern. Positive developments included Belgium establishing a federal preventive mechanism and Hungary overturning a ban on physical contact between prisoners and visitors. Romania adopted a five-year action plan to tackle ill-treatment in institutions. However, overcrowding and inadequate healthcare persisted, for example in Albanian and Italian prisons, and allegations of torture were reported in Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

Governments must act urgently to end torture and other ill-treatment, bringing perpetrators to justice.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Several countries adopted legislative changes to address impunity for sexual violence. The Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Poland introduced a consent-based definition of rape, and Croatia made femicide a separate criminal offence.

Gender-based violence, however, remained widespread. Romania saw an increase in reported incidents of domestic violence compared with previous years. Killings of women mainly by partners and ex-partners continued at an alarmingly high level, including in Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Spain and Türkiye. Migrant women, sex

workers and trans women faced systematic barriers when trying to file complaints of sexual violence. In France, such obstacles included denial of the right to register a complaint and threats of expulsion.

Governments should end impunity for all gender-based violence.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Some countries took positive steps to remove barriers to accessing abortion. France became the first country in the world to explicitly include abortion as a guaranteed freedom in its constitution, and several countries backed measures to protect pregnant people from harassment outside abortion clinics.

However, abortion remained largely criminalized and barriers in accessing abortion persisted in many countries. Andorra continued to enforce a full abortion ban, in Poland abortion remained severely restricted and in Malta, risk to the life of the pregnant person remained the only legal exception allowing access to abortion. In England and Wales, there was an increase in investigations and prosecutions of women accused of having an abortion outside the legal framework.

Refusals to provide abortion care on grounds of conscience or religion remained a concern, including in Croatia, Italy and Portugal. Abortion was particularly inaccessible in rural and economically deprived areas in countries such as Croatia and Slovenia.

Governments must guarantee access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare, including safe abortion.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

There were obstacles for people accessing social security. Women and people with disabilities in Austria faced stigmatization, bureaucratic hurdles and restrictive legal provisions. In Finland, significant cuts to social security jeopardized an adequate standard of living for those already on low incomes. In the UK the standard social security allowance was less than the cost of common essentials.

The right to health was eroded in Italy and Spain owing to insufficient public investment in health infrastructure. In Greece, health workers and experts continued to report ongoing and significant gaps in the national health system.

Across the UK, 4.3 million children were living in poverty, with a disproportionate impact on children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, while in Italy 10% of the population was living in absolute poverty.

Access to housing remained a significant challenge. In Poland, a shortage of affordable housing led to substandard living conditions. Andorra failed to prevent winter evictions and Ireland saw record levels of homelessness.

Governments must take immediate action to guarantee all people's economic and social rights, free from discrimination, including by assigning adequate resources and ensuring universal and comprehensive social protection.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Several countries faced disasters including floods, wildfires and extreme heat exacerbated by human-induced climate change. Spain saw torrential rains in October, causing flash floods and 224 deaths. Record temperatures attributed to climate change caused deaths in Greece and Portugal.

Despite limited positive outcomes, from Slovenia imposing stricter emissions limits, Croatia planning for 75% renewable electricity by 2030, the growth of renewable energy in Hungary and the cancellation of a mining permit in Montenegro over environmental concerns, many countries lagged behind in climate policies. A landmark ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found Switzerland's inadequate climate policies had violated the right to effective protection from the serious adverse effects of climate change. Germany's climate plans were deemed legally insufficient and Türkiye's climate policies were rated critically insufficient. The Netherlands weakened its climate policies, Norway continued new exploration for fossil fuels, Greece expanded gas infrastructure and Belgium spent EUR 15.5 billion on fossil fuel subsidies. Collectively, European countries blocked agreement at COP29 on an adequately scaled-up climate finance target.

Governments should speedily phase out the use and production of fossil fuel through a just transition and end all fossil fuel financing. They should also urgently scale up climate finance and additional dedicated funding for loss and damage to lower-income countries.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

While Montenegro suspended the use of facial recognition software, and a court in France ruled that AI-powered audio surveillance systems were manifestly illegal, the unlawful use of spyware and facial recognition technology remained a concern. Invasive digital forensic techniques were used against activists and independent journalists by the authorities in Serbia. In Germany, police used facial recognition technology without sufficient legal basis. The ECtHR ruled that Poland had breached the right to privacy through "secret surveillance" related to the use of Pegasus spyware, and in Hungary a court found that the country's data protection watchdog had failed to effectively investigate a case of four individuals targeted by Pegasus.

Governments must stop the slide into creating surveillance societies.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Crisis, conflict and upheaval beset the Middle East and North Africa region in 2024. Israel's actions in Gaza took a catastrophic toll on civilians and amounted to genocide. Israel also escalated its armed conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon. December's sudden ousting of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria exposed the consequences of decades of impunity for human rights violations in a region plagued by ongoing repression and a rise in authoritarian practices in multiple countries.

Israel's relentless military offensive on the occupied Gaza Strip intensified the long-standing humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's 18-year unlawful blockade of Gaza. It left most of the Palestinians there displaced, homeless, hungry, at risk of life-threatening diseases and unable to access medical care, power or clean water.

Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Yemen were drawn into the conflict. For the first time, Iran and Israel openly launched direct attacks on each other's territories. In September, cross-border hostilities between Israel and the armed group Hezbollah escalated into intense military confrontations. Israel attacked areas across Lebanon, with a devastating effect on civilians.

While millions of people worldwide protested against Israel's actions in Gaza, throughout 2024 the world's governments – individually and multilaterally – failed repeatedly to take meaningful action to end the atrocities and were slow even in calling for a ceasefire. Meanwhile, Israel's system of apartheid became increasingly violent in the occupied West Bank, marked by a sharp increase in unlawful killings and state-backed attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian civilians.

The effects of other long-standing conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen continued to blight the lives of millions, particularly people from marginalized communities, many of whom were denied their rights to food, water, adequate housing, healthcare and security.

International justice mechanisms took important steps towards accountability in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Libya. But Israel's allies and other powerful actors attacked or dismissed these accountability measures, shielding perpetrators from justice and further laying bare double standards and the failure of the rules-based global order.

Governments and non-state armed actors across the region continued to repress dissent. Authorities detained, tortured and unjustly prosecuted dissidents and critics, punishing them with harsh sentences, including the death penalty. Among those targeted were journalists, online commentators, political and trade union activists, people expressing solidarity with Palestinians, and human rights defenders. In some countries, security forces used unlawful and even lethal force, alongside enforced disappearances and mass arbitrary arrests, to suppress protests. Virtually all perpetrators of these crimes enjoyed impunity.

Discrimination remained rife region-wide on the basis of gender, race, nationality, legal status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion and class.

The major fossil fuel-producing states failed to take steps to address climate change, even as the region continued to suffer the harmful, often life-threatening, consequences of the climate crisis, including extreme weather events and slower onset catastrophes such as increasing water scarcity.

ARMED CONFLICTS
ISRAEL'S OFFENSIVE IN GAZA

By the end of 2024, 14 months after deadly attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in southern Israel on 7 October 2023, Israel's unremitting military assault on the Gaza Strip had killed at least 45,500 people and injured at least 108,300. Many Palestinians were yet to find their loved ones' remains in the rubble.

Throughout the year, Amnesty International documented multiple war crimes by Israel, including direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, often destroying entire multigenerational families.

In an attempt to create a buffer zone along Gaza's eastern perimeter, Israeli forces using bulldozers and manually laid explosives, systematically destroyed agricultural land and civilian buildings, razing entire neighbourhoods, including homes, schools and mosques.

Israel's actions forcibly displaced 1.9 million Palestinians, 90% of Gaza's population, and deliberately engineered an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe.

Amnesty International's research found that Israel committed acts prohibited under the Genocide Convention with the specific intent to destroy Palestinians in Gaza, thus committing genocide. These acts included killings, causing serious bodily or mental harm to civilians and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction.

Israel repeatedly denied, obstructed and failed to allow and facilitate meaningful humanitarian access into and around Gaza. Israeli forces conducted a large-scale invasion of the southern city of Rafah in May. The government ignored warnings from the international community, including Israel's own allies, as well as legally binding orders of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), not to attack Rafah because of the devastating effect it would have on the civilian population.

Israel issued waves of "evacuation" orders, squeezing Gaza's population into small, densely populated areas that lacked life-sustaining infrastructure, healthcare and food. As a result, most Palestinians in Gaza were facing extreme hunger and rapidly spreading disease. Israeli air strikes frequently hit civilians who were following "evacuation" orders, including after they arrived in areas that Israel promised would be safe.

Israel also continued to arbitrarily detain and, in some cases, forcibly disappear Palestinians from Gaza. They were routinely transferred into Israel and held there incommunicado, without charge or trial, and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

The presence of Palestinian armed groups in or near civilian areas in Gaza, including camps for internally displaced people, endangered civilian lives and likely violated their obligation under international law to avoid, to the extent feasible, locating fighters in densely populated areas. They continued to hold civilians – Israelis and foreign nationals – hostage, a violation of international humanitarian law that constitutes a war crime.

Israel's decades-long system of apartheid against Palestinians continued. Attacks by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank against Palestinian civilians and their property rose sharply. These attacks, which had the backing of the Israeli state, along with extensive land seizure, home demolitions and unlawful use of force, constituted the crimes against humanity of forcible transfer and apartheid.

The international community failed to act meaningfully to end Israel's atrocities in Gaza. Powerful nations, including the USA and many western European states, publicly backed Israel's actions, undermining the universal value of international law. For months the UN Security Council took no effective action and only called for a ceasefire in March.

On 26 January the ICJ issued its first provisional measures in the case brought by South Africa against Israel under the Genocide Convention. This was followed by two further orders on 28 March and 24 May. Israel defied the Court's orders. Nevertheless, some states continued to arm Israel with weapons used to violate international law, despite being warned

that this was in violation of their obligation to prevent genocide and risked their complicity in genocide and war crimes.

On 21 November the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and former defence minister, Yoav Gallant and, in Palestine, Al-Qassam Brigades commander Mohammed Deif on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Throughout the year, sustained protests and demonstrations against Israel's actions in Gaza involved millions of people worldwide and were met by severe restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly in many countries.

OTHER ARMED CONFLICTS

Israel's attacks on Gaza led to armed hostilities and attacks in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, some of which included US and UK forces.

After nearly a year of sporadic cross-border attacks, on 23 September Israel launched a new military offensive in Lebanon. An estimated 4,047 people were killed, more than 16,600 injured and 1.2 million displaced in Lebanon between 8 October 2023 and the end of 2024. Israeli forces attacked homes, farmland, schools, churches, mosques and hospitals, including in the Lebanese capital, Beirut. They also razed more than 20 villages, with Israeli soldiers using explosives, bulldozers and excavators to destroy civilian buildings long after gaining control of the areas. The armed group Hezbollah fired hundreds of rockets from Lebanon at northern Israel during the year, killing more than 100 people.

Huthi armed forces based in Yemen killed civilian seafarers when they attacked dozens of vessels in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean, alleging the vessels were linked to Israel, the USA and UK. In response, US armed forces carried out naval and air strikes, some jointly with UK forces, against Huthi targets. The Huthis carried out missile and drone attacks against Israel on at least 48 occasions, killing one civilian. In retaliation, on 20 July Israel bombed Hodeidah port, critical for delivering humanitarian aid to Yemen, and Ras Kathnib power station, killing at least six civilians. On 29 September, Israel bombed the ports of Hodeidah and Ras Issa, as well as al-Hali and Ras Kathnib power stations, in Hodeidah governorate, reportedly killing five civilians and injuring others.

In April, Iran launched more than 300 munitions at Israel in retaliation for a strike on Iran's consulate in Syria which killed seven members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. In October, Iran launched nearly 200 ballistic missiles at Israel in response to the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. The same month, Israel carried out strikes on 20 targets inside Iran, killing one civilian and four military personnel.

Israel increased its military operations in Syria in the context of the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. In December, following the overthrow of President Assad in Syria, Israeli forces moved troops into the UN-defined demilitarized buffer zone in the occupied Golan Heights, signalled an expansion of illegal Israeli settlement in the Golan Heights, and carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of armed factions under the Popular Mobilization Units, intensified its operations against Israel in response to Israel's attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, carrying out attacks which the group said targeted military sites and infrastructure in Israel and the Golan Heights.

Elsewhere in the region, long-standing armed conflicts and their aftermath continued to devastate the lives of millions of people, with parties to the conflicts – some backed by foreign governments – committing war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

In Syria, parties to the long-standing armed conflict and their allies continued to conduct unlawful attacks, killing and injuring scores of civilians and destroying vital infrastructure. In the first half of the year, President Assad's government, supported by Russia, escalated attacks on north-western Syria under the control of armed opposition groups. Türkiye repeatedly launched military attacks on cities and villages in north-eastern Syria, in its continuing war on Kurdish groups based there, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to vital civilian infrastructure.

On 8 December, opposition forces ousted Syria's President Assad, ending his family's five decades of brutal and repressive rule marked by widespread human rights violations amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Sporadic armed clashes took place in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, other parts of western Libya and southern Libya between militias and armed groups vying for control of resources or political influence, leading to civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects.

All parties to armed conflicts must respect international humanitarian law, in particular ending direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and indiscriminate attacks. Foreign governments must stop transfers of weapons where there is an overriding risk of their use to commit or facilitate serious violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

Authorities across the region continued to violate the right of people to express critical or dissenting views, including online, whether about their human rights records, economic policies, or in response to the conflict in Gaza or social issues. Some governments used unfounded terrorism-related charges or charges of spreading "false news" to silence opposition voices and to inflict harsh punishments on their critics.

In Iran, authorities subjected protesters, women defying compulsory veiling laws, journalists, artists, writers, academics, university students, LGBTI individuals, members of ethnic and religious minorities, and human rights defenders to a range of violations, including arbitrary detention, summons for coercive interrogations, and unjust prosecution leading to sentences of death, imprisonment, fines and/or flogging for peacefully exercising their human rights.

Hundreds of people in Jordan were charged under the repressive Cybercrimes Law for criticizing the authorities, expressing solidarity with Palestinians, or calling for peaceful protests and public strikes. The Jordanian authorities routinely violated the fair trial rights of people arrested for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Saudi Arabia continued to arbitrarily detain individuals for their real or alleged views without giving them any opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. In many cases, these individuals were then sentenced to lengthy prison terms or the death penalty on vague, "catch-all" charges that criminalize the expression of peaceful opposition as "terrorism", in violation of fair trial rights.

Across North Africa, repression of dissent continued or escalated. Tunisian authorities intensified their crackdown on freedom of expression and all forms of dissent, using repressive laws and unfounded charges to arbitrarily detain high-profile members of the political opposition, journalists, social media users, human rights defenders, lawyers and critics. Egypt's targeting of journalists, peaceful protesters, dissidents, opposition politicians and government critics continued unabated. In Morocco and Western Sahara, Moroccan authorities targeted journalists, activists and government critics, despite a royal pardon for thousands of prisoners. Algeria cracked down on freedom of expression and the press, peaceful assembly and association, including by frequently using fabricated terrorism-related charges to stop peaceful dissent. In Libya, militias and armed groups arbitrarily arrested and detained hundreds of

activists, protesters, journalists and online content creators simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Governments must respect the rights to freedom of expression and association, including by ensuring that journalists, human rights defenders and activists can enjoy these rights without harassment, violence and prosecution, and releasing those detained for exercising these rights.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In almost every country in the region, governments used various tactics to prevent or forcibly disperse peaceful protests.

Egyptian authorities carried out mass arrests before planned protests and violently dispersed the few small protests that took place. On 23 April, for instance, they violently broke up a small protest by women human rights defenders and others showing solidarity with women in Palestine and Sudan. Authorities in Iraq frequently used force, including firing live ammunition, to disperse protests driven by widespread frustration over government corruption, economic hardship and poor public services.

Tunisia's authorities repeatedly used baseless and vague "obstruction" charges to arbitrarily detain, prosecute and convict individuals simply for joining peaceful protests. Jordanian forces arrested thousands of protesters and bystanders linked to huge protests in support of Palestinians in Gaza between October 2023 and October 2024, with many remaining in detention at the end of 2024. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) authorities maintained their repression of peaceful assembly and conducted mass trials of peaceful protesters and other dissidents.

Governments must respect the right to peaceful assembly and end their crack-downs on peaceful protesters.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

People across the region faced multiple, ongoing crises, including devastating conflicts, severe economic and debt shocks, and the increasing toll of the climate emergency. Rising inflation, government failings and other factors – local, regional and international – put intense pressure on the cost of living, including in some of the poorest and most populous countries in the region. This left millions of people food insecure and struggling to survive, and undermined their rights to health, water and an adequate standard of living.

In Lebanon the long-standing financial and economic crisis, which the government helped to cause and prolong, continued. The government failed dismally to introduce the necessary reforms to protect people's economic and social rights, including their right to social security. The crisis had a devastating effect on marginalized groups, including, for example, by putting adequate healthcare even further out of reach for many older people, those with disabilities, informal workers, and refugees, and was exacerbated by the destruction caused by Israel in its war with Hezbollah.

Economic crisis also severely affected people's social and economic rights in Egypt, amid the government's failure to meet its budgetary obligations for spending on health and education. A new law privatizing healthcare jeopardized access to health services, particularly for those living in poverty. The authorities used threats and arrests to repress workers demanding the minimum wage and residents protesting against forced eviction.

In many countries, governments failed to protect low-paid workers from labour abuses and denied workers the right to join and form independent trade unions and to strike without fear of punishment. In the Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, low-paid migrant workers continued to face extreme exploitation, discrimination, grossly inadequate housing,

physical and mental abuses, wage theft by their employers, limited access to healthcare, and summary dismissal. Worst affected were domestic workers, most of them women.

Governments must take urgent action to uphold people's economic and social rights, including by establishing universal social protection systems that enable everyone, including marginalized groups, to access an adequate standard of living, including food, water and healthcare. Donor governments and international financial institutions must urgently work to support governments in achieving this goal. Governments must also protect the right of workers to join and form independent trade unions and to strike, while extending labour law protections to all migrant workers, including domestic workers.

DISCRIMINATION

WOMEN AND GIRLS

Across the region, women and girls continued to face discrimination in law and practice, including in relation to the rights to freedom of movement, expression, bodily autonomy, inheritance, divorce, political office and employment opportunities. Gender-based violence online and offline remained common and was committed with impunity. In some countries, such violence increased while protections for women became weaker.

Laws in Algeria and Iraq allowed rapists to escape prosecution by marrying their victim.

In Yemen the Huthi de facto authorities and armed groups continued to restrict women's movement and ban them from travelling without the accompaniment or written approval of a male guardian.

Despite some positive steps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, authorities continued to fail to hold perpetrators of domestic violence to account and imposed arbitrary restrictions on the freedoms of survivors who sought protection in the woefully underfunded shelter system. Lawmakers also attempted to pass amendments to the personal status law that would significantly undermine protections for women and girls.

In Iran, authorities intensified their crackdown on women and girls who defy compulsory veiling, including through digital surveillance such as facial recognition technology. Increased security patrols harassed and attacked women and girls in public spaces.

Militias and armed groups in Libya targeted women influencers and content creators for the way they expressed themselves and their dress. In November the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity announced plans to introduce compulsory veiling for women and enforce it through "morality police".

LGBTI PEOPLE

Across the region, people were arrested and prosecuted for their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many were given harsh sentences when convicted of consensual same-sex sexual relations. Attacks on the rights of LGBTI people intensified in Iraq, Libya and Tunisia.

In Libya, the Internal Security Agency militia in the capital, Tripoli, and other militias and armed groups arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted individuals for their actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity and broadcast their torture-tainted "confessions". In Tunisia, LGBTI groups reported an increase in prosecutions for "homosexuality charges".

In April, Iraq criminalized same-sex sexual relations for the first time, punishable with up to 15 years' imprisonment. The new law also penalizes actions such as "promoting" same-sex relations or transgender expression and adds vague charges such as "acting effeminate".

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Across the region, members of national, ethnic and religious communities and minorities faced embedded discrimination in law and practice, including in relation to their rights to worship and to live free from persecution and other serious human rights abuses.

Israel further entrenched its system of apartheid through oppression and domination over Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. It systematically committed a wide range of human rights violations, including forcible transfers, administrative detention, torture, unlawful killings, denial of basic rights and freedoms, and persecution.

In Iran, ethnic minorities including Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmen faced discrimination which restricted their access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office. Members of the Baha'i religious minority were subjected to widespread and systematic violations.

Governments must end discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. They must implement legal and policy reforms to grant equal rights for all without discrimination and to protect, promote and guarantee the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief.

RIGHTS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE, MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Protracted conflicts left vast numbers of internally displaced people struggling to survive in Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen. Most faced discrimination by authorities, barriers to accessing services, blocks on their right to return home or reprisals if they tried to return without authorization, as well as restrictions on and cuts to vital humanitarian aid.

Approximately 1.1 million Iraqis remained internally displaced, many struggling to access essential needs and services such as housing, water and healthcare. Iraqi security forces subjected some to arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and torture, including electric shocks and waterboarding, for perceived affiliation to the Islamic State armed group.

In Syria, the number of internally displaced people reached 7.2 million, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. Following President Assad's ousting in December, the humanitarian and security situation remained bleak and uncertain. Nevertheless, many European countries announced they would consider or enact a suspension of pending asylum applications by Syrians.

The rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants were violated across the region, with government failings coupled with the failure of the international community, namely wealthier countries, to share responsibility through providing adequate resettlement places and humanitarian assistance. In Lebanon, around 90% of the country's estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees were living in extreme poverty and unable to access adequate food, housing, education and healthcare. A disturbing rise in anti-refugee rhetoric, in some cases fuelled by local authorities and politicians, intensified the hostile environment. Meanwhile, many refugees and asylum seekers in neighbouring Jordan, which hosted 2 million Palestinian and approximately 750,000 other refugees, including Syrians, faced poverty and deteriorating conditions.

Tunisia's routine and collective expulsions of migrants and refugees to Algeria and Libya continued to violate the principle of non-refoulement and left people in deserted or remote border areas without food or water. From May, authorities cracked down on organizations defending refugees' and migrants' rights, reducing their access to essential services.

Refugees and migrants in Libya, including those intercepted at sea by armed groups and EU-backed coastguards and forcibly returned to Libya, were subjected to indefinite arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, extortion, forced labour and unlawful expulsions.

Egyptian authorities arbitrarily detained and forcibly returned thousands of Sudanese nationals, despite Sudan's raging armed conflict, in flagrant violation of international law.

Governments must end the arbitrary detention of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants on the basis of their migration status and protect them from torture and other ill-treatment in detention, refoulement and mass or collective expulsions. Governments must take concrete steps to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified return of internally displaced people to their areas of origin.

DEATH PENALTY

Most states in the region retained the death penalty and imposed death sentences in 2024, including for offences not involving intentional killing, for acts protected under international law such as consensual same-sex sexual relations and apostasy, and for bogus or overly broad charges brought to silence dissent. Several countries executed people. In Iraq, mass executions were carried out without lawyers and relatives being informed in advance. Iran's execution spree continued as authorities used the death penalty as a tool of political repression.

Governments must immediately establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The region continued to suffer the harmful, often life-threatening, consequences of climate change, including extreme weather events, slower onset catastrophes such as increasing and extreme water scarcity, and other environmental mismanagement. Governments failed to take adequate steps to stop climate change, mitigate its impacts or provide adequate support to those most affected.

Iraq suffered severe water shortages and increasing air and water pollution. Ineffective waste management and deforestation intensified dust storms and waterborne diseases, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations, particularly displaced persons. Jordan also suffered water shortages, with supply only meeting around two-thirds of demand.

Extreme heat blighted Kuwait, with record temperatures in late May being 4°C to 5°C above past averages. Yet, in March, the CEO of the state-owned Kuwait Petroleum Corporation announced that Kuwait would significantly increase oil production by 2035, and announced further increases when new reserves were discovered in July.

Other countries failed to make progress towards necessary fossil fuel phase out. In February, Bahrain sought a loan to expand fossil fuel extraction by creating 400 new oil wells and 30 gas wells. A report in June by Global Witness confirmed that the UAE's COP28 team had pursued fossil fuel deals for the state-owned oil company Abu Dhabi National Oil Company while hosting the climate conference in 2023. Also in June, Saudi Arabia's energy minister announced plans to increase oil production between 2025 and 2027.

Governments must urgently take steps to mitigate the climate crisis, including by curbing carbon emissions and ending the extraction and use of fossil fuels. All states with the necessary resources should significantly increase funding to countries in need of assistance for human rights-consistent mitigation and adaptation measures.

IMPUNITY

Across the region, states continued to facilitate impunity for perpetrators of serious human rights violations, highlighting the failings of deeply flawed domestic judicial systems.

Decades of long-standing impunity for recurrent war crimes and egregious human rights violations by Israel against Palestinians in the context of apartheid and unlawful occupation prevailed.

Moroccan authorities failed to provide victims' families with truth, justice and reparations after a deadly crackdown by Moroccan and Spanish security forces against sub-Saharan African migrants attempting to cross the border from Morocco into the Spanish enclave of Melilla in 2022.

In Iran, impunity prevailed for unlawful killings, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment including rape and other forms of sexual violence, and other crimes under international law or grave human rights violations committed in 2024 and previous years.

In October the ICC announced arrest warrants against six leaders, senior members and affiliates of the al-Kaniat armed group for the war crimes of murder, torture, enforced disappearances and other inhumane acts in Tarhouna, Libya, which the group controlled until June 2020.

European countries continued to investigate and prosecute individuals suspected of committing crimes under international law in Syria through their national courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Governments must combat impunity by undertaking thorough, independent, impartial, effective and transparent investigations into human rights violations and crimes under international law and bringing suspected perpetrators to justice in fair trials in civilian courts.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

A-Z COUNTRY ENTRIES

AFGHANISTAN

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The people of Afghanistan experienced worsening levels of human rights violations under the de facto Taliban authorities. Women and girls faced the crime against humanity of gender persecution and were increasingly deprived of their rights to freedom of movement and freedom of expression. Access to healthcare remained difficult, and education for women and girls beyond primary school remained banned. The Shia-Hazara community continued to face targeted attacks and killings, primarily by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (IS-KP). The Taliban continued to marginalize women as well as ethnic and religious groups from political participation, access to public services and humanitarian assistance.

The Taliban's arbitrary arrests, forcible disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment and extrajudicial executions of former government employees, human rights defenders, journalists and critical voices continued. The Taliban continued to attack and arrest journalists and restricted media freedom. Hundreds of prisoners were reportedly sentenced to death.

The UN and the international community failed to address impunity for ongoing and past atrocities. Despite a deepening humanitarian and human rights crisis, Afghan refugees were forcibly returned to Afghanistan in large groups.

BACKGROUND

The Taliban continued to be in de facto control since the then-government collapsed in August 2021 amid the withdrawal of US and NATO forces. The Taliban annulled the constitution and laws that existed prior to their takeover. Many Taliban leaders faced travel bans as they are sanctioned by the UN Security Council.

In June the UN reported that flash floods in the provinces of Baghlan, Badakhshan and Ghor claimed nearly 350 lives, destroyed or damaged more than 7,800 homes and displaced more than 5,000 families. Thirty-two out of 34 provinces were affected by flash floods, which UNICEF claimed were "hallmarks of the intensifying climate crisis".

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Taliban continued expanding their draconian restrictions on women and girls. In May, they announced salary cuts for women who had been banned from working for the state but remained on the payroll, reducing their pay to AFN 5,000 (USD 70) per month. Mid-year, the Taliban promulgated a "vice and virtue law" banning women's voices from being heard in public and preventing women without *mahram* (male chaperones) from using transport. Under this repressive law, the Taliban "morality inspectors" (police) were empowered to threaten and detain individuals who violate their morality code and bring them before the Taliban's courts for prosecution.

Severe restrictions remained in place – despite the April 2023 UN Security Council resolution calling for their swift reversal – and continued to impact all aspects of women's and girls' lives. Women and girls remained banned from attending education beyond primary school (grade six). In December, it was additionally reported that the Taliban banned women and girls from attending medical education. They remained banned from participating in sporting activities, visiting parks and public baths, and travelling more than 72km or appearing in public without *mahram*.

The Taliban's draconian restrictions further decimated women's financial independence, plunging women-headed households deep into poverty and creating difficulties for women running home-based businesses. Bans remained on women working in the public sector, except in areas such as primary education, healthcare and certain security institutions. The Taliban's decision banning women from working with UN agencies and NGOs remained unchanged.

Due to restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly, Afghan Witness, an independent

research team, reported that 94% of all women's protests "took place indoors".

Gender-based violence

In August the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan reported cases of women detainees being sexually abused and assaulted by the Taliban. Similarly, Afghan Witness and the media reported that the Taliban initiated a campaign in January to arrest women and girls for non-compliance with mandatory hijab rules. This resulted in the arrest and detention of dozens of women and girls during the year, "with many reporting degrading treatments, torture, and even rape".

There were continued reports of a sharp increase in gender-based violence as well as forced and early marriage. Between January 2022 and June 2024, Afghan Witness recorded 840 incidents of gender-based violence against women and girls, including 332 killings, based on their monitoring of open-source information. Impunity continued as the institutions and legal framework designed to address gender-based violence remained dismantled by the Taliban.

In June, Amnesty International joined calls led by Afghan women human rights defenders to recognize gender apartheid as a crime under international law.[1] However, Afghan women human rights defenders were excluded from the third UN-convened meeting on Afghanistan in Qatar on 30 June and 1 July.[2]

In September, Germany, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands announced legal action before the International Court of Justice against the state of Afghanistan for violations of CEDAW by the Taliban de facto authorities.[3]

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The Taliban announced in August that they would no longer allow the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan to enter the country. In September the UN Human Rights Council's resolution on Afghanistan extended the vital mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur and acknowledged serious accountability gaps. However, it failed to establish an independent international accountability mechanism to investigate and to collect and preserve evidence of ongoing and past crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations. Ninety national and international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, had called for such a mechanism to address the cycle of impunity in the country.[4] In August a group of UN Special Procedures mandate holders highlighted that an avenue for access to justice was "virtually non-existent" in Afghanistan.

The ICC investigation of the situation in the country remained slow and limited in scope. It excluded members of US and other international forces involved in the conflict before 2021, as well as members of the former Afghan government.[5]

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

Shia-Hazaras were systematically targeted in attacks and killings at their places of worship, education and civilian locations across the country. The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (IS-KP) claimed responsibility for most of these attacks. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented several attacks in a Hazara-dominated area, west of the capital, Kabul between January and March. In September, 14 Hazara travellers were unlawfully killed in central Afghanistan.

IS-KP suicide attacks also targeted members of the Taliban de facto authorities, causing civilian casualties. Civilians continued to be harmed by landmines and other explosive remnants from the previous conflict. UNAMA reported civilian injuries and deaths in March, resulting from aerial strikes by the Pakistan army and ground engagement between the Taliban and Pakistan's military forces along the border.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES, ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

As of June, 20,000 people, including 1,500 women, were reportedly imprisoned under

the Taliban.

The Taliban continued using arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and unlawful detention against people perceived as political opponents. These included former government employees, religious scholars who criticized the Taliban's policies, civil society activists and human rights defenders and many journalists. For example, the Afghan human rights organization Rawadari recorded 614 cases of arbitrary detention in the first six months of the year. The organization further reported that it had documented 35 cases of enforced disappearance from nine of the country's 34 provinces in the same period.

In August the Taliban Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV, also known as the morality inspectors or police) announced that they had detained 13,000 people over the past year for violating their morality rules. Ahmad Fahim Azimi, an education rights activist, was released in September after 11 months' imprisonment, following arbitrary arrest and an unfair trial in which he was accused of organizing protests and "inciting women to protest".

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS, TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Detainees, including members of the former government and those critical of the Taliban, remained at risk of torture and other ill-treatment and extrajudicial executions. UNAMA recorded at least 98 cases of arbitrary arrest and detention of former government employees between January and June, including 20 incidents involving torture and other ill-treatment and nine incidents of unlawful killings.

The Taliban's use of public corporal punishment, amounting to torture and other ill-treatment, continued across the country. UNAMA reported punishments taking place in at least one province each week. From April to June, UNAMA recorded 179 individuals (147 men, 28 women and four boys) sentenced to corporal punishments. Accusations included "adultery" and "running away" – which disproportionately affected women and girls – and pederasty.

UNAMA also documented at least 1,033 instances of unlawful use of force (205 on women and girls and 828 on men and boys) by members of the MPVPV between August 2021 and March 2024.

DEATH PENALTY

The Taliban continued to carry out public executions of individuals who had been sentenced to death by their courts, despite serious concerns regarding compliance with fair trial rights.[6] UNAMA reported that three men were publicly executed in February and one man in November. In July, reports further indicated that between 300 and 600 prisoners were sentenced to death by the Taliban courts. In March, media reported that the Taliban may resume "stoning to death" as punishment for "adultery".

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Taliban relentlessly suppressed freedom of expression by banning media outlets from operating and restricting their programming. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Afghanistan among the three worst countries for media freedom in 2024. In April, at least two local private TV stations (Noor and Barya) were suspended for criticizing the Taliban. In May, RSF raised concerns that journalists and analysts were prohibited from working for and collaborating with Afghanistan International, a popular TV news channel operating outside the country.

The Taliban also reportedly introduced restrictions on live political talk shows, including limitations on who could participate in interviews and what they could say. In October, media reported that the Taliban in Takhar province had banned filming and broadcasting "living things", as it is against their vice and virtue law. In November, UNAMA reported the use of arbitrary arrest, torture and other ill-treatment, and threats and intimidation against 336 journalists and media workers between August 2021 and September 2024.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

The Taliban's restrictions on Shia jurisprudence being taught in the education system remained in place. The Taliban promulgated decrees and laws which instituted religious discrimination and implemented monolithic religious doctrine. There were reports of the Taliban forcing members of the Shia Islamic community to convert their religious sect to the Sunni faction of Islam. The Taliban restrictions on the Ashura commemoration, which is mainly observed by Shia communities, continued. Additionally, the Taliban called Nawroz (solar new year celebrations) "un-Islamic".

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Poverty, which was exacerbated after the Taliban takeover in 2021, deepened in response to extreme weather events and ongoing internal displacement and economic crisis. UNDP reported that about 85% of Afghans lived on less than one dollar a day. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 23.7 million people, more half the country's population, needed humanitarian assistance. Of those, 12 million people were food insecure, while 2.9 million experienced emergency levels of hunger. UNICEF estimated that 2.9 million children faced acute malnutrition in 2024, with 850,000 experiencing life-threatening malnutrition. The humanitarian assistance programme remained severely underfunded.

Rawadari reported that the Taliban intentionally deprived marginalized religious and ethnic groups of humanitarian and development assistance, as well as access to essential services and government jobs.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) warned of "a near-collapse of the national public health system", with the EU warning that "basic health services are available to just 10% of women". UNAMA warned that restrictions on access to contraception violated women and girls' right to sexual and reproductive health.

People continued to flee the country in large numbers, both due to the worsening humanitarian crises and the draconian Taliban restrictions. Meanwhile, countries in the region, including Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye, continued to forcibly return hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees. These added to the 1.1 to 1.3 million who the IOM reported had already been returned in 2023. Some European countries also returned Afghan refugees back to the country.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI people continued to face discrimination and other human rights violations, including threats and arbitrary detention. Same-sex consensual relations remained illegal and punishable by death.

1. "Global: Gender apartheid must be recognized as a crime under international law", 17 June ↑
2. "Global: UN-hosted Doha meeting on Afghanistan faces a credibility test", 21 June ↑
3. "Afghanistan: International legal initiative an important step toward tackling the Taliban's war on women", 26 September ↑
4. "Afghanistan: Meaningful action needed at UN Human Rights Council to advance accountability for past and ongoing crimes under international law in Afghanistan", 26 September ↑
5. *Afghanistan: Amnesty International Calls for the Urgent Establishment of an Independent International Accountability Mechanism for Afghanistan*, 18 September ↑
6. "Afghanistan: Taliban must halt all executions and abolish death penalty", 23 February ↑

ALBANIA

Republic of Albania

Cancer patients were denied access to free healthcare in the Mother Teresa Hospital in Tirana. Widespread domestic violence against women and girls continued. People in prisons experienced overcrowding and inadequate healthcare. Threats to press freedom persisted. Concerns over refugees' rights were raised by the approval of an agreement with Italy regarding detention centres for asylum seekers rescued at sea.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Several patients needing cancer treatment were transferred by doctors from the state Mother Teresa Hospital in the capital, Tirana to their private, fee-charging clinics. The doctors were suspended and investigations were ongoing. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights highlighted concerns about inadequacies in healthcare infrastructure, shortage of personnel, lack of access to specialized services for sexual and reproductive health and unequal distribution of healthcare services, particularly in rural areas.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The police reported that, in the first six months of the year, 686 women had been subjected to domestic violence, an increase of 30 cases compared to the previous year. A study in May highlighted that lack of institutional support forced victims of domestic violence back to their abusers. The UN ESC Committee highlighted that the procedure for obtaining free legal aid should be reviewed to ensure better access for domestic violence victims.

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

In January, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture once again expressed concerns about the living conditions of forensic psychiatric patients in detention. At the temporary facility housing psychiatric patients within Lezha Prison, the Committee was concerned about overcrowding, lack of medical staff and poor infrastructure. The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture separately reported a high number of people in pretrial detention and inadequate access to healthcare for people in detention.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In May, the 2024 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders found that press freedom and independence of the Albanian media were "threatened by conflicts of interest between the business and political worlds, a flawed legal framework and partisan regulation". It found that journalists continued to face intimidation from both politicians and organized crime.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In January, the Constitutional Court gave the green light for parliament to ratify an agreement with Italy regarding the construction of two detention centres in Albania to hold asylum seekers rescued by Italian state ships, despite concerns over arbitrary detention. The first asylum seekers detained under the agreement, from Bangladesh and Egypt, were returned to Italy following another Italian court decision in October; this granted them the right to have their asylum claims processed in Italy.

DISCRIMINATION

Roma and Egyptian people

In April, the CERD Committee highlighted persistent challenges for Roma and Egyptian people, including difficulties in obtaining birth registration and identity documents, and accessing public services. The committee found evidence of de facto segregation and discrimination of Roma and Egyptian children in some schools.

LGBTI people

In May, a symbolic same-sex marriage in Tirana sparked controversy despite not being legally recognized. It triggered outrage from the political right and religious groups, leading to increased hate speech against the LGBTI community.

In July, the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity urged the government to align laws and policies with the realities faced by LGBTI people, recognizing their experience of stigmatization and discrimination in education, healthcare, employment and daily life.

ALGERIA

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Authorities maintained their closure of civic space through a severe crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. The use of unfounded terrorism charges to crush peaceful dissent continued, including against political activists, journalists, trade unionists and human rights defenders. Authorities increased the penalty for irregularly exiting Algeria and introduced a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment for facilitating an irregular exit. The government collectively and unlawfully expelled at least 31,404 refugees and migrants to Niger. Authorities failed to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment. Civil society reported 48 femicides; there remained no comprehensive official statistics on gender-based violence. A prolonged climate-induced drought negatively affected the realization of human rights. Authorities introduced measures to address inflation; food inflation slowed but remained high.

BACKGROUND

Early presidential elections took place on 7 September. According to the Constitutional Court, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune was re-elected with 84.3% of the vote from a turnout of 46.1% of eligible voters.

In July the World Bank reclassified the Algerian economy from lower-middle-income to upper-middle-income following a revision to national accounts statistics undertaken by the authorities.

According to the World Weather Attribution initiative, July's extreme heatwave in the Mediterranean region, including Algeria, was related to climate change.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

Political activists

Authorities continued to restrict the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association of members of opposition political parties, and to arbitrarily arrest and prosecute political opposition activists for exercising their human rights.[1] In August, judicial authorities subjected political activists to judicial supervision under abusive conditions including a ban on all publications, media interventions and political activity.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Authorities remained highly intolerant towards peaceful gatherings and other peaceful assemblies. Throughout the year, security forces prevented at least three human rights and cultural events from taking place and arrested at least 64 activists who attempted to organize peaceful gatherings.

In March the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association expressed deep concern about the multiple difficulties encountered by leaders of the Trade Union Confederation of Productive Forces (COSYFOP) and affiliated organizations in the exercise of their trade union rights and rights to freedom of association.

In a May report the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association declared that the criminalization of civil society work in Algeria had "a chilling effect and has created a climate of fear, resulting in a severe shrinking of civic space".

Counterterrorism and human rights

The use of vaguely worded and unfounded terrorism charges to suppress peaceful dissent remained widespread. Activist and poet Mohamed Tadjadit was arbitrarily detained for nine months following his arrest on 29 January on "terrorism" charges.[2] On 28 March, union leader Hamza Kherroubi, president of the COSYFOP-affiliated Algerian Union of Industries (UAI), was unjustly convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison on baseless terrorism-related charges.

Freedom of expression and of the press

On 28 April the president ratified Law 24-06 amending and supplementing the Penal Code. The law introduced a plethora of overly

broad and vague amendments and new provisions which facilitate the criminalization of acts protected by international human rights law. The law could lead to further self-censorship and prevent free and open discussions on matters of public interest.

Authorities continued to curtail the work of journalists through arbitrary detentions and prosecutions and unlawful sanctions against independent media outlets. On 13 June, the Algiers Court of Appeal confirmed the arbitrary dissolution of media group Interface Medias, after the conviction and sentencing of its director and founder, Ihsane El Kadi, to seven years in prison in June 2023 on trumped-up and vague charges.[3] Ihsane El Kadi was released on 1 November in a presidential pardon for 4,000 prisoners, which also included activist Mohamed Tadjadit (see above), human rights defender Mohad Gasmi and at least 20 other arbitrarily detained activists, human rights defenders and journalists.

Authorities also placed or maintained arbitrary travel bans and other restrictions on activists, lawyers, trade unionists and journalists in relation to the exercise of their human rights, including freedom of expression.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Penal Code and Family Code continued to unlawfully discriminate against women in matters of inheritance, marriage, divorce, child custody and guardianship. Women's rights groups continued to call for the repeal of discriminatory provisions.

The activist group Féminicides Algérie recorded at least 48 femicides as of 23 December. No comprehensive official statistics were available on gender-based violence, amid concerns over severe under-reporting due to societal stigma, police inaction, limited shelters, fear of further abuse and other barriers for women and girls seeking protection and justice.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The Penal Code continued to criminalize consensual adult same-sex sexual relations, punishable by up to two years in prison and a fine.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Law 24-06 increased the maximum penalty for irregularly exiting Algeria from six months' to three years' imprisonment. Article 175bis1 introduced a new penalty of up to five years' imprisonment for "anyone who facilitates or attempts to facilitate, directly or indirectly" an irregular exit.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

According to the organization Alarm Phone Sahara, Algeria summarily and collectively expelled at least 31,404 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to Niger during the year.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Authorities continued to use Decree Law 06-3, which discriminates against religions other than Sunni Islam, to violate the rights of non-Muslims for practising their faith, including through criminal prosecutions.

According to the Protestant Church of Algeria, 46 out of 47 of their churches remained closed either due to judicial harassment or because the authorities ordered their closure.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Judicial and security authorities continued to ignore detainees' allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

Authorities failed to open an investigation after journalist Merzoug Touati submitted a complaint on 12 August in which he alleged that police officers in the north-eastern city of Bejaia subjected him to torture and other ill-treatment to reveal the location of his phone, including by threatening to subject him to sexual violence in police custody.

Algeria again failed to submit its fourth periodic report to the UN Committee against Torture, which was due in 2012.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

A January report from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre highlighted the effects of ongoing and severe

climate change-related droughts across the Mediterranean region, including Algeria, with negative repercussions on agriculture, ecosystems, drinking water availability, energy production and the increased risk of wildfires.

To address the drought, on 8 February, Algeria announced a programme to rehabilitate several wastewater treatment plants, with the declared objective of deriving 60% of water for irrigation from treated wastewater by 2030.

On 8 June, protests erupted in the north-western region of Tiaret following months of water shortages and rationing related to the drought. The government sacked the local officials it alleged were responsible for mismanagement, mobilized water trucks and announced the construction of a water pipeline.

Algeria remained in the top nine gas flaring countries globally. Gas flaring releases greenhouse gas emissions and can harm the health of surrounding communities. In June, the World Bank reported a 5% reduction in gas flaring volume and a 3% decrease in flaring intensity in Algeria compared to the previous year, in addition to a 2% decrease in oil production.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

On 1 July a court unjustly convicted and sentenced civil society activist Rabah Kadri to a one-year suspended prison term, a fine and payment of damages in relation to his TikTok posts criticizing socio-economic conditions in Algeria and demanding political change.

Food inflation slowed but remained high at almost 5%, threatening the rights to food, health and housing for the poorest section of the population. According to the World Bank, food accounted for more than half of household expenditure for the poorest 40%.

The 2024 budget introduced tax exemptions on sales and imports of several food products, increased the salary scale for public sector employees by about 15%, and increased allowances for students, people with disabilities and unemployed people. Authorities announced a new assisted employment contract for unemployed people in April and a 10% to 15% increase in retirement benefits in May.

Algeria had yet to submit its fifth periodic report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which was due in 2015.

1. "Algeria: Authorities must halt ongoing repression of civic space ahead of presidential elections", 2 September ↑
2. "Algeria: Authorities must drop bogus charges against Hirak activist Mohamed Tadjadit", 17 July ↑
3. *Algeria: Further Information: Journalist's Sentence Confirmed on Appeal: Ihsane El Kadi*, 16 January ↑

ANDORRA

Principality of Andorra

A total ban on abortion remained in place. An activist who raised concerns about the ban was acquitted after a protracted judicial process. A bill to address concerns around affordable housing was welcomed but deemed insufficient.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

A total ban on abortion remained in place, violating the right to safe abortion care. Those in need of an abortion had no alternative but to travel – if able – to other countries in search of essential healthcare.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In January, following a judicial process lasting more than four years, the trial of Vanessa Mendoza Cortés, president of the women's rights organization Associació Stop Violències, ended in acquittal. She had been charged with "a crime against the prestige of the institutions" after speaking out about women's rights and the harmful impact of Andorra's abortion ban during a CEDAW Committee session in 2019.[1]

RIGHT TO HOUSING

In March, a report published by the European Committee of Social Rights found Andorra in breach of the European Social

Charter as its laws failed to prohibit evictions during winter or provide for compensation in the event of an illegal eviction.

In July, the government introduced a draft bill aimed at sustainable growth and protection of the right to housing. Although welcomed, the bill lacked concrete targets to increase social housing stock. At the end of the year, the bill had not been debated in parliament.

In October, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance recommended that Andorra review its five-year residency requirement for access to social housing, to ensure equitable access to housing for foreigners in vulnerable situations.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Defamation laws, including the criminalization of criticism of the authorities and Andorran institutions, remained in force, breaching international human rights law.

1. "Andorra: Acquittal of activist who raised concerns about total abortion ban at a UN meeting 'an important victory'", 17 January ↑

ANGOLA

Republic of Angola

Civil society activists and journalists were arrested and detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Some of them were denied necessary healthcare in detention. There was no investigation into the killing of one woman by security forces and the injury of another. The fate and whereabouts of two members of the National Unity for Total Revolution of Angola Movement remained unknown. Women and children from the south-western provinces were most vulnerable to food insecurity, which was expected to affect 5% of the overall population.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Some prisoners were denied adequate medical care. The health of at least two activists, imprisoned since September 2023 in connection with their roles in supporting peaceful protests, deteriorated. In February, Adolfo Campos was admitted to the prison hospital for urgent treatment. The prison authorities ignored doctors' recommendations and his lawyers' request that he be transferred for surgery at an external facility. In June, Gildo das Ruas complained of fever and body aches but prison authorities did not let him see a doctor until 1 August when he was diagnosed with spinal deviation, preventing him from standing for more than 30 minutes, and prescribed a wheelchair and a lumbar prosthesis. A wheelchair delivered to the prison by his lawyers on 15 August was withheld from him for at least four days.[1]

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The Angolan National Police (PNA) repressed at least seven protests against the continuing detention of activists, including Adolfo Campos and Gildo das Ruas (see above), high living costs, denial of workers' rights and the prospect of President Lourenço serving a third term in office, among other things.

On 22 June the PNA prevented the National Unity for Total Revolution of Angola (UNTRA) movement from holding a peaceful demonstration in the capital, Luanda. At least 11 protesters were arrested, one of whom was beaten and seriously injured by the arresting officers. They were released without charge seven hours later.

A demonstration against new legislation on vandalism and national security was stopped by the PNA on 31 August when at least seven protesters, including activists and a journalist, were arrested at Santa Ana cemetery in Luanda, taken to Luanda Provincial Command and released without charge 10 hours later.

The PNA repressed another UNTRA protest on 21 September, claiming it was unauthorized, which the organizers refuted. At least seven protesters were detained, including organizers who had resisted a

police order to disperse. The police confiscated their banners, pamphlets and telephones. They were all released the same day without charge.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

The PNA continued to arbitrarily detain people, particularly activists involved in protests.

On 4 January the PNA arrested Laurinda Gouveia, a human rights activist, and her husband along with their two-year-old daughter at a peaceful protest in Luanda that called for the release of activists and the social media influencer Neth Nehara, who was serving a two-year prison sentence for criticizing the president on TikTok. Laurinda Gouveia and her family were released the next day after she and her husband attended a summary trial at the Luanda Provincial Court, which dropped all charges on the basis of insufficient evidence.

On 16 March, Laurinda Gouveia was rearrested along with Elisabeth Campos and Marinela Pascoal, as they were about to participate in a protest organized by Women for Civic and Political Rights against police violence and high living costs. They were released the same evening after their lawyer lodged a complaint.

On 20 March, PNA officers detained three people in the cities of Bengo and Huambo for participating in a general strike called by the General Centre of Independent and Free Trade Unions of Angola to demand an increase in the national minimum wage and better living conditions.

Florindo Chivucute, the executive director of civil society organization Friends of Angola, was arrested on 27 August for disobeying police orders after he filmed traffic police and officers from the Criminal Investigation Services (SIC) and the Directorate of Investigation of Penal Offences (DIIP) attacking him. He spent a night in handcuffs in the 4th Police Station, Luanda, before being given a two-month suspended prison sentence.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 6 June, TV Nzinga journalist Guilherme Fortuna was prevented from reporting on the mass lay-off of workers from the Luanda-Bengo Special Economic Zone when officers of the 4th Police Station assaulted him, destroying his camera and recording equipment.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

There was no investigation announced into the killing on 23 August of Elzira dos Prazeres Manuel Zonga, and the injury of Esperança José Manuel, by gunshots fired by PNA officers who were trying to stop a violent clash between rival groups in the Rangel neighbourhood of Luanda. The two women had not been participating in the violence. A police officer was also seriously injured during the clash.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

According to Deutsche Welle News and UNTRA's secretary-general Leonardo Marcos, two UNTRA members were forcibly disappeared on 11 March. They were believed to have been taken by SIC and DIIP officials after they left the Radio Iglesias office in Luanda, where they were being interviewed about a protest they were planning for 23 March against high living costs and the continued detention of "political" prisoners. Their fate and whereabouts remained unknown at the end of the year.

RIGHT TO FOOD

People from the Cunene, Huila and Namibie provinces faced severe drought caused by the long-term impact of El Niño. Agricultural production was compromised. About 5% of Angola's population, particularly women and children, were expected to experience food insecurity during the year. Planned government cuts to fuel subsidies were expected to compound the situation in the absence of sufficient social protection measures. While local authorities in Cahama commune, Cunene province, constructed dams to improve access to water, and distributed resilient seeds to address the

agricultural production deficit, the measures were insufficient. Consequently, hundreds of people continued to migrate from Cunene province to Namibia.

1. "Angola: Immediately release activists wrongfully jailed for one year and denied medical care", 16 September ↑

ARGENTINA

Argentine Republic

Barriers to accessing abortion remained. High rates of femicide and gender-based violence persisted and support services were cut. Female journalists experienced digital violence. New legislation legalized mass surveillance. Repressive responses to public demonstrations increased. Poverty worsened and the government imposed harsh austerity measures, particularly impacting older people. The government took regressive steps in the fight against climate change, including introducing legislation to authorize deforestation and mining in periglacial zones.

BACKGROUND

Argentina remained immersed in a deep economic and social crisis. In June, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC), 52.9% of the population were living in poverty.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child voiced concern over the closure and degradation of institutions, retraction of public policies, and drastic reduction to the budget allocated to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents, including cuts to investment in health and education.

Congress had failed to appoint an ombudsperson since 2009. The Executive Branch proposed only male candidates for two vacancies at the all-male Supreme Court.

A proposal to lower the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 13 years was pending approval.

Argentina rejected the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, it was the only country to dissociate itself from the Pact for the Future and vote against a resolution in the UN General Assembly aimed at preventing digital violence against women and girls.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

According to the Ministry of Health, since the 2021 legalization of abortion before 14 weeks of pregnancy, 245,015 people accessed a safe abortion within the public health system up to October 2023. Abortion-related deaths reduced by 53% between 2020 and 2022. In January, however, President Javier Milei referred to what he called "the bloody abortion agenda", alongside other stigmatizing rhetoric and false information. Despite the abortion law remaining in effect (amid parliamentary attempts to overturn it), in September the National Directorate of Sexual and Reproductive Health announced that there was a shortage of essential supplies for abortion services.

According to information published in 2024, every hour five girls aged under 20 gave birth in Argentina in 2022. Despite this, the government reversed the Adolescents' Unplanned Pregnancy Prevention Plan, which had successfully reduced the teenage pregnancy rate by 49% over the previous four years. The Ministry of Health dismantled it by reducing the real-term budget by 68%, ending the contracts of 619 specialists and cutting resources.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Between January and December a femicide was reported every 33 hours. Despite this, resource cuts for policies around gender-based violence were alarming. The gender-based violence hotline "144" reduced its staff by 42% and the Acompañar programme, which aims to strengthen the economic independence of individuals experiencing gender-based violence, had reduced its reach by 98.63% in the first quarter of 2024 compared with the same period in 2023.

In June the Brazilian justice system found actor Juan Darthés guilty of raping Argentinian actor Thelma Fardín when she

was 16 years old. Juan Darthés holds dual Brazilian and Argentinian citizenship and had relocated to Brazil following Thelma Fardín's accusation in 2018. Brazil does not extradite its own citizens.

In May, three lesbian women died after a man threw a Molotov cocktail into their room while they slept.

In August a man was convicted for the murder of Tehuel de la Torre, a young transgender man who disappeared on 11 March 2021. The court found that the crime was aggravated because it was motivated by hatred of gender identity, marking the first decision by the Argentinian justice system recognizing extreme gender-based violence against transgender men. Pierina Nochetti, a lesbian human rights activist, faced criminal charges that could have resulted in up to four years in prison for allegedly painting graffiti protesting at the disappearance of Tehuel de la Torre. In October, she was acquitted.[1]

In April, influencer Emmanuel Danann was sentenced to community service and participation in a gender violence prevention workshop and was prohibited from mentioning journalist Marina Abiuso following systemic online gender-based harassment against her.

Over the past five years, 63.5% of female journalists in Argentina have experienced digital violence, with 85.6% reporting harassment or trolling. Additionally, 45.9% have faced sexual harassment or threats of sexual violence. As a result, 50% of these journalists reported engaging in self-censorship, and 34.5% chose to withdraw from digital platforms altogether.[2]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MASS SURVEILLANCE

Since President Milei's administration began in 2023, nearly 30 journalists experienced harassment and violence on social media and in the media from the president and other officials.[3]

Resolutions 428/2024 and 710/2024, issued by the Ministry of Security, enabled mass surveillance through monitoring social media, digital applications and the internet, as well as facial recognition and machine-learning algorithms used to analyse "historical crime data and predict future crimes".

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Following the approval of restrictive regulations on the right to protest in December 2023, the authorities responded to public demonstrations with increasing repression. On 1 February, during a peaceful protest against a bill proposing austerity measures, Matías Aufieri was blinded in his left eye by a rubber bullet fired by police.

On 12 June, 33 people were arbitrarily detained and criminalized during protests against a new version of the same law. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights condemned the authorities' comments stigmatizing and criminalizing demonstrators, and describing them as "terrorists" with alleged plans for a "coup d'état".

IMPUNITY

The Executive ordered the closure of the Special Investigation Unit for the search of children appropriated and forcibly disappeared during the 1976-1983 military regime.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights found Argentina responsible for failing to adopt reasonable measures to prevent the attack on 18 July 1994 at the headquarters of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association centre, as well as for not fulfilling its duty to investigate the attack and its cover-up with due diligence and for violating the right to historical truth.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The introduction of austerity measures had a disproportionate impact on children and older people.

According to the INDEC, 15.7 million people lived below the poverty line in the first half of 2024, an increase of 11.2 percentage points compared with the end of 2023. UNICEF reported that in April more than a million children went to bed without an evening meal.

Reduction in pension values was one of the main drivers of the fiscal adjustment

carried out by the administration. For the whole of 2024, the minimum pension benefit failed to cover the cost of living, impacting people's right to an adequate standard of living. Despite the decision by Congress to increase the value of pensions, the president vetoed the change, undermining the economic and social rights of older people.

The average person living in Argentina suffered economic austerity, while the fiscal system favoured a regressive tax system that exacerbated inequality. The government justified austerity and budget cuts as necessary to achieve fiscal balance, while reducing progressive taxes and increasing tax exemptions for large companies.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Concerns remained over the government's position on climate change. The president declared that "global warming is a lie from socialism" and announced that he was unsubscribing Argentina from the Agenda 2030 commitments, which include targets to limit climate change. The Climate Action Tracker rated Argentina's climate targets and policies as "critically insufficient", meaning that they were not at all consistent with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C limit for the average global temperature rise.

The government also introduced regressive legislation authorizing deforestation in currently protected areas and expanding the authorization of mining activities in the periglacial zone. The reforms had not been passed by the end of the year.

1. "Argentina: Ongoing criminalization against LGBT+ activist", 30 May ↑
2. "Muted: The impact of digital violence against women journalists", 15 October (Spanish only) ↑
3. "Escalation of attacks on freedom of expression in Argentina: Amnesty International's letter to the IACHR", 23 July (Spanish only) ↑

ARMENIA

Republic of Armenia

The government struggled to integrate more than 100,000 refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh. Freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly were curtailed on several occasions and journalists and environmental defenders were threatened and harassed. Amendments to the domestic violence law provided increased protection to survivors. Discrimination against LGBTI people persisted.

BACKGROUND

Negotiations towards finalizing a peace deal with Azerbaijan continued amidst a tense security situation, marked by clashes around Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region and along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Tensions also remained high over key issues such as territorial corridors and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The government continued to strengthen political ties with the EU and USA, while announcing plans to leave the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization.

The post-conflict tensions with Azerbaijan continued to fuel domestic political unrest. In April and May, large-scale protests erupted after a border demarcation agreement with Azerbaijan left four villages in the Tavush region on the Azerbaijani side of the border. Protesters blocked roads, calling on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to resign and criticizing his handling of the 2022 conflict with Azerbaijan and his government's shift in political alliances.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The government continued to face difficulties in integrating more than 100,000 refugees who fled Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan took control in September 2023. Housing, employment and education remained particularly difficult for many refugees. Their right to a safe and dignified return remained unfulfilled.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The police used unlawful force against demonstrators on several occasions during the protests in April and May calling on the prime minister to resign.

On 12 June, police and demonstrators clashed in the centre of the capital, Yerevan, during protests against the border demarcation agreement. Some 101 individuals were injured, including 17 police officers, and 98 people were reportedly detained. At least 15 individuals were later charged with hooliganism and violating public order. No law enforcement officers were indicted or charged following an inquiry into the proportionality and legality of the police response.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The protests in April and May were accompanied by reports of increased pressure and harassment against journalists, including insults and threats. The Armenian Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression reported that 14 journalists and media workers were injured while covering the protests, due to targeted attacks as well as the crush of the crowd. Some journalists were shoved and pushed to the ground, while others reported being beaten and injured by police officers.

On 22 March, authorities detained podcast hosts and political opposition activists Vazgen Sagatelyan and Narek Samsonyan on charges of hooliganism and remanded them in custody for two months. The two men were accused of using obscene language against the Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan and other figures from the ruling party on the media outlet AntiFake. Their trial began on 23 September. If convicted, they could face up to five years' imprisonment.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The Amulsar gold mine was given permission to resume operations in January without fully addressing the environmental concerns around water and land pollution, which had led to protests in previous years. Environmental defenders faced lawsuits intended to silence them and were targeted by media smear campaigns. These included allegations that their activism threatened national security. The attacks followed their December 2023 joint statement raising concerns about the environmental impacts of the controversial Amulsar mining project.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

On 12 April, parliament adopted amendments to the domestic violence law, strengthening protections for survivors and removing the previous emphasis on "restoring family harmony", which could potentially put pressure on victims to stay in abusive relationships. The amendments expanded the definition of domestic violence to include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. The amendments also introduced new offences including forced medical interventions, restricting access to healthcare, "virginity testing" and stalking.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Stigmatization and discrimination against LGBTI people continued. In June, staff in the office of the Ombudsperson reported being subjected to threats, harassment and verbal abuse, particularly for their work with LGBTI individuals.

1. "Armenia: Violence during street protests must be investigated", 13 June ↑

AUSTRALIA

Australia

Discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remained entrenched. Children as young as 10 years of age were imprisoned. New migration laws increased risks of indefinite detention or refoulement, and other human rights abuses in detention. Anti-protest laws were used to restrict the right to peaceful assembly. New fossil fuel projects were approved, perpetuating Australia's status as a leading fossil fuel producer.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples continued to face inequality. Only five of the 19 targets set in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap were on track. Progress on four targets worsened, including Indigenous incarceration rates, children in out-of-home care, and suicide rates among First Nations Peoples.

Eighteen Indigenous People died in custody during the year.

Indigenous women experienced disproportionate levels of domestic violence. Perpetrators of crimes against missing and murdered Indigenous women and children were often not held accountable.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Northern Territory lowered the age of criminal responsibility from 12 to 10 and reintroduced physical restraint devices such as spit-hoods. Queensland introduced tougher sentences for children under "adult crime, adult time" policies. In June, Victoria raised the age of criminal responsibility to 12, but rescinded plans to raise this to 14.

In Western Australia, three Aboriginal boys died in the youth detention system.[1] Indigenous children were 23 times more likely to be under youth justice supervision and 28 times more likely to be in detention, despite making up only 5.7% of the population aged 10 to 17.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Unlawful refugee policies continued, including indefinite detention in Australia and sending asylum seekers "offshore" to Nauru. By the end of the year, there were over 100 refugees and asylum seekers in Nauru.

In May, the High Court dismissed a challenge brought by an Iranian asylum seeker, known as ASF17, who had been detained since 2013. ASF17 was unsuccessful in his claim of persecution based on his sexuality under a flawed "fast track" assessment process. He faced indefinite detention in Australia since he was unable to be removed to Iran. The ruling impacted up to 200 people held in immigration detention in similar circumstances.

In late November, three new migration laws were passed that included increased powers to remove and detain refugees and migrants, including to third countries, and new powers to confiscate phones in detention.[2]

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In July, the Disability Royal Commission published a report which made over 200 recommendations. Only 13 of these were fully accepted, with agreement "in principle" on 117 others. The government did not agree to phase out special schools, group homes or segregated employment settings, nor to pass new laws for greater protections for people with disabilities, as recommended. There were fears that this would negatively impact the rights to housing, education and work for people with disabilities.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government continued to expand fossil fuel projects, ranking among the top 20 countries in developed gas reserves. Australia was also one of nine nations responsible for 90% of global coal production. It planned to increase coal and gas output by more than 5% by 2030: an increase incompatible with global climate commitments. There was no clear plan to phase out fossil fuels or curb extraction. Climate finance contributions were rated as critically insufficient.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Anti-protest laws were used against climate activists and those protesting against the war in Gaza.[3] On 25 June, in Newcastle, New South Wales, police stopped a climate protester attempting to disrupt trains and arrested at least 26 people. In November, over 170 people were arrested for temporarily blocking coal ships. Students and activists advocating for Palestinian human rights faced arrests, police violence and harassment. The University of Sydney introduced a policy requiring students to apply for permits to protest. At the University of Melbourne, CCTV footage and Wi-Fi

location data were used as evidence in misconduct hearings against protesters.

In September, anti-war protesters were arrested after clashes with police outside a major defence weapons exposition in Melbourne. Police fired rubber bullets at demonstrators.

1. "Australia: Death of 17 year old Aboriginal boy in WA youth detention a shameful, preventable tragedy", 30 August ↑
2. "Australia: Labor's new migration laws deliver a dangerous setback for rights of refugees and people seeking asylum", 2 December ↑
3. "Australia: Police attempts to block protests go against government's human rights obligations, say civil liberties and community groups", 2 October ↑

AUSTRIA

Republic of Austria

Social security provisions remained inadequate. Abortion continued to be criminalized. Peaceful acts of civil disobedience were met with prison terms without due process. Parliament passed a Freedom of Information Act, but with far-reaching exceptions. Guardianship for unaccompanied children seeking international protection was not guaranteed. Anti-discrimination legislation was inadequate at the regional level. Police officers were still not required to wear identification badges. No climate protection act was introduced.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Women and people with disabilities faced significant barriers in accessing social assistance benefits, including stigmatization, bureaucratic hurdles and restrictive legal provisions, which undermined their right to social security.[1] During the parliamentary election campaigns, the Austrian People's Party as well as the Austrian Freedom Party advocated restricting access to social assistance benefits for asylum seekers and non-nationals.

In September the Ministry of Social Affairs adopted the Housing First approach as an Austrian-wide model to support people experiencing homelessness. Despite this positive development, the government failed to adopt a comprehensive national housing strategy.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

By year's end 27 women had been killed in cases of suspected femicides, amid concerns about a failure to adopt long-term strategies to prevent such violence. In September the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) called on Austria, among other things, to ensure that places in women's shelters were available in sufficient quantity and in an adequate geographic distribution.

Women continued to have limited access to safe and affordable abortion care in several federal states. Stigmatization of health personnel providing abortion care remained a further barrier to women accessing safe abortion services.[2] Civil society continued to urge the government to fully decriminalize abortion.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Peaceful acts of civil disobedience were met with prison terms without due process and negative rhetoric was used against climate activists. In May, protests by Palestinian solidarity movements at the University of Vienna and the Technical University were dispersed by the police.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In January, parliament passed the Freedom of Information Act, although most municipalities were exempted from the duty to proactively publish information of general interest.

In August, the government published a draft law on surveillance of encrypted communications which would allow the use of highly invasive spyware.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

In June the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) expressed concerns over conditions in some detention deportation centres and called on Austria to end the practice of detaining individuals with mental health issues in so-called security cells in such facilities.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In June the UN CAT expressed concerns about the lack of any federal provision to ensure guardianship for all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on their arrival in the country. A legislative proposal by the Ministry of Justice to address this was not forwarded to parliament for discussion.

Also in June the Constitutional Court upheld a decision to send a man back to Afghanistan, despite concerns that he faced a real risk of serious human rights violations.

In October the Court of Justice of the EU ruled that an Afghan woman's gender and nationality alone could suffice as proof of persecution, following Austria's denial of refugee status to two Afghan women.

There were no safe and dignified pathways like resettlement programmes for people seeking international protection.

DISCRIMINATION

Austria failed to harmonize anti-discrimination legislation across national and regional levels. Disability, ethnicity and gender continued to be considered protected grounds only in access to goods and services.

Concerns persisted throughout the year about rates of antisemitic and anti-Muslim crimes.

In the run up to parliamentary elections in September, there was a notable increase in racist speech, including by public officials, particularly online targeting of asylum seekers and refugees.

UNLAWFUL USE OF FORCE

In January, the new police oversight body became operational although concerns over its full independence persisted. Police were still not required to wear identification badges, impeding accountability.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Human-induced climate change increased extreme weather events, with floods, storms, and mountain snowfall in September. The government failed to introduce a binding climate protection act.

1. *"As if You Were Going to the Enemy": Access to Social Assistance Benefits in Austria*, 28 June ↑
2. *Austria: "It's my job" – Healthcare Professionals As Defenders of the Law on Abortion in Austria*, 26 June (German only) ↑

AZERBAIJAN

Republic of Azerbaijan

The year saw a sharp decline in respect for human rights, with the authorities continuing to impose an effective ban on independent oversight. Impunity prevailed for past violations in the conflict over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Independent NGOs and the media continued to face arbitrary restrictions. Human rights defenders and activists were arrested for their legitimate activities. Peaceful protests were suppressed. Torture and other ill-treatment remained widespread. LGBTI people were denied justice.

BACKGROUND

In November, Azerbaijan hosted COP29 amid allegations that senior officials from its conference team were using the opportunity to broker new fossil fuel deals. The Host Country Agreement was never made public, although a leaked version indicated a lack of genuine protection for human rights.

The authorities defied efforts to ensure oversight, refusing to cooperate with international intergovernmental bodies and civil society organizations, including those focused on human rights mechanisms. In January, the government threatened to

withdraw from the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Convention on Human Rights, after the council's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) suspended Azerbaijan's credentials due to insufficient cooperation and a worsening rights record. Authorities also restricted monitoring of February's snap presidential election, which was criticized by observers for lacking genuine competition and was won by the incumbent.

Peace negotiations with Armenia progressed after Azerbaijan agreed to drop its demand for a "Zangezur Corridor" to its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia in August. However, its new demands for Armenia to amend its constitution to remove references to unity with Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as ongoing disputes over border delineation, further complicated efforts to reach a final settlement.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Impunity prevailed for violations in the conflict over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. On 24 January, when suspending Azerbaijan's credentials, PACE reiterated its concern at Azerbaijan's failure to acknowledge the severe humanitarian and human rights impact of restricting access from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh through the Lachin Corridor. PACE also reiterated its condemnation of Azerbaijan's September 2023 military operation, which led to the displacement to Armenia of the entire ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, amounting to more than 100,000 people. Their right to a safe and dignified return remained unrealized.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

Independent NGOs and the media continued to face arbitrary restrictions, including denial of registration and onerous reporting requirements.[1] The media sector remained under effective government control, resulting in widespread self-censorship. The presidential election and COP29 were preceded by new waves of arrests of independent journalists and other government critics. In April, human rights defender Anar Mammadli, winner of the 2014 PACE human rights prize, was arrested and placed in pretrial detention on fabricated smuggling charges. His arrest came shortly after his Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center published an assessment on the conduct of the February presidential election and as he, together with other human rights defenders, announced a coalition on climate justice ahead of COP29.

More than a dozen journalists remained in arbitrary detention following their arrest in 2023. Authorities also extended the pretrial detention of at least 11 journalists from Azerbaijan's few remaining independent news outlets, falsely accusing them of currency smuggling in connection with alleged funding from western donors.

On 6 March, police raided one of the last remaining independent news channels Toplum TV, its partner organization the Institute of Democratic Initiatives (IDI), and the Platform for the Third Republic, an opposition group. They detained journalists and activists including Toplum TV founder Alasgar Mammadli, journalist Mushfig Jabbar, Third Republic board members Akif Gurbanov and Ruslan Izzetli, and IDI activists Ramil Babayev and Ali Zeynalov, all on fabricated charges. Independent journalists Imran Aliyev and Farid Mehralizade, arrested on 18 April and 29 May respectively, also remained in detention on false charges of currency smuggling.

Between August and November, the prosecution brought new fabricated charges of illegal entrepreneurship, money laundering and tax evasion against journalists of the investigative outlet Abzas Media, who had been held in arbitrary detention since November 2023. Its director and his deputy Ulvi Hasanli and Mahammad Kekalov, editor-in-chief Sevinj Vagifgizi and journalists Nargiz Absalamova, Elnara Gasimova and Hafiz Babali faced between eight and 12 years' imprisonment if convicted.

In July and August, academics Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov were arrested on fabricated charges of treason. They remained

in pretrial custody and were denied contact with their families.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Freedom of assembly remained severely and unduly restricted and the authorities continued to imprison those taking part in peaceful protests.

In April, trade union activist Aykhan Israfilov was sentenced to three years' imprisonment on fabricated drug charges in retaliation for participating in peaceful protests by couriers in August 2023.

Two activists who supported environmental protests in the village of Söyüdlü, Gadabay district, in 2023 were also convicted on false drug-related charges (see below). Joshgun Musayev, who printed posters during the protest, was arrested in August and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Former member of parliament Nazim Baydamirli, arrested in October shortly after he publicly supported the protests, was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment, and impunity for the perpetrators, remained widespread. On 3 July, in an exceptional move, the CoE's Committee for the Prevention of Torture publicly denounced Azerbaijan's ongoing refusal to cooperate and address long-standing concerns, including widespread physical ill-treatment and, on occasions, torture by the police. It called on the Azerbaijani authorities "to break this 'unholy alliance' between the continued resort to physical ill-treatment/torture by the police and the pervasive practice of threats, planting evidence, forced confessions and extortion".

On 24 July, Ulvi Hasanli (see above) published a letter alleging torture and other ill-treatment, including systematic beating of prisoners, in the detention centre where he was held.

Jailed government critics continued to be denied adequate medical care, resulting in significant worsening of their health. They included Anar Mammadli, Alasgar Mammadli, Ruslan Izzetli, Aziz Orujov, Fazil Gasimov and Famil Khalilov. On 22 April, academic Gubad Ibadoghlu, who had been held in pretrial detention for 274 days, was moved to house arrest as his health deteriorated. He remained under investigation on false charges and was banned from leaving Azerbaijan to receive medical care.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

On 19 April, the European Court of Human Rights struck out the case of *A. v. Azerbaijan* and 23 related applications, based on Azerbaijan's unilateral declaration, which acknowledged "the fact there was a violation of the applicants' rights" and made a commitment to pay them damages. The applicants alleged, among other things, that as LGBTI persons they had been subjected to discrimination, arbitrary arrests, mistreatment and forced medical examinations. The court's decision, which activists criticized for denying justice, left the allegations unaddressed because the authorities failed to conduct effective investigations and bring those responsible to justice. In 2019, the applicants had indicated to the court that "they were not satisfied with the terms of the [Azerbaijani government's] unilateral declaration" on which the decision was based.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

On 5 August, the government authorized the resumption of operations at a gold mine in Söyüdlü, including expanding an existing pond containing toxic waste. The operations had been suspended for a year following environmental protests in 2023 over concerns of improper storage of toxic waste during mining operations. Locals and environmental activists alleged that the waste was causing serious health problems and polluting surrounding agricultural land. The protests were brutally suppressed by the authorities.

1. Azerbaijan: *Update: The Human Rights Situation in Azerbaijan Ahead of COP29*, 1 November ↑

BAHRAIN

Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain continued to suppress the rights to freedom of expression and association, including through arbitrary detention and travel bans. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly was not fully respected; peaceful and violent demonstrators were grouped together in unfair trials which relied on non-credible evidence including "confessions" taken from children.

BACKGROUND

Bahrain released 2,586 prisoners, including more than 750 people detained for political reasons, according to Shia opposition groups, in three royal pardons on 8 April, 15 June and 4 September. The 8 April pardon included human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Naji Fateel. However, other prominent human rights defenders including Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and Abduljalil Al-Singace remained arbitrarily detained.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Bahrain continued to conduct arrests and prosecutions of government critics. On 5 May, authorities began a criminal trial against human rights activist Ali al-Hajee for peacefully protesting against an arbitrary travel ban imposed on him after his release from prison in 2023.[1] He had been released after serving a 10-year sentence for his involvement in peaceful protests. He was acquitted on 29 May and the travel ban was lifted in August.

Authorities continued the criminal investigation, begun in November 2023, of Jasim Hussein Al Abbas, based on a blog post he wrote about Bahrain's conversion to Islam. Authorities held him under an arbitrary travel ban throughout the year on the accusation of "circulating wrong historical information". Despite his repeated inquiries, the authorities would not disclose to him which government agency was responsible for imposing the travel ban or how he could contest it.

On 25 March, authorities detained Ebrahim Sharif, a leader of the outlawed opposition party Wa'd, for social media posts in which he criticized the government for investing national revenues in McLaren Automotive company rather than public housing. He was released on 28 March but the authorities did not formally drop the criminal investigation, allowing them the discretion to bring future charges in the case. This was the second time in less than a year that the authorities had detained Ebrahim Sharif for his political expression online.

On 30 July the Ministry of the Interior and Office of Public Prosecution detained Hasan al-Hayeki, Jamsheer Fairouz, Husain 'Id, Sayed Mohamed al-'Alawi and Saleh Sahwan for organizing a gathering on the night of 16 July at which people chanted: "We demand the release of the prisoners!" and other political slogans. Hasan al-Hayeki was released on 3 September. The others were released on 22 September.

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF NATIONALITY

On 10 July the Court of Cassation stripped Mohamed Rafeeq al-Husaini, the representative of al-Muharraq Governorate's First Electoral District, of his membership of the Council of Representatives, the elected house of Bahrain's parliament, on the grounds that he held Pakistani as well as Bahraini nationality. Pakistan does not recognize Mohamed Rafeeq al-Husaini as a Pakistani national, and he had lived in Bahrain with Bahraini nationality for decades. In August the Court of Cassation stripped Mohamed Rafeeq al-Husaini of his Bahraini nationality and the executive authorities deported him to Pakistan. The government acted against him after he called on 30 April for the release from prison of Ali Salman, the leader of the outlawed opposition party al-Wefaq. Ali Salman is serving a life sentence because of his political activities; Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The authorities continued to arrest, prosecute and imprison peaceful demonstrators and bystanders in unfair trials. On 25 March, seven defendants were convicted for participating in a pro-Palestine protest in the village of Sanabis on 2 November 2023. The court handed down prison sentences to all seven defendants in the absence of any credible evidence that they had committed an internationally recognized criminal offence (see below).

Despite the large-scale pardon and release of prisoners, Bahrain continued to arbitrarily detain 10 leaders of mass anti-government protests that took place in 2011, including activists and prisoners of conscience. The 10 men, who were convicted before a military court on charges including "setting up terror groups to topple the regime and change the constitution", had their convictions and sentences upheld on appeal in September 2012.

UNFAIR TRIALS

Criminal cases continued to be prosecuted through procedures that often violated the right to a fair trial. In cases where violence was allegedly used against police during street demonstrations, defendants were typically tried in groups resulting in group verdicts, undermining the right to a determination of individual criminal liability.

In February and March, for example, a court tried three adults and three children in one proceeding on charges of participating in a pro-Palestine demonstration in the village of Karzakkan on 17 November 2023 where some protesters engaged in violence against the police and some remained peaceful. In the separate trial of seven defendants in connection with the pro-Palestine protest in Sanabis on 2 November 2023, the only evidence used to convict them consisted of statements from officers of the Ministry of the Interior and the claim that five of the defendants had "confessed" under interrogation. Four of the five "confessions" were from children, including two 15-year-olds.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Authorities responded to long-term sit-in protests by inmates at Jaw prison, which began in March, by restricting the protesters' telephone calls and visits and by cutting off electricity to their buildings. This included cutting off detainees' air conditioning during summer temperatures of 44 to 46°C.

As in previous years, prisoners and their families were routinely denied access to their medical records.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

During COP29 in November, Bahrain's oil minister announced the country's commitment to reducing emissions by 30% by the year 2035 and achieving net zero by 2060. However, in February, Bahrain had sought a USD 500 million loan to expand oil and gas production by 400 new oil wells and 30 gas wells.

1. "Bahrain: Human rights activist faces trial in further prosecution for protesting travel ban", 3 May ↑

BANGLADESH

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Freedom of expression continued to be stifled by the draconian Cyber Security Act which did not adhere to international laws and standards. Student-led protests faced violence from the police, armed forces and groups aligned with the former ruling party, the Awami League. The violence left hundreds dead and thousands injured and sparked domestic and international pressure for reform. The new interim government began to address the issue of enforced disappearances, however, families of the disappeared were still waiting for truth and justice. Rohingya refugees continued to face dire living conditions in camps, without access to essential services. Religious minorities and Indigenous Peoples faced violence. Garment workers continued to suffer intimidation,

harassment and repression of their rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

BACKGROUND

Following weeks of student-led protests, on 5 August Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India. An interim government comprised of advisers was formed on 8 August. Subsequent breakdowns of law and order were reported, along with incidents of violence against those with ties to the Awami League party and minority communities, including Indigenous Peoples. The interim government extended an invitation to the OHCHR, the UN human rights office, to investigate human rights violations that took place between 1 July and 15 August.

In August, flash floods and heavy monsoon rains created what authorities referred to as the "worst climate disaster in recent memory". Climate-induced flooding affected almost 6 million people and displaced at least 500,000.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Following mounting domestic and international pressure, in 2023 the government had replaced the Digital Security Act (DSA) with the equally draconian Cyber Security Act (CSA). Despite its repeal, media reports indicated that cases continued to be filed under the DSA as late as April. In February the Rangpur Cyber Tribunal instigated investigations into the editor of a local newspaper and two other people; all were later charged and imprisoned under the DSA.

The CSA was criticized for duplicating problematic provisions of the DSA. It retained 58 of the 62 provisions – 28 were retained verbatim – and enabled severe restrictions on freedom of expression, liberty and privacy.[1] In February, Pinaki Battacharya, a blogger living in exile in France, and six others were charged under the CSA for allegedly distorting images of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina and publishing them on social media. Similarly, in June, 11 people were charged under the CSA for allegedly making "derogatory remarks" about then prime minister Hasina on social media. On 24 December the interim government approved the draft Cyber Protection Ordinance (CPO) which repealed and replaced the CSA. The CPO has been criticized by civil society for its vague, over-broad and repressive provisions, which could be used to stifle freedom of expression.

Selim Khan, a 19-year-old atheist blogger who had expressed views critical of Islam in a private Facebook group, had been arrested and detained under the CSA on 4 November 2023. Despite finally being granted bail on 13 March after several refusals, he was not released until 13 August. His case was ongoing at year's end.

On 14 August, journalist Rozina Islam was acquitted of allegedly stealing confidential documents. She had been detained under the Official Secrets Act and Penal Code in May 2021 and held for a week before being released on bail. The authorities failed to produce any evidence to substantiate the charges against her.

During the nationwide protests that took place in July-September, authorities enforced an internet blackout on 18 July for six days. Ongoing restrictions were reported. The government alleged the blackout was to combat the spread of misinformation. Civil society groups expressed concern, however, that it hindered human rights monitoring and limited people's ability to counter misinformation.[2]

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

A quota system that allocated 30% of government jobs to descendants of independence war veterans was reinstated in June. In early July, university students took to the streets in protest demanding equal job opportunities based on merit. Many were concerned the quotas favoured supporters of the ruling party. The protests took place amid high unemployment rates, including among graduates.

On 15 July, peaceful protesters were violently dispersed by police using unlawful force. Some protesters were allegedly attacked by members of the Bangladesh

Chatra League (BCL), a group affiliated with the Awami League, with the support of security forces using batons, sticks and firearms. Students reported being attacked by members of these groups while they were seeking treatment in hospital.

On 16 July, student leader Abu Sayed was intentionally and unlawfully shot by police officers who fired directly at his chest from across the street in circumstances where he posed no threat. Abu Sayed was reported dead upon arrival at the hospital. His was one of six deaths reported on 16 July.

Protests demanding an apology for the violence from former prime minister Sheikh Hasina erupted across the country in solidarity with student protesters. Some protests turned violent and public facilities such as railway stations and highways were reportedly damaged. At midnight on 19 July a nationwide curfew was implemented. Armed forces were deployed and authorities passed "shoot-on-sight" orders.

Amnesty International documented the repeated use of unlawful force by authorities with weapons including assault rifles loaded with lethal ammunition. Authorities fired tear gas into enclosed spaces and used rubber bullets and shotguns loaded with pellets. Lethal and less-lethal weapons were used against unarmed students, violating Bangladesh's obligations under international law and standards.

According to media reports, between 17 and 29 July, 10,000 protesters were arrested and detained, including student leaders, protest coordinators, bystanders and people providing protesters with food and water. Student leaders Arif Sohel, Rony Sheikh and Sabir Rahman were arrested in July. Their families and lawyers reported being denied access to them while in detention, in violation of their due process rights. Rony was released on bail on 2 August, Arif was released on bail on 3 August, and Sabir was released on bail at the end of July. Most of the students were arrested under mass First Information Reports, (FIRs), where they remained unnamed.

According to local civil society group Human Rights Support Society, the death toll between 16 July and 9 September was at least 875, of whom at least 52% were students. Media reported at least 111 deaths on 4 August alone.

From August onwards, protests called for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, which culminated in a planned "Long March to Dhaka" on 5 August. Sheikh Hasina fled to India and resigned on 5 August, after 15 years in power.

Women's and girls' rights

Women and girls played a key role in the student protest movement, facing unlawful use of force by the police and reporting violent attacks from groups affiliated with the Awami League. Women who spoke to Amnesty International said they were kicked in their breasts, stomach and head during these attacks. Media reports suggested that women and girls were attacked to deter them from protesting.

Women journalists claimed that their coverage of the protests led to them being targeted by the police, groups affiliated with the Awami League and even protesters.

On 27 July, Nusrat Tabbasum, a student leader and key protest coordinator, was arrested and arbitrarily detained alongside other coordinators. The government claimed they were taken into custody "for their safety". Nusrat Tabbasum was released on 1 August with five others after they went on a 32-hour hunger strike. The coordinators claimed that while in police custody they were coerced into declaring an end to the protests.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

According to Odhikar, a Bangladeshi human rights organization, there were 10 reported cases of enforced disappearances between January and June.

After Sheikh Hasina's resignation, three people whose whereabouts had been unknown for years were released from a secret detention facility. They were Michael Chakma, an Indigenous rights activist who was forcibly disappeared in 2019; Abdullahil Aman Azmi, a retired brigadier general and son of the head of the Jamaat-e-Islami party,

who was forcibly disappeared in 2016; and Ahmad Bin Quasem, a Supreme Court lawyer, who was also forcibly disappeared in 2016.

On 27 August the interim government set up a five-member Commission of Inquiry to investigate allegations of enforced disappearances that took place between 6 January 2009 and August 2024. On 14 December the Commission published an interim report which detailed the legal frameworks and patterns observed in incidents of disappearances in Bangladesh.

In a welcome step, on 29 August, the interim government acceded to the International Convention against enforced disappearance. However, Bangladesh is a dualist country (one where the government considers international law separate from domestic law) and there was no domestic legislation enacted to give full effect to the Convention in the domestic system.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Bangladesh was host to almost 1 million Rohingya refugees who fled violence and persecution in Myanmar. Living conditions in the camps remained dire, especially as more refugees entered Bangladesh due to violence in Myanmar. Refugees in camps experienced food insecurity, a lack of housing and essential services such as healthcare, and were unable to be registered by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. Many refugees were prevented from entering Bangladesh and were "pushed back" – unlawfully rejected at the border by guards – in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

Refugees were also victims of floods and landslides in the camps during heavy monsoon rains. A large fire which spread through the camps in January led to at least 800 shelters being burned, affecting the shelter of almost 7,000 refugees. According to UNHCR, authorities and humanitarian agencies provided refugees with temporary emergency shelter, food and medical and psychological support.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Authorities failed to protect minority communities from violence, discrimination and harassment. On 5 and 6 August, there was a spate of attacks against Hindu and Ahmadi communities. Houses, places of worship and businesses belonging to religious minorities were attacked and at least one person from the Hindu community was killed.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In April and May, as part of an ongoing military operation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in south-eastern Bangladesh, over 100 Indigenous Bawm people were arbitrarily arrested on charges including alleged sedition under the draconian Special Powers Act[3] They remained in detention at the end of the year.

On 20 September, violence erupted between Bengali settlers and Indigenous Jummo people in the Khagrachari and Rangamati districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The violence left at least three people dead, 15 injured and at least 50 homes and businesses burned.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Garment workers faced continued repression and crackdowns on their right to freedom of association, assembly and peaceful protest.

At least nine garment workers, along with other workers, including child labourers, were killed by authorities exercising unlawful use of force during the nationwide protests in July and August. During this time, many garment factories were closed for extended periods, leaving workers without wages and forcing many to protest in demand of back pay.

Workers faced arbitrary charges and unlawful use of force, prompting fears of arrest or detention. On 30 September a garment worker was shot dead by police, and at least 41 workers were injured when initially peaceful protests demanding higher wages turned violent.

At least 40,000 garment workers remained at risk of arrest and detention due to legal charges brought against them during wage-related protests in September to November

2023. Despite the announcement on 24 September by the interim government that they would drop these charges, by the end of the year the majority of cases had not been formally dropped.

On 11 September the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association promised to abolish a database of workers. They had previously denied that the database was being used to "blacklist" and prevent the employment of workers associated with trade unions or protests.

1. "Bangladesh: Repackaging repression: The cyber security act and the continuing lawfare against dissent in Bangladesh", 8 August ↑
2. "Bangladesh: Further video and photographic analysis confirm police unlawfully used lethal and less-lethal weapons against protesters", 25 July ↑
3. "Bangladesh: Over 100 Indigenous People Arbitrarily Arrested: Bawm Villagers", 22 May ↑

BELARUS

Republic of Belarus

The authorities continued to crack down on all forms of public criticism and abused the justice system to penalize peaceful dissent. The suppression of independent media and civil society organizations escalated. Torture and other ill-treatment were endemic and impunity prevailed. The enforced disappearance of prisoners was widely practised. The LGBTI community continued to face harassment. Refugees and migrants were forced across borders with the EU. Climate action policies remained inadequate.

BACKGROUND

With international isolation prevailing, Belarus continued to engage with Russia economically, politically, diplomatically and militarily. Rhetoric about external threats from EU neighbours and Ukraine continued, and Belarus's military forces conducted activities intended to be perceived as preparation for a military confrontation.

In October the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus stated that the country's engagement with the UN human rights system had "reached its lowest historical point".

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Freedom of expression remained severely curtailed. The official list of online, printed and broadcast materials labelled by the authorities as containing "extremist content" continued to grow. Each month, hundreds of individuals were arbitrarily added to the "List of persons involved in extremist activities", which comprised 4,707 people as of December.

At the end of the year, 45 media workers were in prison for their professional activity.

The suppression of civil society organizations, including independent NGOs, trade unions and ethnic and religious communities, escalated. At least 329 organizations were dissolved or in the process of dissolution in 2024.

Human rights defender and 2020 protest icon, 73-year-old Nina Bahinskaya, was arbitrarily detained in October for marching with a poster of an arbitrarily banned political party. Police held her in custody in handcuffs for three hours, then released her pending a court hearing.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Religious organizations and clergy not aligned with the government faced accusations of creating or distributing extremist materials, leading to prohibition and blocking of online materials and social network profiles, arbitrary detentions and arrests.

In May, Roman Catholic priest Andrei Yukhnevich was detained for displaying a Ukrainian flag on his social media account. He was then accused of sexually abusing minors and remanded in custody.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

The authorities released dozens of prisoners convicted of politically-motivated charges,

under non-disclosure conditions and after forcing them to appeal for pardon. Their names were not released.

However, arrests and prosecution of dissenters remained widespread, particularly targeting participants and supporters of the peaceful mass protests in 2020, whose family members were also harassed. In January, police raided the homes of about 160 individuals, mainly relatives of unfairly imprisoned protesters. Some were briefly detained and questioned.

As of December, 1,265 people were imprisoned on politically motivated charges and around 3,000 were released after fully serving their sentence, according to the Human Rights Centre Viasna. Also, according to Viasna, at least 55 people were detained in 2024 upon returning to Belarus from exile. Some were penalized under administrative proceedings, and 17 faced criminal charges, including for making donations to victims of human rights violations.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained endemic, with perpetrators enjoying impunity. Individuals convicted on politically motivated charges endured harsher treatment in custody, their prison uniforms marked with yellow badges. Several such high-profile prisoners were denied contact with the outside world, frequently put in punishment cells for extended periods and refused adequate healthcare.

Five victims of politically motivated prosecution died in detention. Two of them, Vadzim Khrasko and Igor Lednik, had pre-existing health conditions that were well known to the authorities.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Throughout the year, there was no outside contact with and no direct information about Syarhei Tsikhanouski, Ihar Losik, Maksim Znak, Mikalai Statkevich, Viktar Babaryka and other imprisoned high-profile activists, journalists and politicians. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus, such prolonged periods of isolation could amount to enforced disappearances.

There had been no contact with the imprisoned 2020 protest leader Maryia Kalesnikava for over 600 days, until her father was granted a meeting with her in November following international pressure.

UNFAIR TRIALS

The authorities continued to abuse the justice system to suppress peaceful dissent, targeting political opponents, human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers, among others. Trials in absentia were commonplace. In July, 20 exiled political analysts and journalists affiliated with opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya were sentenced to between 10 and 11-and-a-half years' imprisonment for crimes against the state and "extremism".

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In February the Prosecutor General presented a draft law to parliament proposing to make "propaganda of non-traditional family relations", including "propaganda of abnormal relationships, pedophilia, and voluntary refusal to have children", administrative offences.

In April the Ministry of Culture updated the official definition of pornography by adding "non-traditional sexual relations and/or sexual behaviour", clarifying that it included, among other things, consensual same-sex and bisexual relationships.

The LGBTI community continued to face harassment, including arbitrary arrests. NGOs and media reported that, in August and September alone, at least 30 LGBTI people were detained. Their detentions were mostly for purported "minor hooliganism" and subscription to "extremist" materials, but also for "production and distribution of pornographic materials" (a criminal offence if committed repeatedly).

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Human rights organizations ZMINA, Freedom House, BYPOL and Viasna reported 2,219 cases of the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus, where they were enrolled into local education facilities and subjected to indoctrination and propaganda.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Authorities continued to force refugees and migrants across Belarus's borders with the EU. According to the NGO Human Constanta, in the three years to March 2024, at least 116 migrants and refugees were reported to have died in the border areas between Belarus and the EU, as a result of adverse conditions and alleged violent forcible returns.

DEATH PENALTY

No new executions were recorded. A German national, Rico Krieger, was convicted of several offences, including spying and mercenary activities, and sentenced to death in July. He was later pardoned and then freed on 1 August as part of a prisoner exchange agreed between Russia and several western countries.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The Climate Change Performance Index lowered Belarus's ranking to 47th place ("among the overall low performers"), scoring it "very low in the Renewable Energy and Climate Policy categories".

BELGIUM

Kingdom of Belgium

New criminal offences risked undermining the right to freedom of expression. Arms transfers to Israel were halted but repression against pro-Palestinian protesters was on the rise. Asylum seekers were left homeless and Afghan asylum seekers were denied protection. Prison conditions remained dire although some progress was made in establishing oversight. Provisions for care for survivors of sexual violence were strengthened and the country's policies on people with disabilities were reviewed internationally. The state was ordered to pay reparations for crimes against humanity during colonial rule.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In February, parliament adopted a new criminal code. It criminalized some acts, including a malicious attack on the authority of the state, glorification of terrorism and lese-majesty (an offence of showing a lack of respect for the sovereign), which would undermine freedom of expression.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Municipalities continued to require prior authorization for public gatherings, a disproportionate restriction of the right to protest.[1] In May, police used a water cannon and tear gas to disperse a peaceful demonstration near the Israeli embassy protesting against human rights violations in Gaza. The mayor of Uccle district had ordered the protest to be broken up as the organizers had not obtained prior authorization.

In September, civil society organizations warned against increasing repression against pro-Palestinian demonstrators, highlighting the use of administrative sanctions against peaceful protesters for failing to comply with unlawful municipal authorization regimes. Around 70 people who had participated in or sympathized with the occupation of a university building in the capital, Brussels were summoned for questioning in a criminal investigation into membership of a group "inciting segregation and racism".[2]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Authorities continued to leave thousands of asylum seekers homeless and destitute by denying them access to accommodation.

Despite the severity of the human rights crisis in Afghanistan, the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons continued to deny international protection to the majority of Afghan asylum seekers. Statistics published in December indicated that only 39% of those applying were granted protection. Most of the Afghan nationals who did not obtain international protection were unable to return to Afghanistan and were vulnerable to abuse due to their irregular migration status.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

On 18 April, parliament adopted a law on care centres for survivors of sexual violence which established a legal basis for such centres, safeguarded funding and ensured collaboration between hospitals, the police and the public prosecutor's office.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

The new criminal code adopted in February stipulated that custodial sentences should be used only as a last resort.

Overcrowding in dilapidated prisons continued, with insufficient access to essential services, including healthcare and sanitary facilities.

In April, a federal preventive mechanism against torture and other ill-treatment was established, bringing ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture one step closer.

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In September, the Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities recommended, among other things, that Belgium develop and enact an effective deinstitutionalization strategy; ensure mobility policies meet the specific needs of people with disabilities, including older people; and ensure that people with disabilities have a sufficient income to lead a dignified life.[3]

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

In February, the Walloon regional government suspended export licences of military material to Israel, after an open letter sent by civil society organizations. In December, media reported that the Walloon regional government had resumed issuing export licences for military material to the United Arab Emirates despite significant human rights concerns.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Political parties continued to block a vote in parliament on a proposal aiming to improve access to abortion services and bring the laws into closer compliance with the 2022 WHO Abortion Care Guideline.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 2 December, the Court of Appeals of Brussels recognized the responsibility of the Belgian state for the crime against humanity of abduction and systematic racial segregation of *Métis* children (those of mixed African and European ancestry) under Belgian colonial rule in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The court ordered reparations to be paid to the five appellants.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In May, a non-exhaustive inventory by the federal government showed that in 2021 the state spent EUR 15.5 billion in fossil fuels subsidies; the actual figure was higher still.

1. *Europe: Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of The Right to Protest in 21 European Countries*, 8 July ↑
2. Belgium: "NGOs and trade unions concerned about repressive measures targeting pro-Palestinian movement in Belgium", 20 September (French only) ↑
3. *Belgium: Submission to The UN Committee on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities: 31st Session, 12 August-5 September 2024*, 12 July ↑

BENIN

Republic of Benin

Rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continued to be routinely curtailed. Opposition leaders were arbitrarily detained. Detention conditions violated international human rights standards for the treatment of prisoners. Victims of forced eviction linked to tourism development projects continued to be denied adequate compensation. Armed groups killed people at the borders with Niger and Burkina Faso.

BACKGROUND

A new electoral code – denounced by the opposition – was enacted in March. The text restricted participation in the presidential election, scheduled for 2026. Despite the lifting of the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS

against Niger after the 2023 coup, tensions between Benin and neighbouring Niger increased following Niger's refusal to open its borders. This led to an increase in the cost of living in Benin.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Steve Amoussou, a Beninese national, was arrested on 12 August in Lomé, Togo, where he was living. He was transferred to Benin, where he was charged by the Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism with "electronic harassment, initiation and publication of false news and direct incitement to rebellion". His trial, which began on 7 October, was ongoing at the end of the year. The Beninese authorities claim that he is "Frère Hounvi", the pseudonym of a cyber activist known for his criticisms of the authorities.

The management of Benin's leading private media group, La Gazette du Golfe, announced in February the dismissal of its 200 employees after the authorities froze its bank accounts. This followed a decision on 8 August 2023 by the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC) to suspend "all means of mass communication" of the group, in connection with an alleged "glorification of a coup d'état" after comments made on the situation in Niger.

In September, the president of the HAAC threatened to suspend media outlets that do not comply with the authorities' requirements regarding terrorism-related information.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

On 26 April security forces repressed with excessive force a trade union protest against the high cost of living in Cotonou, after the prefect of the Littoral department banned it on the grounds that no "request for authorization" had been received. Several union leaders were arrested and released the same day. On 11 May the prefect of the Littoral department authorized a similar protest in Cotonou.

On 30 December, several trade unions issued a statement denouncing the arrest the previous day of a trade union leader from Cotonou, who had called for a dockworkers' meeting that day to discuss the deterioration in their working conditions. He was released the same day after being presented to the public prosecutor and after the dockers announced a strike.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Opposition leader Reckya Madougou remained in detention, despite the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stating in 2022 that her detention was arbitrary. She was convicted in December 2021 of "complicity in acts of terrorism" and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

On 27 November, the public prosecutor of the Parakou court announced the opening of an investigation and the arrest of seven police officers, after Samba Fayçal Ouorou Gani was found dead on 19 November after a police check.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Prisoners continued to live in filthy, overcrowded cells without adequate clean water and medical treatment.[1] According to the director general of the Prison Agency, as of September there were more than 19,000 detainees in Benin's 11 detention facilities, around 300% over capacity. Due to lack of space, most prisoners slept on the floor on their side, with no room to turn round. Most prisons were not equipped with fans, despite the excessive heat. The air in the buildings and cells was fetid due to the lack of sanitary facilities. Prisons lacked medical staff, and prisoners reported that medicine was often denied, unavailable or out of date.

In August, deputies of the National Assembly submitted several written questions to the government regarding the poor conditions in detention and excessive periods of preventive detention.

On 9 October, the president adopted a decree "on the organization and internal regime of prisons", setting high standards for detainees' health and hygiene.

FORCED EVICTIONS

People forcibly evicted from the district of Fiyégnon in Cotonou in September 2021 in connection with tourism development projects along the coast were yet to receive adequate compensation. Residents had not been appropriately warned of the eviction or when it was planned to take place. Most of the residents were at home when the demolition equipment arrived, and the demolitions were carried out in the rain, at night and at the start of the school year, with consequences for children's education.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS

On 16 and 17 April, an attack by unidentified gunmen on the Monkassa customs post left three people dead, including one member of the Beninese defence and security forces. On the night of 24 July, seven soldiers and five African Parks rangers were killed in W National Park, bordering Niger. In recent years, attacks by armed groups increased in border areas, attributed by the authorities to Islamic State and Al-Qaeda fighters from neighbouring countries.

1. "Benin: Prisoners penned into overcrowded, dirty cells denied healthcare amid heatwave", 1 August ↑

BOLIVIA

Plurinational State of Bolivia

Attacks on and harassment of human rights defenders continued. Authorities failed to fully guarantee Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent. Judicial elections were delayed. Authorities' actions were insufficient to combat wildfires, which reached record levels.

BACKGROUND

Many people continued to face socio-economic obstacles to access their rights to health, food and water, among others.

In June, the general commander of the army led armed vehicles to the government palace in an attempted uprising and was arrested shortly afterwards, alongside other collaborators.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Authorities failed to protect human rights defenders, who continued to be stigmatized, harassed and attacked. Defenders of territory, land and the environment were at particular risk. Park rangers protecting the Madidi National Park continued to be subjected to threats and attacks. In August, human rights defender Waldo Albarracín Sánchez and his family received physical threats for their historic human rights work.

The work of the Permanent Assembly on Human Rights in Bolivia, an NGO in the capital, La Paz, continued to face serious obstacles. Its office remained occupied by groups related to political power brokers and blocked by police officers, undermining its normal casework and functions. Human rights organizations signalled the particular risk faced by women defenders, who were generally overlooked in data relating to aggressions against human rights defenders.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Despite being a state party to Covenant 169 of the ILO, the government failed to implement meaningful processes to guarantee the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples in relation to extractive projects that affect their territories, or to respect their right to self-determination or offer security of tenure for their land and territory. The CERD Committee expressed its "concern about the alleged violation of the constitutional right to prior consultation in the Ayllu Acre Antequera community", an Indigenous community affected by mining activities in their territory.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the OAS expressed concern for the right to independent and impartial judges, after judicial elections were delayed for more than

a year. The elections were partially carried out on 15 December.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

There were some advances by the legislative assembly in abolishing a series of laws that permitted deforestation and the expansion of industries such as cattle ranching, industrial-scale agriculture and extractive projects. Nevertheless, in contravention of Bolivia's international commitments on carbon emissions, authorities failed to take decisive action to combat wildfires. These reached record levels during August and September, putting people's rights to housing, health and education, among others, at risk.[1]

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Public Prosecutor's Office reported that between January and December 84 feminicides had been registered.

1. "Americas: Open letter to South American presidents on wildfires", 23 September ↑

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Criminalization of defamation in Republika Srpska and progressively more restrictive measures countrywide were reflected in a significantly lower ranking in the World Press Freedom Index. Roma and returnees from the Bosnian war continued to face widespread discrimination. Reception conditions for migrants and refugees improved. Genocide denial and glorification of convicted war criminals persisted.

BACKGROUND

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remained deeply divided and politically fragile. In May, Republika Srpska (RS) decided to draft an agreement on "peaceful disassociation" from the Federation of BiH and passed entity laws creating parallel legal and institutional frameworks in contravention of the BiH constitution. The UN High Representative in BiH, Christian Schmidt, accused the RS authorities of continuing to "actively subvert" the state.

In March, the EU opened accession negotiations with BiH, a major milestone despite the lack of progress on key reforms. The authorities' failure to adopt the draft Reform Agenda 2024-2027 left BiH as the only Western Balkan country outside of the EU's Growth Plan.

Major national parties held most municipal assemblies in the October local elections, but opposition parties had more success in urban centres.

Following an extended heatwave in summer, unprecedented torrential rain in October caused floods and landslides, killing 26 people and causing the destruction of hundreds of homes in several municipalities across the country.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

Journalists were often targets of verbal threats and attacks, including by public officials.

In January, amendments to the RS Criminal Code classifying defamation as a criminal offence entered into force.

A media investigation in June found that recent legal changes and progressively more restrictive measures imposed under the pretext of fighting disinformation had reduced freedom of expression, especially on social media, in both RS and the Federation of BiH.

In April, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association called on the authorities to urgently reverse restrictive laws and practices that threatened civic space, social cohesion and democratic institutions.

Protests in support of Palestine took place throughout the year without restrictions.

In May, the RS government withdrew its controversial Law on Special Registry and Publicity of the Work of NGOs from parliamentary procedure. This would have required non-profit organizations to enrol in a

special registry, subjected them to increased legal oversight and potentially classified them as "agents of foreign influence". RS president Milorad Dodik said the law would be reintroduced after "further harmonization" with European standards.

BiH dropped from 64th to 81st place in the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders.

DISCRIMINATION

Discriminatory provisions in the constitution and electoral laws at state level continued to deny adequate political representation to people who did not identify as one of the country's "constituent peoples": Bosniak, Croat or Serb.

There was no progress in implementing previous judgments and recommendations of the European Court of Human Rights, which had found the power-sharing arrangements in the country discriminatory.

Roma continued to face social exclusion and discrimination. Most lived in chronic poverty in inadequate housing and had limited access to formal employment or public services including healthcare and education. The CERD Committee urged authorities to take urgent steps to address systemic racial discrimination against Roma.

In the Federation of BiH, the long-standing "two schools under one roof" system of separate schools in the same building with separate curricula for Bosniak and Croat pupils, persisted, despite multiple court rulings finding the practice to constitute discrimination.

In the lead-up to 11 July, the day chosen to commemorate the events in Srebrenica in 1995, incidents of violence against returnees and internally displaced persons from the Bosnian war of 1992 to 1995 increased. Returnees also continued to face limited access to education, healthcare, social protection and employment.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Gender-based violence remained widespread, with at least 11 women killed by a partner or family member.

In June, the Federation of BiH parliament adopted a Strategy for Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence 2024-2027. It aimed to strengthen violence prevention measures, improve support for victims and survivors, and set up programmes for work with perpetrators.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In August, a boat carrying 30 refugees and migrants, mostly from Syria, capsized on the Drina River on the border with Serbia, killing at least 11 people, including a nine-month-old baby.

The authorities considerably improved housing conditions for migrants and refugees in reception centres, but the CERD Committee expressed concern about the continued administrative detention of migrants, including children.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In May, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 11 July as an International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.[1] Politicians in the RS continued to publicly deny genocide and war crimes and glorify convicted war criminals. The CERD Committee called on the authorities in BiH to investigate and prosecute all incidents of hate speech.

Courts in RS continued to apply statutes of limitations barring many civil compensation claims filed by the victims of war crimes, especially in cases of sexual violence, and required victims to cover legal fees when their claims were dismissed.

More than 7,500 people remained missing as a result of the Bosnian war.

1. "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Srebrenica resolution an important recognition for victims and their families", 23 May ↑

BOTSWANA

Republic of Botswana

Police used unnecessary and excessive force against demonstrators protesting a bill to grant excessive presidential powers. Persistent drought increased the threat of food insecurity. Religious groups opposed draft amendments which proposed to protect LGBTI people's rights. Gender-based violence continued to rise. The UN urged the government to address environmental challenges, including access to water. Botswana continued to sentence people to death.

BACKGROUND

The opposition Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) party ousted the Botswana Democratic Party from its 58-year rule in the October general elections. Political analysts linked the UDC's success to rising corruption, declining health and education standards, and depleted public funds under the previous administration.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In September, protests erupted outside the National Assembly as parliament debated a bill that sought to grant the president sweeping powers to appoint key civil servants. Opposition members boycotted the vote, and police used unnecessary and excessive force against people protesting the bill, injuring several of them. Civil society groups condemned the violence. The bill failed to pass due to insufficient parliamentary support.

RIGHT TO FOOD

In June, then-president Masisi declared 2023-2024 an "extreme agricultural drought year", raising urgent concerns over food security. In May, a report by the Rural Development Secretariat, an official body, highlighted the devastating effects of drought on food production, water supplies and nutrition. Crop yields dropped from 206,572 tons in 2021-22 to 125,184 tons in 2022-23, leaving 163,000 people food insecure. The situation was exacerbated by the El Niño effect, leading to a severe lack of rain and worsening harvests, putting a further 37,000 people at greater risk of hunger.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In March, the government introduced a constitutional amendment bill that included protections against discrimination for intersex people and persons with disabilities. The bill was opposed, particularly by religious groups like the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana (EFB), who objected to the inclusion of intersex rights, citing concerns over "morality and the erosion of Christian values". The EFB called for a national referendum on the issue.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence remained widespread and continued to rise. WoMen Against Rape, a human rights organization fighting against gender-based violence, reported an increase in cases from 2023 and gaps in legal protection, including the absence of legislation outlawing marital rape. In June, the UN Population Fund identified violence against women as a major public health concern in Botswana. In September, Tonota District Council reported a rise in sexual abuse cases. The police service recorded 47 threats to kill, 25 murders, 30 sexual abuse cases, and 93 rapes and attempted rapes against women over the Christmas holiday period.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In March, following a visit to the country, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to a healthy environment urged Botswana to address environmental challenges including pollution, the climate crisis and access to water. He recommended legal recognition of the right to a healthy environment, and the advancement of renewable energy.

DEATH PENALTY

Botswana continued to sentence people to death. There were no executions.

BRAZIL

Federative Republic of Brazil

Poverty decreased but persisted for more than a quarter of the population. The child mortality rate decreased; maternal deaths disproportionately affected Black women. Deaths from dengue fever and tuberculosis increased. Unemployment decreased; forced evictions and homelessness remained concerning. The education budget was cut. Alarming police violence continued under the banner of the "war on drugs". Children continued to be at risk of violent death, particularly Black youths. Impunity persisted for human rights violations committed by state agents. Brazil remained one of the most dangerous countries for land rights defenders, especially Indigenous and *Quilombola* defenders. Trials for the killings of various human rights defenders were ongoing. Deforestation and wildfires continued unabated in the face of the government's inadequate response. Flooding in Rio Grande do Sul particularly affected vulnerable groups. Attacks against Indigenous and *Quilombola* communities remained frequent, mostly due to inefficient land demarcation policies. Gender-based violence increased against women and LGBTI people, including femicides and gender-based political violence. Proposed legislation threatened access to abortion.

BACKGROUND

In June, the Federal Supreme Court (STF) decriminalized the possession of marijuana for personal use up to a limited amount. This was an important but limited step towards the decriminalization of drugs and the mitigation of the disproportionate impact of the drugs trade on vulnerable groups.

The 2024 Violence Atlas report documented 46,328 violent deaths in 2023, mostly by firearms. From 2012 to 2023, a Black person was killed every 12 minutes.

According to a 2024 report by the National Human Rights Council, there had been a staggering 270% rise in the number of neo-Nazi groups in the country between 2019 and 2021.

After being dismantled by the previous administration, memory and truth policies were partially resumed, including the Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances.

The 2024 national budget showed limited investment in certain social policies, especially those of the Ministry of Racial Equality which are aimed at addressing racial inequalities.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The Getúlio Vargas Foundation released data in June showing that poverty had decreased, but 28% of the population were still experiencing poverty in 2023. The latest data from the National Observatory of Inequalities revealed that in 2022 Black people, especially women, earned substantially less than white people.

Right to health

Official data published in 2024 showed that in 2023 3,280 women suffered obstetric maternal deaths, of whom 66% were Black. Infant mortality in 2023 had dropped to the lowest rate in 28 years, with 32,006 deaths, the majority of which were Black children.

In 2024, dengue fever cases surged to 6.6 million, leaving 6,041 people dead, compared with 1.6 million cases and 1,179 deaths in 2023, according to the Ministry of Health. The same ministry reported that in 2023 the death rate from tuberculosis had increased for the second consecutive year.

Recent studies showed that the number of suicides increased by 43% between 2011 and 2022 despite a 36% reduction in suicides worldwide. The highest suicide rate by race/ethnicity was among Indigenous People at around 16.6 per 100,000.

Rights to housing and work

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics reported a decrease in unemployment, to 7 million unemployed and 3.1 million "discouraged workers" (unemployed workers who have lost hope of

finding a job), by the third quarter of 2024. The Institute of Research on Applied Economics reported that employment included 48.3 million informal jobs.

The Zero Eviction ("Despejo Zero") civil society coalition claimed there were 1.5 million forced evictions between October 2022 and June 2024. No public data on this was available.

The latest data from the unified register database from federal government gave the number of 309,023 rough sleepers in 2024. The Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship only had disaggregated data available from 2023 about race – 68% of homeless people were Black people – and violence against this population, having 6,268 incidents, mostly physical violence.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The country faced significant educational challenges. In September, the Ministry of Education's budget was cut by BRL 1.3 billion (approximately USD 230 million) for the remainder of the year.

Police operations had a significant impact on education. Redes da Maré, an organization based in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, reported that by August 38 police operations had taken place in the Maré area, disrupting 34 days out of 200 in the school year in that area.

After a spike in school violence with 16 episodes in 2023 and seven attacks by October 2024, the government announced new security measures and launched the School Violence Monitoring and Prevention System in April.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Data released in 2024 by the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism reported 330 attacks on journalists in 2023, including stigmatization, physical assault, and civil and criminal lawsuits. The majority of the aggressors were state actors, accounting for 55.7% of cases.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

Alarming police violence persisted under the banner of the "war on drugs". According to information released in 2024 by the Brazilian Public Security Forum, from 2013 to 2023 there was a 188.9% increase in homicides committed by police, with 6,393 deaths in 2023. Most of the victims were Black and young people, accounting for 82.7% and 71.7% of cases, respectively. Racism was also present in violence against the police, with Black police officers accounting for 69.7% of police deaths by lethal violence.

This level of violence affected police officers' mental health. The Brazilian Public Security Forum reported that the suicide rate among police officers increased by 26.2% from 2022 to 2023, with a total of 118 cases.

The army was still deployed in Rio de Janeiro state, as it had been since 2010. The Ministry of Justice and Public Security outlined programmes to strengthen external control and oversight of the police.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Congress discussed proposals to reduce the minimum age of criminal responsibility and extend sentencing periods for children.

Recently released data from UNICEF revealed that between 2021 and 2023 at least 15,101 children were victims of violent deaths. Of these, 82.9% were Black children and adolescents. The mortality risk for Black young people was 4.4 times higher than that of white young people over the same period. In 2023, 900 children and adolescents were killed by police.

In Rio de Janeiro state, the freedom of movement of Black young people was further restricted by Operation Summer, which started in September and was planned to continue until March 2025, despite being suspended by a court ruling. The operation allowed police officers to conduct searches on children and adolescents in certain areas without clearly defined criteria and to refer them to social services.

In April, an important step was taken towards increasing the protection of the rights of children and adolescents. A resolution issued by the National Council for the Rights

of Children and Adolescents prohibited the confinement of this group in "therapeutic communities" (organizations sheltering people with drug dependence). These institutions are known for several human rights violations.

IMPUNITY

Accountability for human rights violations committed by state agents remained poor. A decade after 19-year-old Johnatha de Oliveira was shot during a police operation in the Manguinhos *favela* of Rio de Janeiro, the police officer suspected of criminal responsibility for his death was brought to trial before a jury. The jury decided that he had not intended to kill Johnatha, and the case was downgraded to be reviewed by a military court.[1] The jury was nullified on appeal. It was agreed that a new trial would take place.

A court acquitted three police officers for the murder of João Pedro Matos, an 11-year-old boy killed inside his home during a police operation in the Complexo do Salgueiro *favela* in Rio de Janeiro in May 2020.[2]

In the case of Davi Fiuza, who was forcibly disappeared in São Cristóvão, a neighbourhood in the city of Salvador in Bahia state in 2014, five military police officers were charged with abduction and false imprisonment, out of 17 who were indicted. In October, the Superior Court of Justice maintained the jury's jurisdiction despite the defendants' request to be brought to trial before a military court. The case was still awaiting trial.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Global Witness highlighted Brazil as the second most dangerous country for land and territorial rights defenders in 2023, particularly Indigenous Peoples. Despite a legal mandate from 2007, a national plan for human rights defenders was still not ready.

From 2020 to May 2024, the National Human Rights Ombudsman received 2,332 complaints regarding violations against human rights defenders. The Protection Programme for Human Rights Defenders operated in fewer than half (10) of the country's states. In 2024, 1,134 cases were under monitoring, with over half involving Indigenous and *Quilombola* individuals (traditional people who are descendants of Africans who escaped slavery). Most threats came from landowners, companies and public security agents.

In October, two men were convicted for the killing of councillor and human rights defender Marielle Franco and her driver Anderson Gomes in March 2018. The STF accepted the indictment of the individuals accused of ordering the crime, including a congressman and the former head of Rio de Janeiro's Civil Police, who were arrested. The Ethics Committee of the House of Representatives voted to revoke the mandate of the accused congressman. According to the media, in June the STF opened an investigation into the obstruction of justice targeting a former head of Rio de Janeiro's state civil police, a former homicide police station chief and a police commissioner in charge of conducting investigations into the crime.

An indictment against the alleged perpetrators of the 2022 murder of environmental activists Bruno Pereira and Dom Phillips was pending appeal. An investigation into those who had ordered their killing was ongoing.

Justice progressed for the killings of *Quilombola* leaders Flávio Gabriel Pacífico dos Santo ("Binho do Quilombo") in 2017 and his mother Mãe Bernardete Pacífico in 2023. Binho's alleged killers were arrested and an indictment for Mãe Bernardete Pacífico's homicide was filed in court.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

According to the National Institute for Space Research, Brazil accounted for 54.5% of South America's wildfires in 2024, and deforestation in the Cerrado and Amazon zones reached 8,237.9km², primarily on rural lands. Mining activities affected 66.2km², encroaching on protected areas and Indigenous lands. The Ministry for the Environment was unable to provide Amnesty International with a list of mining companies responsible for environmental damage.

The government's response to wildfires and deforestation during the year was delayed, with major initiatives only starting in June and intensifying in September.

During the year, 58% of Brazil faced the worst drought in 75 years, with a third of the population experiencing severe conditions.

Flooding in Rio Grande do Sul state affected 2.3 million people and displaced 600,000, leading to a state of emergency in 27 cities. Official data reported 806 injuries, 183 deaths and 28 missing resulting from the flood. Vulnerable groups were especially affected, including 16,691 Indigenous People. By August, the state's health department had reported 788 confirmed cases of leptospirosis and 2,844 cases under investigation, resulting in 26 deaths, alongside 10 outbreaks of acute diarrhoeal disease.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Data released in July by the Missionary Indigenous Council revealed that, in 2023, at least 208 Indigenous People were murdered. Additionally, 1,040 Indigenous children up to the age of four died from mostly preventable causes, and 180 suicides were reported.

The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples reported that 652 cases of land conflict were under review by the second half of 2024. In August, violent attacks increased against the Guarani Kaiowá community in Mato Grosso do Sul state and the Ava-Guarani in Paraná state. In September, Neri Guarani Kaiowá, a 23-year-old Indigenous man, was killed by police officers during an operation in Nhanderu Marangatu Indigenous land in Barra Farm, in the city of Antonio João, Mato Grosso do Sul state.

These conflicts largely stemmed from the lack of land demarcation, the demarcation process having been completed for 601 Indigenous lands and 731 still pending in 2024. Law 14.701 – approved at the end of 2023 – declared that only those lands occupied when the federal constitution of 1988 was promulgated could be demarcated, which undermined Indigenous rights. Despite previous court rulings deeming this unconstitutional, a conciliation mechanism between farmers, state agencies, and Indigenous groups was established by the STF. Indigenous People abandoned these meetings claiming they were not allowed meaningful participation.

According to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, 537,941 Indigenous People faced food insecurity in 2024, one of the adverse effects of non-Indigenous exploitation of natural resources.

Quilombolas

Quilombolas continued to suffer violence and lacked state protection. According to a recent report from the National Coordination of the Articulation of Black Rural *Quilombola* Communities and the NGO Terra de Direitos, between 2018 and 2022 at least 32 *Quilombola* people were killed in 11 states, the main causes being land conflict and gender-based violence. According to the Ministry of Racial Equality, 126 *Quilombola* communities experienced conflicts during January and February. The Palmares Cultural Foundation reported that the land of 3,051 *Quilombola* communities had been certified, with 262 still being processed in 2024. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, only 12.6% of the total *Quilombola* population were living in officially demarcated territories (a recognition stage prior to titling) and 4.3% living in titled territories.

Racism was prevalent, evidenced by the Ministry of Human Rights' reporting an 80% increase in human rights violations against Afro-Brazilian religious communities. In the first half of 2024, 342 violations were documented by the Ministry of Racial Equality.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Data from Brazil's Public Security Annuary highlighted an increase in violence against women. A report published in July stated that in 2023, Brazil recorded 1,467 femicides, an increase of 0.8% on the previous year, 63% affecting Black women and 64% occurring at home. There were 258,941 reports of physical assaults, a rise of 9.8%. There were 894,511 cases of psychological violence,

threats and stalking, all of which had increased. A total of 540,255 emergency protective measures were granted, 26.7% more than the previous year. Sexual violence had also increased, with 83,988 rapes, a 6.5% increase, of which 88% were against women and girls, 52% against Black people, and 76% against children under 13 years old. Despite these numbers, National Gender Violence Map found that 61% of incidents go unreported.

LGBTI people faced severe threats, with 7,673 human rights violations reported to the human rights hotline last year. In a report published in 2024, the human rights group Grupo Gay da Bahia reported 257 violent deaths in 2023, mainly affecting young Black transgender people. At least 5,537 LGBTI people had been violently killed between 2000 and 2023. Transgender Europe confirmed in a report published in 2024 that Brazil had the highest number of transgender murders globally between October 2022 and September 2023.

In a year in which mayors and city councillors were elected across the country, gender-based political violence remained a concern, with official data showing 455 reported violations. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office was actively monitoring 91 cases of gender-based political violence in 2023 and 2024.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Bill 1904/24 threatened the rights of people accessing abortion by proposing that abortions after 22 weeks of pregnancy would be considered murder and increasing penalties to 20 years' imprisonment for anyone involved, even for pregnancies resulting from rape. This bill and other similar propositions were still under discussion in parliament. The Ministry of Women reported that the prohibition of abortion disproportionately affected women living in poverty.

1. "10 years of fighting for justice for Johnatha", 6 March (Portuguese only) ↑

2. "João Pedro case: There is no self-defence when an unarmed child is killed inside their home by police action", 10 July (Portuguese only) ↑

BULGARIA

Republic of Bulgaria

Independent journalists and media fought numerous defamation lawsuits. Parliament introduced amendments prohibiting "LGBTI propaganda" in schools but rejected other amendments that would have further undermined LGBTI rights. Anti-immigrant attacks increased. A Saudi activist was at risk of deportation. Systematic failures continued to plague psychiatric care. Measures to strengthen protection for victims of domestic violence were pending.

BACKGROUND

In October, Bulgarians went to the polls for the seventh time in three years. The protracted political instability left the Ombudsman role vacant since April.

An intense heatwave led to wildfires and water shortages.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Independent journalists and media reporting on organized crime and corruption faced strategic lawsuits against public participation.

In January, the Sofia City Court rejected a libel claim by an insurance company for an unprecedented BGN 1 million in damages (about EUR 500,000) against e-magazine Mediapool over a story about the Green Card system in Bulgaria. Mediapool's editor-in-chief called the ruling, which was not final, "an important victory" for media freedom.

In April, minister of interior Kalin Stoyanov filed a defamation lawsuit against the Bureau for Investigative Reporting and Data over the outlet's reporting on alleged corruption in the ministry. Media Freedom Rapid Response said the lawsuit was designed to "silence legitimate investigative reporting".

In a landmark ruling in June, the European Court of Human Rights found that Bulgaria

had violated the rights to a fair trial and freedom of expression of journalist Rosen Bossev, who was found guilty of defamation in a criminal case in 2019. The court concluded that his conviction was not made by an "impartial tribunal" and violated freedom of expression.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In September the so-called Foreign Agents Bill, introduced for the fourth time by the pro-Russia party Revival, was defeated in a parliamentary committee. The bill would prohibit foreign-funded organizations from carrying out activities in educational institutions and in some ministries.

An NGO from Stara Zagora was denied municipal funding after its founder criticized border police for ill-treating migrants.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In July, the European Court of Human Rights retroactively found the case of *Y.T. v Bulgaria*, a trans man who was denied legal recognition of his gender identity, to be inadmissible. The court urged Bulgaria to set up a transparent and accessible framework for legal gender recognition.

In August, in an urgent procedure, parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Pre-School and School Education, which prohibited the provision of information about "non-traditional sexual orientation" and "gender identity different from biological sex" in schools. Rights organizations strongly opposed the legislation, calling it a direct assault on fundamental freedoms of the LGBTI community.[1] Teachers across Bulgaria faced threats for opposing the legislation. The leader of Revival, the party which initiated the amendments, threatened to file criminal charges against teachers who "want to push homosexual propaganda".

In September, parliament rejected amendments to the Child Protection Act introducing criminalization of gender-affirming healthcare for minors and draconian fines for healthcare professionals providing this care.[2]

According to an EU Agency for Fundamental Rights survey, 72% of LGBTI people in Bulgaria reported being bullied in school due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

ILGA-Europe, an LGBTI-rights NGO, ranked Bulgaria as the third lowest-performing country in the EU for the protection of LGBTI rights in 2024.

DISCRIMINATION

Roma continued to face discrimination in all walks of life. In July the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the former leader of the Bulgarian National Movement Party, Krasimir Karakachanov, engaged in discriminatory harassment due to anti-Roma statements made in 2019, which triggered widespread anti-Roma violence.

Against the backdrop of disinformation and hostile rhetoric by politicians in the lead-up to the European Parliament elections in April, there was an increase in xenophobic incidents, including physical attacks on asylum seekers and foreign nationals.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Although the number of people travelling the so-called Balkans route towards western Europe dropped, pushbacks and violence persisted on the Bulgarian border with Turkey.

A Saudi activist, Abdulrahman al-Khalidi, who was awaiting a final decision in the asylum process in Bulgaria, was at risk of deportation to Saudi Arabia. Despite a court ordering his release, he remained in administrative detention in the Busmantsi Detention Centre near Sofia and was denied adequate medical and psycho-social support. Human rights organizations warned that if deported, he would be at risk of torture and other serious human rights violations.[3]

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In January, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) noted that patients in psychiatric institutions continued to lack adequate psycho-social care, which was "neglectful and harmful to patients". The CPT criticized the Ministry of

Health for failing to prevent and punish persistent ill-treatment of patients.

In April, rights organizations reported widespread abuses of people with disabilities, including torture and other ill-treatment, financial and verbal abuse, neglect and isolation in institutions, including small group homes.

In August, a 57-year-old patient died in a fire in a psychiatric hospital in Varna. An investigation by the Ombudsman's Office found that the patient was immobilized at the time and left without supervision, while the hospital complex itself was severely understaffed, with only one doctor on duty.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In March, Together against Violence, a coalition of 37 rights organizations, asked the authorities to urgently implement the 2023 amendments to the Law on Domestic Violence, including improving risk assessment procedures and coordination between institutions.

The National Council for Prevention of and Protection from Domestic Violence officially started working. In September, the government adopted the Programme for the Prevention of and Protection from Domestic Violence 2024-2026, which included measures to strengthen education and prevention programmes and provide support for the victims of domestic violence.

Women's rights organizations reported that at least 18 women died due to domestic violence in 2024.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Despite a previous commitment to speed up the phase-out of coal-fired plants, in April parliament postponed a vote on the Climate Neutrality Roadmap. Protests by coal and power plant workers fearing job losses slowed down Bulgaria's green transition.

The Ministry of Environment and Water concealed from the public that the air quality monitoring system in Sofia failed to accurately report pollution levels.

Bulgaria dropped from 36th to 46th place in the Climate Change Performance Index.

1. "Bulgaria: Ban of 'LGBTI propaganda' in schools is attack on the entire LGBTI community", 8 August ↑
2. "Bulgaria: Rejection of attempts to criminalise gender-affirming healthcare a welcome block against rising tide of hate", 27 September ↑
3. "Bulgaria should not deport Saudi activist Abdulrahman al-Khalidi and should immediately release him", 12 March ↑

BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso

People accused of plotting against the state were arbitrarily arrested. Activists, journalists and magistrates were victims of enforced disappearances. The continuing armed conflict resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths and the blockades of several towns. Media organizations were temporarily closed. The government planned to criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations in the amended Personal and Family Code.

BACKGROUND

In January, Burkina Faso announced its intention to leave ECOWAS in a joint declaration with Mali and Niger. In July a Confederation of Sahelian States, uniting these three countries, was announced.

In May the political transition, which started in January 2022 and was due to end in July, was extended for a further five years.

The conflict continued to rage between government forces and the armed groups the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) and the Islamic State in the Sahel. Burkinabe authorities claimed to have reconquered 69% of the country as of August.

As of May, there were more than 2 million internally displaced people due to the conflict. In November the government froze the assets of a more than 100 individuals, including exiled opponents and critics that it accused of involvement in terrorism.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

In January, Evrard Somda, former high commander of the National Gendarmerie, was accused of involvement in a coup plot and arrested. He remained in incommunicado detention at the end of the year.

Guy-Hervé Kam, a lawyer, was also arrested in January over accusations of involvement in a coup plot and held incommunicado. Several court injunctions ordering his release were not implemented. During his eventual release on 29 May, he was re-arrested by state security forces and presented before a military judge, who accused him of plotting against state security and remanded him in custody. He was freed and placed under judicial review on 10 July. He was arrested and detained again in August after another summons before a military court.

Emmanuel Zoungrana, a former military commander who was accused of "plotting against state security" in January 2022, was re-arrested in May despite court orders calling for his provisional release.[1]

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

In February, Bassirou Badjo and Rasmane Zinaba, two members of the citizen's movement Balai Citoyen, were forcibly disappeared before being forcibly conscripted to the front line, despite a November 2023 court ruling calling for the suspension of their conscription.

In June, Atiana Serge Oulon, editor of the biweekly investigative newspaper L'Évènement, along with journalist Alain Traoré and television presenters Kalifara Séré and Adama Bayala, were arrested, allegedly by security services, and forcibly disappeared. In October the government announced that Atiana Serge Oulon, Kalifara Séré and Adama Bayala had been conscripted for military service but gave no information on the whereabouts of Alain Traoré.

In June, former military commander Yves Didier Bamouni was abducted by unidentified actors. His whereabouts remained undisclosed at the end of the year.

In August, seven magistrates were arrested and forcibly disappeared after they received a conscription order from the authorities to be deployed to the front line. A few days before their arrests, a court in Bobo-Dioulasso ruled that some of the conscription orders were illegal and a violation of their human rights. Some of the conscripted magistrates had been investigating alleged crimes by supporters of the authorities.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

Abuses by armed groups

On 25 February an armed group attacked and killed 15 worshippers at a Catholic church in Essakane, Sahel region, according to media and local sources. On the same day an armed group attacked and killed at least 14 worshippers at a mosque in Natiaboani, Est region.

In August around 200 people, including civilians, were reportedly killed by the GSIM in Barsalogho while digging trenches.

On 25 August the GSIM attacked and killed 26 civilians at a church in Kounla, Boucle du Mouhoun region.

Violations by government forces

In February the Burkinabe military unlawfully killed at least 223 civilians, including at least 56 children, during an operation in the villages of Soro and Nodin, according to Human Rights Watch. An investigation into the killings was announced by the Ouahigouya High Court.

In May the French newspaper Libération reported that hundreds of civilians were killed by the military and its proxy forces in Marmiga and several villages near Mansila during a supply operation to besieged towns in the east.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

In April the Higher Communications Council (CSC) suspended the broadcasters TV5 Monde, BBC and Voice of America, as well as access to the websites of nine international media organizations, for two weeks in retaliation for their reporting on the Nodin and Soro massacres.

In June the CSC suspended for one month all editions of the Burkinabe news organization L'Évènement, denouncing "breaches of law and journalism ethics", following the publication of an article alleging embezzlement of funds intended for the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland, an auxiliary force of the army. The decision was overruled by an administrative court on 12 July. In August, L'Évènement announced the suspension of its activities.

TV5 Monde was again suspended for six months by the CSC in June, following an interview it conducted with Newton Ahmed Barry, an exiled public figure and critic of the military regime.

In December, the daily newspaper L'Observateur Paalga was summoned by the CSC after publishing an article about the Malian army.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The continued sieges by armed groups against several cities and towns continued to affect people's access to farmlands, causing a spike in cost of living, and forced displacement of civilians. As of November, the Humanitarian Response Plan – led by OCHA – had only received 40% of funding pledged by the government and donors for healthcare, education and shelter among other things.

Right to education

The conflict had forced the closure of 5,319 schools as of March, affecting 818,149 pupils, according to the Ministry of Education. However, according to UNICEF, 1,304 schools were reopened during the year and 440,945 internally displaced pupils were enrolled.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The preliminary draft decree of the new Personal and Family Code raised the legal age of marriage of men and women to 18 years, in conformity with international law. The draft Code stipulated that the minimum legal age could be reduced to 16 if authorized by a judge, which would be contrary to CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child – both ratified by Burkina Faso – and could encourage child marriage. The draft Code, sent to parliament in July, was yet to be voted on and enacted.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The draft Personal and Family Code would criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations, as well as those who defend or promote them, if passed.

DEATH PENALTY

In November the government announced its intention to reintroduce the death penalty.

1. "Burkina Faso: Authorities must immediately release Guy Hervé Kam and Lt-Colonel Zoungrana", 31 May ↑

BURUNDI

Republic of Burundi

Journalists and others who spoke out against authority figures faced arbitrary arrest, detention and physical attacks. Certain offences by the media were decriminalized. The government continued to interfere in the internal affairs of the political opposition. Arrests and enforced disappearances of opposition members continued. Healthcare for detainees was inadequate. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's mandate expanded to include land disputes. Discrimination against LGBTI people and unmarried women continued. The cost-of-living crisis worsened with rising fuel and food prices. There were more than 86,000 internally displaced people due to climate-related extreme weather, and more than 289,500 Burundians remained as refugees in neighbouring countries.

BACKGROUND

Ahead of the 2025 legislative and local elections, a new electoral code, adopted in June, significantly increased the deposits candidates must pay to stand in elections.

The first national census since 2008 took place in September, collecting data on population, housing, agriculture and livestock.

Tensions with Rwanda persisted. In January, Burundi closed the border with Rwanda in response to attacks claimed by the armed group Resistance for the Rule of Law in Burundi (RED-Tabara), which the UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo accused Rwanda of supporting. Burundian armed forces continued their deployment in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), under a bilateral agreement signed in February between Burundi and the DRC, following the East African Community Regional Force's withdrawal in December 2023.

In June, the Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions recommended that Burundi's National Independent Human Rights Commission be downgraded due to insufficient independence and effectiveness. In October the UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Burundi.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

On 13 February the Cassation Chamber of the Supreme Court upheld journalist Floriane Irangabiye's conviction, which related to her criticism of the government. On 14 August, she received a presidential pardon. She was released on 16 August.[1]

Journalist Sandra Muhoza was arrested on 12 April and later charged with "endangering internal state security" and "ethnic aversion" for comments she made in a WhatsApp group.[2] Her trial, scheduled for 5 September, was postponed reportedly because there was no fuel to transport prisoners to the court. In a hearing on 12 November the prosecution sought a 12-year sentence. On 16 December she was convicted and sentenced to 21 months in prison.

Several journalists working for Iwacu newspaper (one of the last remaining independent media houses) and other private media organizations faced physical attacks, arrests and detention. On 6 June, Iwacu received a warning from the National Communication Council, an official body, on the grounds of "serious professional misconduct", which cited several articles published by Iwacu, without indicating specific concerns. On the night of 25 June, unidentified people threw stones for several hours into Iwacu's office compound in Bujumbura.[3]

The media law was revised for the fourth time since 2013, with the introduction of what was described as a partial decriminalization of press offences. Under the new law, promulgated by the president in July, the punishment for anyone who publishes or broadcasts information constituting the offences of "insult", "harmful imputation", "contempt", "dissemination of false news", "public outrage against good morals", "slanderous denunciation", "invasion of privacy", "attack on the presumption of innocence" and "revelation of the identity of a victim of sexual violence", was reduced to a fine rather than a prison sentence.

The government continued to interfere in the internal affairs of the National Congress for Liberty (CNL) opposition party. In March, the interior minister refused the CNL president, Agathon Rwasa, permission to hold an extraordinary congress. The same month, the minister formally, and rapidly, acknowledged the report and outcomes of an extraordinary congress of CNL members opposed to Agathon Rwasa at which he was replaced as party leader. Agathon Rwasa's replacement, Nestor Girukwishaka, was considered to be close to the ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Arrests of opposition political party members were reported regularly, including members of the Movement for Solidarity and Democracy, Front for Democracy in Burundi and CNL. In March, CNL members loyal to

Agathon Rwasa were arrested on their way to and outside the congress where he was replaced (see above).

Trade unionist Émilienne Sibomana was released from prison on 21 November, more than four months after her acquittal on 28 June by the Gitega Court of Appeal on charges of "slanderous denunciation". She had been arrested in January 2023, the day after she accused a school principal of sexual abuse during a public meeting at which the education minister was present.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

The Forum for Consciousness and Development, a Burundian NGO, documented 34 cases of enforced disappearance between January and June, primarily of political opposition party members. There was no news on the fate or whereabouts of 24 of them by the end of June.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

Prisoners were denied access to adequate medical care and family visits. Prisons were chronically overcrowded.

Christophe Sahabo, who was arrested in April 2022 in a dispute over the management of Kira Hospital, remained in detention with major delays in his court case. During a hearing at Muha High Court in Bujumbura on 10 September, he vomited and collapsed and was transferred to hospital where he underwent tests and began treatment. Despite a recommendation to keep him under medical observation for several days, he was transferred back to Ruyigi Prison (160km from the hospital) on 12 September. His family members were refused access to him in prison on 14 September. Two independent doctors reviewed Christophe Sahabo's medical notes and test results and confirmed that his condition was potentially life-threatening and required urgent medical attention. [4]

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In May the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) was renewed for a further four years. In a significant expansion of its remit, it assumed responsibility for cases that were left unresolved by the National Commission for Land and Other Properties (CNTB) when the latter's mandate ended in 2022, as well as new land dispute cases. Between 2006 and 2022, the CNTB was charged with resolving land disputes relating to returning refugees and internally displaced people who had fled during past periods of violence. The CVR law states that there is no judicial appeal for its decisions.

DISCRIMINATION

Both the prosecution and defence lodged appeals in the case of 24 people arrested in the capital, Gitega, at a workshop on economic inclusion in February 2023. They, and two others later added to the case, had been prosecuted for "homosexuality" and "incitement to debauchery". In January the Gitega Court of Appeal acquitted all 26 defendants on the "homosexuality" charge. Five people were found guilty of "inciting debauchery" and sentenced to one year in prison and a fine. They were released in February.

High-level officials continued to use violent and inflammatory rhetoric against LGBTI people. During a speech for International Women's Day in March, President Ndayishimiye stated in Kirundi: "I've said it and I repeat it, homosexuals should be publicly stoned."

Officials in several provinces conducted a campaign against "concubinage" (the cohabitation of a married person with someone who is not their spouse, which is illegal under Burundian law). As a result, between January and June, 900 women and 3,600 children were driven from their homes in Ngozi Province. Also in Ngozi Province, the governor issued a deadline of 30 June for 1,300 couples not registered with the civil registry to regularize their marriages.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Burundi's strained economic situation deteriorated and the government failed to respond effectively. High inflation rates and a

scarcity of hard currency contributed to severe fuel shortages which left commuters struggling to get to work. Food prices increased steeply – the price of sugar, for example, rose by 150% in mid-September. In July, the price of potatoes was 45% above the five-year average.

As in previous election cycles, from August onwards there were widespread reports of individuals and businesses being forced to pay contributions to the CNDD-FDD party, with access to services denied to those who refused.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

As of December, 86,159 people remained internally displaced, 93% of them due to extreme weather events in part driven by climate change, including torrential rains, landslides and flooding of rivers and the shores of Lake Tanganyika, which affected at least 298,000 people overall. The World Weather Attribution initiative called on Burundi to improve its existing disaster preparedness policies and early warning systems to reduce the impacts of such events. With the support of UNDP, the government launched a USD 10 million climate resilience project in September in some of the most affected areas in and around Bujumbura.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

There were 289,621 Burundian refugees living in neighbouring countries as of 31 December; 20,081 refugees returned to Burundi from countries in the region, primarily Tanzania, in 2024. Returnees constituted 7% of internally displaced people inside Burundi. In the Kirundo and Cankuzo border provinces, that proportion rose to 35% and 21%, respectively.

The Tanzanian authorities sent mixed messages about the future of Burundian refugees in the country. In March, Tanzania's Kigoma Regional Commissioner held a mass meeting with refugees, reiterating calls on Burundian refugees to voluntarily register for repatriation, adding that refugee status would be rescinded in January 2025 and that Nduta camp would be closed by 31 December 2024. The Tanzanian Ministry of Home Affairs subsequently assured UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, that the camps there would remain open and no one would be forced to return.

1. *Burundi: Rhetoric Versus Reality: Repression of Civil Society Continues under President Ndayishimiye's Government*, 21 August↑
2. *Burundi: At a Critical Juncture for Burundi, the Special Rapporteur's Mandate Remains Vital*, 29 August ↑
3. "Burundi: End intimidation of media as 2025 elections approach", 4 July ↑
4. "Burundi: Jailed doctor needs urgent medical care: Dr Christophe Sahabo", 18 September ↑

CAMBODIA

Kingdom of Cambodia

Human rights violations continued unabated. Thousands of families in Angkor continued to live under threat of forced eviction, while thousands already evicted were denied remedy and remained living in inadequate housing, struggling with debt and without work. Ninety-seven people, including children, were arrested for peacefully expressing their opinions, and subsequently charged with incitement and plotting, showing the extent of the deterioration of civic space. An internationally renowned journalist was arrested after extensively reporting about the scamming industry, which continued to flourish with impunity.

BACKGROUND

Hun Manet, the prime minister, leader of the ruling political party and the Cambodian People's Party, continued the same policies as his predecessor and father, Hun Sen.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

People continued to live under the threat of forced evictions at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Angkor. Previous mass forced evictions had occurred in violation of

international human rights law, and authorities failed to adequately inform people or meaningfully consult with them prior to the evictions. Authorities also intimidated and threatened many into not questioning the evictions, which resulted in relocation to places that did not have housing, adequate water, sanitation facilities, or access to livelihoods.

UNESCO requested Cambodia submit a report that addressed "possible forced population displacements" and included "a response to the Amnesty International allegations". In February, the government published a State of Conservation report that failed to provide any verifiable information on how families were selected for relocation. It asserted, without evidence, that only "squatters" were relocated. The report also failed to provide accessible links to previous research, maps or land surveys to indicate how the government undertook its assessment of the "illegality" of households within Angkor.

The Run Ta Ek resettlement site for evicted families continued to lack basic infrastructure, such as roads and drainage, and many houses did not have access to piped water. Many residents were heavily indebted to predatory microfinance institutions and reported using their social welfare cards and land titles as collateral for the loans.

A decision approved by the World Heritage Committee fell short of calling on the government to make an explicit commitment not to engage in forced evictions in Angkor, but a monitoring mission was requested.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Authorities arbitrarily arrested at least 94 people, including several children, between July and October, for publicly criticizing the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area (CLV). The CLV is a development plan between the governments of Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam established in 2004 to facilitate cooperation on trade and migration. At least 59 of those arrested, including environmental, human rights and other activists, were unlawfully detained and charged for peacefully expressing their views. Authorities charged at least 21 people with incitement to commit a felony, a charge often spuriously brought against human rights activists. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia previously expressed concern about the improper use of such incitement charges. At least 33 people faced charges of plotting against the state, including four members from the Khmer Student Intelligent League Association. Incitement carries a penalty of up to two years in prison, while plotting carries a punishment of up to 10 years.

In a speech on 12 August, former prime minister and current senate president Hun Sen made public threats against CLV critics, including Hay Vanna, an opposition activist living in Japan. On 16 August, Cambodian authorities arrested Hay Vannith, Vanna's brother, a Health Ministry civil servant. They did not provide information about his whereabouts until 20 August, raising concerns that he had been forcibly disappeared. His family only learned he was in custody after an audio recording of a supposed confession by Hay Vannith to overthrow the government was posted on 21 August on the government spokesperson's Facebook page.

On 20 September, Hun Sen revealed Cambodia would withdraw from the CLV, but charges against many of those charged with crimes relating to the CLV had not been dropped by the end of the year.[2]

Thirty-nine political activists or members of opposition parties remained imprisoned, often on spurious charges and unfair convictions for crimes such as incitement to commit a felony, plotting, and insulting the king. Most had spent months in pretrial detention. Prisoner of conscience and leader of the former main opposition party, Kem Sokha, was charged with conspiracy with a foreign power and sentenced to 27 years in prison.

Environmental defenders and the right to a healthy environment

On 5 June, five environmental activists from the Mother Nature movement refused to enter the courtroom because authorities arbitrarily prevented some media and supporters from monitoring their public hearing. The hearing proceeded despite the absence of all charged activists.[3]

On 2 July, 10 activists associated with the movement were convicted of plotting and insulting the king. The charges related to Mother Nature's public activism since 2012.

Journalists

Award-winning journalist Mech Dara was arrested by military police on 30 September. On 1 October he was charged with incitement under articles 494 and 495 of the Cambodian Criminal Code. Dara is known for his journalism with numerous leading Cambodian news outlets which have since been closed by the government, or its allies, essentially silencing all domestic independent media. He had won awards for his investigative reporting on corruption and Cambodia's scam compounds, locations where human trafficking and torture were regularly reported.[4]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND FORCED LABOUR

Human trafficking, forced labour, slavery, torture and child labour continued to occur across the country, particularly in compounds where online cryptocurrency, gambling and gaming scams were run.[5]

1. "Cambodia: World Heritage Committee must ensure UNESCO decision addresses Angkor forced evictions", 19 July ↑
2. "Cambodia: Arrests target critics of regional development zone", 28 August ↑
3. "Cambodia: Conviction of youth activists a further blow to Cambodia's environmental movement", 2 July ↑
4. "Cambodia: Charges against journalist highlight clampdown on press freedom", 2 October ↑
5. "Cambodia: Review of the Universal Periodic Review at 57th session of the UN Human Rights Council", 1 October ↑

CAMEROON

Republic of Cameroon

People critical of the authorities were prosecuted and threatened with restrictions on their right to freedom of movement, and journalists were intimidated by security forces. Anglophone leaders, activists and journalists as well as opposition activists were arbitrarily detained. Armed separatists were responsible for murders and attacks against schools in North-west and South-west regions, and armed groups killed civilians in Far North region.

BACKGROUND

A year before the 2025 presidential elections, political tensions mounted and armed conflict and violence continued in the Far North, North-west and South-west regions. More than 580,000 people were displaced by armed violence in the North-west and South-west regions. In September, Norwegian police arrested Lucas Cho Ayaba, one of the main Anglophone separatist leaders, on suspicion of incitement to commit crimes against humanity in Cameroon.

Between January and October, flooding in Far North region affected 356,730 people, killing at least 30.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In a decree issued on 16 July, the senior divisional officer of Mfoundi division, a geographical area which includes the capital, Yaoundé, stated that "anyone who dangerously insults the [state] institutions or the person who embodies them" could be banned from staying in Mfoundi. Two days later, the communications minister issued a press release stating that "it is unacceptable for compatriots… to use irreverent language" about the president, Paul Biya, "who was freely and overwhelmingly elected by his fellow citizens."

Junior Ngombe, a hairdresser and social media activist, was released on bail on 31 July by a military court after seven days'

detention at the Secretariat of State for Defence in Yaoundé, where he had been transferred after his arrest in Douala on 24 July. He had shared videos on social media urging Cameroonian youth to register to vote for the upcoming presidential election and denouncing the control of the country by the ruling party.

Cameroonian activist Yves Kibouy Bershu, known as Ramon Cotta, was arrested on 19 July in Gabon and transferred to Cameroon on 23 July without any known legal or diplomatic procedure. He was charged with "apology for the crime of secession, illegal acquisition of weapons of war, contempt of constituted bodies and lack of a national identity card" and transferred on 9 October to pretrial detention in Kondengui central prison in Yaoundé. Videos he had posted on social media criticized the Cameroonian authorities and the Cameroonian embassy in Gabon.

On 3 October the National Trade Union of Journalists of Cameroon issued a declaration denouncing pressure by security officers on media outlets "to silence those who express criticisms against the authorities".

On 9 October, following rumours about the health of the president, the minister of territorial administration banned "any media debate on the state of the President of the Republic", in a letter addressed to the country's governors.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

On 6 December the minister of territorial administration issued a decree banning or suspending for three months the activities of several organizations, including the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, based on accusations including "illicit funding".

ARBITRARY DETENTION

Dozens of Anglophone people remained arbitrarily detained after being sentenced by military courts in the context of armed violence in the Anglophone regions. They included journalist Thomas Awah Junior, protest leaders Mancho Bibixy, Tsi Conrad and Penn Terence Khan, and 10 political leaders including Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention considered their detention arbitrary and urged the Cameroonian authorities to release them.

Kingsley Njoka, a freelance journalist from the Anglophone North-west region who had been arrested in 2020, initially held incommunicado, and charged with secessionism and complicity in an armed group, was sentenced on 24 September by a military tribunal to 10 years in jail.

Forty-one activists and opposition leaders remained arbitrarily detained after being sentenced by military courts for taking part in a march on 22 September 2022, organized by the Cameroon Renaissance Movement opposition party.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS

North-west and South-west regions

In the two Anglophone regions, real or suspected armed separatists continued to carry out murders, hostage-taking for ransoms and extortion, targeting defence and security forces, political and administrative authorities, civil servants and other civilians they accused of not complying with their rules, including lockdowns and a "liberation tax".

On 11 February, during the Cameroon Youth Celebrations, a home-made bomb killed one person and injured more than 100 others in Nkambe, North-west region. On 26 May a grenade attack on a bar in Bamenda, North-west region killed two people and injured 41.

On 20 May, the mayor of Belo, Boyo division, North-West region, his deputy and an inspector of basic education were shot dead. On 26 October, the second deputy mayor of Bamenda II was abducted and murdered.

Far North region

In Far North region, the armed conflict between state forces and armed groups was ongoing. Armed groups affiliated to Islamic State's West Africa Province and Jamatu Ahli Al-Sunna lil Da'wa Wal Jihad, both descended from the Boko Haram armed

group, continued to attack civilians in villages along the border with Nigeria and on islands in Lake Chad, looting and killing and abducting civilians, according to security sources.

On the night of 1-2 January, four people were killed, eight abducted, and two properties set on fire during an attack in Bargaram in Hile-Alifa commune. Three Cameroonian aid workers from the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale, who were abducted on 10 January in Kolofata district, were released on 19 April. In June, 13 children, women and men from the fishing community were abducted in Mourdas. In October, around 15 fishermen were abducted in Darak, and four civilians were killed in Kalguiwa.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

In the North-west and South-west regions, defence and security forces were accused of unlawful killings of people suspected of collaborating with armed separatist groups, according to Cameroonian NGOs. The government did not respond to accusations of unlawful killings, including the killing of four civilians in Mamfe in April during a military operation.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

No information was made public regarding an investigation into the murder of journalist Jean-Jacques Ola Bébé in Yaoundé in February 2023. On 9 September the Yaoundé military tribunal publicly announced charges against 17 defendants on trial in relation to the murder of journalist Martinez Zogo in Yaoundé in January 2023.

CANADA

Canada

Systemic racism and discrimination against Black and racialized people persisted. Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) people faced discrimination and violence. Indigenous land defenders were criminalized for protecting their ancestral territory, violence against Indigenous women continued and the fate of Indigenous children remained unresolved. Migrants' and refugees' rights were violated. Canada did not meet emissions targets.

DISCRIMINATION

Between 29 August and 27 September, nine Indigenous People were killed by police in separate incidents across Canada, demonstrating systemic racism and discrimination in police institutions.

The Saskatchewan Court of Appeal heard in September whether a constitutional challenge to a discriminatory name and pronoun law targeting transgender and gender-diverse students could proceed. The court was considering if a law could be declared unconstitutional even when the notwithstanding clause, which prevents courts from striking down laws that violate charter provisions, is enacted.

Organizations expressed disappointment with the proposed Canada Disability Benefit, announced in June, calling on the federal government to urgently address the crisis of disability poverty.

The Supreme Court heard a constitutional challenge in November to the laws criminalizing sex work and associated activities.

The Federal Court heard an application in November to certify a class action brought by current and former federal public service workers against the government for anti-Black racism in recruitment.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Anti-2SLGBTQQIA+ policies increased. Alberta introduced measures in January limiting students' access to gender-affirming healthcare and stifling discussion around gender identity, sexual diversity and comprehensive sexuality education in schools.[1]

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Indigenous, Black and racialized women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people were disproportionately targeted through online threats, violence and racist abuse.[2]

Organizations called on the Ontario government and municipalities to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic as recommended in Bill 173, Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act 2024.

Femicide against Black women continued to be under-reported due to lack of disaggregated data.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Four Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous land defenders were found guilty of criminal contempt of court for protecting Wet'suwet'en territory against the construction of a pipeline, including Likhts'amisyu Clan Wing Chief Dsta'hyl, who served a 60-day house arrest.[3]

The Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishnabek (Grassy Narrows) First Nation testified before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, detailing health issues and environmental damage from mercury dumped in the English and Wabigoon rivers 50 years ago and Canada's ongoing failure to prevent further poisoning and provide adequate reparation.

The majority of the 94 calls to action listed in the 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had still not been implemented.

Canada failed to make real progress towards the implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice highlighted in the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

In August, the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera (Mohawk Mothers), who demanded archaeological digs at the former Royal Victoria Hospital site in Montreal due to the suspected presence of Indigenous children's graves, lost their case before the Quebec Court of Appeal. The court overturned a lower court decision requiring McGill University to respect an agreement on archaeological excavations at the site.

The Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unknown Graves and Burial Sites' final report acknowledged that Indian Residential Schools were "colonial institutions of genocide" and called on the government to implement an independent, Indigenous-led investigation.

Canada negotiated a free trade agreement with Ecuador without consulting with Indigenous Peoples. In June, the Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that no trade agreement proceed without the free, prior and informed consent of affected Indigenous Peoples.[4]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) continued to tie migrant workers to a single employer who controlled their immigration status, labour conditions and living conditions. This put them at risk of labour exploitation and other abuses such as wage theft, excessive working hours, verbal, physical, sexual and psychological abuse and racial discrimination. Migrant workers under the TFWP, who are predominantly racialized, did not have access to adequate and effective remedies.

The Quebec Court of Appeal upheld the decision to grant asylum-seeking families access to subsidized educational childcare. The Quebec government appealed the decision, and the Supreme Court certified the appeal in October. The Court of Appeal denied Quebec's request for a stay, so families retained access to subsidized childcare, pending the Supreme Court's decision.

Concerns persisted about the complex application processes and effectiveness of the Temporary Residence Visa Program for Gazan and Sudanese people.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In July, the Ontario Superior Court failed to uphold the right to peaceful assembly by granting an injunction sought by the University of Toronto against a peaceful pro-Palestinian encampment.[5] Similar encampments at universities around the country were cleared by police or private

security forces without a court order; at least one ended after an agreement was reached with the university.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

Canada continued to export arms and military equipment to countries despite lack of accountability for past violations and substantial risks that they could be used in serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Arms worth USD 6.4 million were exported to Saudi Arabia, representing 42% of the total of non-US military exports. Authorization of new export permits for transfers of military goods to Israel was reportedly paused in January, although no official "notice to exporters" was issued and at least 180 export permits remained active.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

According to government data, Canada is the 11th largest emitter of greenhouse gases worldwide. Instead of implementing policies to reduce emissions, it offered a tax credit to fossil fuel companies for carbon capture, utilization and storage projects. According to the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Canada will miss its target of 40-45% reduction in emissions by 2030. A regulatory framework to cap greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas sector was not introduced. On a per-capita basis, Canada financed the fossil fuel industry more than almost any other G20 country. Canada continued to grant permits for the construction of oil and gas infrastructure, including on unceded Indigenous territories.

The Environmental Racism Bill became law, requiring the development of a national strategy to address the harm caused by environmental racism.

Climate activists continued to be criminalized. In Montreal, three activists were detained for peacefully protesting at the government's inaction to address climate change.[6]

1. "Amnesty International Canada condemns 'appalling' anti-trans policy changes in Alberta", 2 February †
2. "Canada must end technology-facilitated gender-based violence", 5 July†
3. "Wet'suwet'en Chief Dsta'hyl declared first Amnesty International prisoner of conscience held in Canada", 31 July †
4. "Amnesty International Canada shares concerns at parliamentary study of free trade negotiations with Ecuador", 16 February †
5. "U of T encampment ruling fails to uphold the right of peaceful assembly", 2 July †
6. "Authorities' response to climate activists who climbed the Jacques-Cartier bridge raises concerns", 30 October (French only) †

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Central African Republic

Armed groups and government forces continued to carry out unlawful attacks and killings. There was a significant rise in cases of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. There was progress in fighting impunity, highlighted by a publicly released arrest warrant against the former president, and the arrest of two men charged with crimes under international law. A UN report revealed poor detention conditions. More than 2.5 million people were affected by food insecurity.

BACKGROUND

Clashes continued between government forces, aided by their allies, and armed groups affiliated with the Coalition of Patriots for Change, leading to numerous civilian casualties. On 30 July the UN Security Council lifted the arms embargo, in place since 2013. By 31 August, 455,533 people were internally displaced. Meanwhile, the country hosted 43,393 refugees, including 29,070 from Sudan.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

According to a report by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization

Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), covering the second quarter of 2024, armed groups and government forces, supported by their allies, continued to carry out unlawful attacks and killings.

MINUSCA reported that, in the region of Haut-Mbomou on 19 February, the Azande Ani Kpi Gbe armed group ambushed a civilian truck in Kere, killing four of the 20 passengers and abducting a woman. Clashes between the group and another armed group, the Unity for Peace in Central Africa (UPC) followed in Kitessa, Maboussou and Manza on 22 and 23 February, resulting in 10 deaths and the displacement of part of the population to Zémio. On 27 February, national defence forces and other security personnel conducted an operation targeting Anti-Balaka armed group leaders at the Willy mining site, 35km south-west of Bossangoa in Ouham region in the west of the country. According to local sources, four civilians were killed and several others wounded. On 29 March, suspected members of the Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic and UPC combatants attacked the market in Ouogo, 63km north-west of Batangafo, wounding six civilians.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to OCHA, there was a surge in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, exacerbated by the conflict and "by socio-cultural norms that are unfavourable to women and girls, despite the existence of relevant policies and legislation" that could offer some protection if implemented. In the first half of the year, more than 11,000 cases of gender-based violence were reported. More than 6,000 of the cases were reported in the second quarter alone, 96% of which involved victims who were women or girls, and 32% of which were rapes, the most frequently reported crime. According to the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System, between January and September all identified survivors of gender-based violence benefited from psycho-social support, while 82% received medical assistance – only 28% of which occurred within the critical 72-hour window; 11% received legal or judicial assistance; and only 6% were supported with economic reintegration measures.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 1 May the Special Criminal Court (SCC), a UN-backed hybrid court, issued an international arrest warrant for former president François Bozizé for alleged crimes against humanity linked to actions by his presidential guard between 2009 and 2013. The court urged Guinea-Bissau, where François Bozizé was exiled, to cooperate in his arrest. On 8 May the president of Guinea-Bissau announced his intention to disregard the request.

On 21 June the SCC announced the arrest of Edmond Beina, a suspect in the "Guen" case, which involved crimes committed in 2014 in the Mambéré region. He was charged with several crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder and extermination. Abakar Zakaria Hamid, also known as "SG", was arrested on 4 September and appeared before SCC investigating judges. He faced multiple charges including crimes against humanity such as murder, extermination, persecution and enforced disappearance.

On 13 December, the SCC delivered its verdict in the case known as "Ndélé 1" in which the four accused were convicted of crimes against humanity committed during incidents in 2020 in the town of Ndélé. On the same day, the defence lawyer announced his decision to appeal.

On 3 May the gendarmerie temporarily closed, without providing formal documentation, the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission. It had been established in 2020 "to investigate, establish the truth and assign responsibility for the serious national events that have occurred since 29 March 1959, that is 60 years of the tumultuous history of the Central African Republic". The staff were instructed to leave the premises, and on 7 May a government decree dismissed the commission members, citing internal

conflicts and poor management. A committee was established to appoint new members.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

In July a MINUSCA report revealed alarming detention conditions, emphasizing poor healthcare and hygiene and severe malnutrition among detainees, a situation that was aggravated by insufficient food budgets and prolonged detention. The report also highlighted the ill-treatment experienced by several detainees and noted the lack of a government response regarding these issues. It listed numerous other shortcomings, including non-compliance with legal custody time limits and the excessive use of pretrial detention.

RIGHT TO FOOD

According to the Food Security Cluster, a UN-led organization, more than 2.5 million people experienced severe food insecurity, with 307,000 in emergency conditions by November. In regions including Mbomou and Haute-Kotto, more than 50% of the population were living in a situation of emergency or crisis food insecurity. This primarily affected internally displaced people, those in remote areas and poor urban households, whose access to food was challenged due to rising prices, conflict and poor infrastructure.

CHAD

Republic of Chad

The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly remained restricted, with authorities banning several protests under the pretext of maintaining public order. One journalist was killed, while others faced threats. No investigation was initiated after the death of an opposition leader during an assault by security forces on his party's headquarters; 25 of his relatives were subsequently detained without access to a lawyer. Detention conditions remained in breach of international human rights standards. Gender-based violence remained widespread.

BACKGROUND

On 6 May, Mahamat "Kaka" Déby was officially declared the winner of the presidential elections, bringing an end to the transitional period that began in April 2021 following the death of President Idriss Déby.

Floods affected several cities across the country, leading to the deaths of several hundred people and the displacement of thousands.

Conflicts between herders and farmers continued, in a context of increased pressure on natural resources aggravated by lack of grazing land in the north and population growth in the south.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

The government repeatedly banned demonstrations, citing that protest against the rising cost of living was prohibited. In June, a ban was placed on a demonstration by graduates protesting that promises made to them of public sector jobs had not been honoured.

In March, the Union of Journalists of Chad released a statement to highlight increasing threats against journalists and urged the authorities to take action to ensure the safety of journalists and their families. This followed the murders on 1 March of journalist Idriss Yaya, his wife and his four-year-old son in the village of Djondjol, near Mangalmé. Idriss Yaya, who worked for a radio station in Mongo, had received multiple threats prior to his murder, likely linked to his reporting of escalating communal conflicts in the region. On 2 March, nine people were arrested in connection with the murders.

On 7 August, Badour Oumar Ali, editor-in-chief of Chad's leading news website Tchadinfos.com, was arrested by armed and masked men and taken to the headquarters of the National Security Agency. He was released without charge after 24 hours in detention. The incident was part of a broader trend of harassment and intimidation of the media, and followed a temporary suspension of the website at the end of July.

In September, Reed Brody, a Hungarian-American human rights lawyer renowned for his work in support of victims of repression during Hissène Habré's presidency, was arrested and expelled from Chad. He was expelled just before attending a conference calling for payment by the state of full damages to victims of the former regime, where he was to launch his book on bringing Hissène Habré to justice.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATIONS

In February, opposition leader Yaya Dillo was shot dead during an assault by security forces on the headquarters of his party, the Socialist Party Without Borders (PSF). The shooting followed accusations that his supporters had attacked the National Security Agency and attempted to assassinate the president of the Supreme Court. Transitional prime minister Succès Masra announced the launch of an international commission of inquiry to determine responsibility for Dillo's death. However, the investigation had made no progress by year's end.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

Following the death of Yaya Dillo (see above), 25 of his relatives, also PSF activists, including three under the age of 18, were detained for five months without being brought before a judge. They were held in the high-security prison of Koro Toro, 600km from N'Djamena where they had been based, with no access to legal representation or medical care.[1]

During mobile court hearings in Koro Toro prison from 2 to 4 July, 10 were acquitted due to lack of evidence but not released, while 14 were sentenced to 10 years in prison. One remained in detention in N'Djamena without being charged. On 23 September, the party's secretary-general was also arrested in N'Djamena. In November and December, all the detainees except for the secretary-general were released, with no explanations given.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

In August, Human Rights Watch released a report highlighting severe human rights violations arising from the detention of individuals arrested during protests in N'Djamena in October 2022. Former detainees described their harrowing journey to Koro Toro prison, experiencing overcrowded transport conditions and severe dehydration as well as inhumane treatment, including beatings and lack of medical care once at the prison.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2024, Chad ranked 144th out of 146 countries on gender equality. The Women's Associations' Liaison and Information Unit reported in June that the difficulty women faced in accessing land, particularly in the context of inheritance, contributed to entrenching inequalities.

The United Nations Population Fund recorded 1,310 cases of gender-based violence (GBV) in Chad between January and June, and 794 between July and September. The cases mostly involved physical and psychological violence, but there were also significant numbers involving denial of resources, sexual assault, rape and forced marriage. Organizations working in the field emphasized that the actual numbers were likely to be higher due to unreported cases.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The rising cost of living stoked widespread discontent. In response, the authorities implemented measures to support the most vulnerable. On 11 March, two months before the presidential elections and coinciding with the start of Ramadan, the government announced free water and electricity until the end of the year, covering up to 300 kilowatt hours per household per month. The announcement, which came amid ongoing power shortages in many neighbourhoods, was matched by 50% reductions in transportation taxes.

In September, Action Against Hunger reported that at least 3.4 million people in Chad were experiencing critical food

insecurity. These included some 620,000 refugees from the conflict in Sudan. OCHA found that only 50% of the USD 1.12 billion funding requirement for humanitarian relief was being met.

1. "Chad: Authorities must ensure fair trial rights of detained relatives of killed opposition leader", 28 May ↑

CHILE

Republic of Chile

Despite the unprecedented conviction of two members of the *Carabineros* for human rights violations committed during the 2019 protests, impunity prevailed and no bill regarding reparations was presented. Barriers in accessing abortion persisted. Conditions for pregnant detainees remained poor. Changes were made to the regulatory framework on the use of force. Congress continued to discuss bills proposing the criminalization of refugees and migrants. The detention of Indigenous women for selling products in public spaces persisted. Facial recognition technology was implemented without a clear legislative framework.

BACKGROUND

In February, Chile signed the 2023 Ljubljana – The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In August, for the first time, two members of the *Carabineros* (police force) were convicted for acts of torture committed against a protester during the 2019 protests. Criminal proceedings regarding eye injuries sustained by Gustavo Gatica continued. Criminal charges were brought in October against three members of the former high command of the *Carabineros* for their failure to prevent human rights violations committed by their subordinates during the protests. Despite these developments, impunity remained for human rights violations and crimes under international law perpetrated during that period, and several political authorities unduly questioned the actions of the prosecution, particularly in relation to the investigation of the *Carabineros'* former high command.

The government rescinded grace pensions granted to victims of human rights violations committed during the protests in cases where the beneficiaries had been convicted of crimes prior to that period. No bill was forthcoming regarding reparations to victims of violations committed during the protests, despite the extensive conclusions of the Roundtable for Comprehensive Reparations delivered to the government.

Complaints arose in August about possible serious irregularities in the implementation of the National Search Plan for people forcibly disappeared during the regime of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). The irregularities related to the software used for the search of detained disappeared people. As a result, one of the main experts resigned and family members of the disappeared expressed their concerns about the situation. Meanwhile, measures ensuring the plan's permanent operation were not approved. The government's limited support for memorial sites relating to this period remained a source of concern and its continuity was at risk.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Barriers in accessing abortion services persisted in government healthcare facilities, even when lawful abortion was allowed. Healthcare institutions and professionals refused to perform abortion services because of their moral or religious views, undermining pregnant people's right to access abortion services. In five public hospitals all obstetricians refused to provide abortions in cases of pregnancies resulting from rape, which could amount to torture or other ill-treatment.

In May, the government presented changes to regulations governing abortion services. The proposed amendments aimed to require healthcare institutions to maintain lists of professionals who refused to perform lawful abortion services because of their moral or religious views and to specify the circumstances under which they refused to participate in abortion procedures. The proposals further mandated that patients be informed of a healthcare professional's refusal to provide lawful abortion services for moral or religious reasons, where applicable. As of December, the Controller General had not approved the amended regulations.

In June, the president committed to presenting a bill on lawful abortion to Congress before the end of the year, but he failed to fulfil this commitment.

In January, a woman at the Iquique Penitentiary Centre gave birth in one of the facility's cells. The Chilean Committee for the Prevention of Torture stated that this event highlighted significant and urgent issues requiring immediate attention, including the need to improve prenatal care to pregnant detainees, and ensure access to adequate nutrition and the constant presence of qualified personnel to attend childbirth.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Authorities continued to require prior authorization for public gatherings in public spaces, forcing protesters to notify them and be subjected to barriers to exercise their right of freedom of assembly. Throughout the year, Congress failed to discuss the elimination of the prior authorization requirement.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

Congress continued discussing a bill to regulate the use of force by security officials, enshrining in legislation current protocols and regulations issued by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Safety and the Ministry of National Defence. There were concerns over the lack of clarity in the proposals for the regulation of the use of force and its imminent approval.[1]

Despite the procurement of projectile electric-shock weapons for the *Carabineros* since 2019, and in 2024 for the *Gendarmería* (penitentiary police), the Ministry of the Interior and Public Safety had not issued a protocol for their correct use. No authorized use of this weapon had been recorded, but a pilot project was announced to be implemented near the end of the first quarter of 2025.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Throughout the year, Congress continued to discuss bills proposing the criminalization of refugees and migrants. Of particular concern was the proposal to impose prison sentences on people found guilty of irregular entry or stay in the country.

In September, the Pensions Superintendency asserted that Venezuelan workers in Chile could not withdraw their pension funds because it was not possible to verify the validity of their required documentation. Meanwhile, xenophobic rhetoric and attacks continued against Venezuelan refugees by some of the general public and some public figures.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Carabineros and other enforcement agencies continued to detain Indigenous women for selling their products in public spaces, creating significant barriers to the exercise of their ancestral traditions and cultural rights. A particularly troubling case involved the detention and handcuffing of an Aymara woman in Pica, a commune in Tarapacá region in northern Chile, for selling coca leaves. She was subsequently released after her defence argued that this activity was a cultural and traditional practice of the Aymara People.

MASS SURVEILLANCE

Facial recognition technology was implemented for policing purposes without the establishment of clear and explicit regulatory frameworks defining its limitations.

A bill aimed at regulating personal data collection was approved and its implementation pending.

In December, amendments to anti-terrorist legislation were approved that would allow for the deployment of technology for intercepting messages, calls, metadata and mass geo-referencing without establishing appropriate safeguards on its use and access to it.

1. *Bill for the Regulation of the Use of Force*, 4 June (Spanish only) †

CHINA

The People's Republic of China

The government continued to enforce repressive laws and policies that restricted the right to freedom of expression and other human rights. Human rights defenders were arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to long prison terms. Activists living overseas faced threats and intimidation. New restrictions on religious freedom were introduced in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and prosecutions of intellectuals, artists and other Uyghur cultural figures continued. Chinese authorities' repression of Tibetan culture and language intensified. Renewable energy generation capacity was expanded but China remained heavily reliant on coal. A new national security law further restricted civic space in Hong Kong where dozens of pro-democracy activists were sentenced to long prison terms.

BACKGROUND

Amid growing concerns about economic slowdown, falling birthrates and an ageing population, the government intensified its focus on ensuring "stability", resulting in increased restrictions on human rights. The tightening grip of the Chinese authorities and the continued lack of transparency were demonstrated by the expulsions from the Chinese Communist Party of officials for accessing "forbidden" publications, the imposition of restrictions on civil servant travel and censorship of consumer rights scandals.

Despite government denials, weapons and other military equipment manufactured in China were used by parties to the armed conflict in Sudan. In the conflict in Myanmar, evidence continued to implicate Chinese state and non-state actors in supplying aviation fuel to the military, enabling air strikes against civilian targets and other war crimes.

Hong Kong's economy remained slow with many stores and restaurants closing down. The fiscal deficit persisted and the fiscal reserves fell to their lowest level since 2010. Efforts by the authorities to rebuild the territory's image as an international hub for foreign investment and tourism were hindered by the ongoing crackdown against political opponents.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Artists and others were among those prosecuted under restrictive laws. On 5 January, authorities arrested Chen Pinlin, the director of a documentary about the 2022 White Paper Movement, a peaceful protest movement against highly restrictive Covid-19 policies and pervasive censorship and surveillance. He was charged with "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" and remained in detention awaiting trial at year's end.[1] In September, Gao Zhen, a renowned artist whose work includes critical depictions of social issues, was detained on suspicion of "insulting revolutionary heroes and martyrs". Gao Zhen, who lived in the USA, was visiting relatives in China at the time of his arrest. He was awaiting trial at year's end.[2]

In April the Ministry of State Security issued new regulations granting additional powers to law enforcement officers to inspect electronic devices including those of overseas visitors to China. The new regulations, which came into force in July, expanded the scope of existing counter-espionage laws to encompass "national security" matters while also weakening their procedural safeguards.

In June, in a rare response to public pressure, the central government withdrew a draft amendment to the Law on Administrative Penalties for Public Security.

The amendment included vaguely worded offences against conduct "undermining the spirit" and "hurting the feelings" of the nation. However, other steps were taken to further expand the legal and regulatory framework restricting the right to freedom of expression.

On 11 October the Cyberspace Administration of China announced new measures to restrict the use of "obscure expressions" online, targeting slang adopted by internet users to circumvent online censorship.

Also in October, local authorities in Shanghai reportedly detained at least six people wearing Halloween costumes.

The government continued its campaign to silence dissent by citizens living abroad. Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students studying at universities in western Europe and North America faced surveillance and on- and offline censorship, including by state actors. They, and some of their family members in mainland China, were subjected to harassment and intimidation to prevent them from engaging in activities relating to political or other "sensitive" issues.[3]

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders, including activists, lawyers and citizen journalists, continued to face intimidation, harassment, arbitrary detention, and torture and other ill-treatment for defending human rights and exercising their freedoms of expression and association. Their repression was often enabled by recourse to overly-broad and vague national security laws. In some cases, harassment and intimidation extended to their family members.

On 14 February, the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers wrote to the government to raise concerns about administrative restrictions on, the criminalization of, and other patterns of interference in the work of lawyers. According to the Special Rapporteur, human rights lawyers working on sensitive cases were particularly targeted.

Following her trial in December 2023, labour and women's rights activist Li Qiaochu was convicted in February of "inciting subversion of state power". She was sentenced to three years and eight months in prison.[4] She was released in August because of time already served.

Three other human rights defenders, lawyers Li Yuhan and Chang Weiping and anti-discrimination activist Cheng Yuan, were released from prison. All three continued to face restrictions on their freedom of movement and were deprived of "political rights" following their release.

In June, Guangzhou Intermediate Court sentenced Sophia Huang Xueqin and Wang Jianbing to five years' and three-and-a-half years' imprisonment, respectively, for "inciting subversion of state power". The two prominent #MeToo and labour rights activists had been detained since they were arrested in September 2021 due to their involvement in trainings for non-violent protest and participation in discussions on shrinking civil society space.[5]

In August, citizen journalist Zhang Zhan was detained after engaging in human rights advocacy. She had been subjected to surveillance since her release from prison in May 2024.

In October, detained women's and health rights defender He Fangmei was sentenced to five years and six months' imprisonment in connection with her campaigning for safe vaccines. He Fangmei had given birth to a second daughter while in detention; at some point, both children were taken by local officials and placed in a psychiatric hospital. In April the girls, aged three and eight, were reportedly moved but their whereabouts were unknown.

In October, Lu Siwei, a human rights lawyer known for defending politically sensitive cases, was arrested and charged with "crossing the border illegally". Lu Siwei had previously been detained by police in Laos in July 2023 and forcibly returned to China.

Concerns about conditions of detention and torture and other ill-treatment of human rights defenders persisted. In October, legal scholar and activist Xu Zhiyong, who was serving a 14-year prison sentence for

"subversion of state power", reportedly went on hunger strike to protest his mistreatment by prison guards.

The health of Xu Yan, arrested in April 2023 with her husband Yu Wensheng, reportedly deteriorated in detention due to poor nutrition. The two activists were sentenced on 29 October to one year and nine months' and three years' imprisonment respectively for "inciting subversion of state power".[6]

In March, 14 UN experts condemned the continued failure of the Chinese authorities to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death in custody in 2014 of human rights defender Cao Shunli. She was detained in 2013 as she was preparing to participate in China's UPR process but her health deteriorated, allegedly due to torture and other ill-treatment including denial of access to medical care.

ETHNIC AUTONOMOUS REGIONS

The government continued to enforce repressive policies in ethnic autonomous regions, especially the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Tibet, denying rights including to cultural expression and to freedom of religion and belief. Repression of ethnic and minority populations was carried out under the guise of counterterrorism and national security.

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

In January the government published a white paper entitled Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism that described efforts to ostensibly "protect" human rights in the context of counterterrorism. However, repressive laws – including the 2015 Counter Terrorism Law and the 2017 Xinjiang Regulation on De-extremification – continued to be used to arbitrarily detain members of Uyghur, Kazakh and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups and to restrict cultural and religious practices. In August the UN human rights office, OHCHR, repeated its call to the Chinese authorities to review and revise the legal framework governing national security and counterterrorism and to strengthen the protection of minorities against discrimination.

Revisions to religious regulations took effect in February, further limiting freedom of religion and belief. The amendments to the Xinjiang Religious Affairs Regulations and statements by the Xinjiang Party Secretary emphasized the need for Islam to be "Sinicised". This echoed previous statements by Chinese leaders, stressing "loyalty... above all else" to the Chinese Communist Party.

The detention of Uyghur cultural figures continued. Among those prosecuted during the year was film-maker Ikram Nurmehmet. He was found guilty in January of "taking part in terrorist activities" because he had travelled to Türkiye. According to media reports, Ikram Nurmehmet was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to coerce him into "confessing" crimes he had not committed. In June, songwriter Yashar Shohret was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "promoting extremism" and "illegally possessing extremist materials". The sentence was in connection with his expression of cultural identity through music and his possession of Uyghur literature.

Other prominent Uyghur scholars and artists continued to serve long prison terms and were deprived of communication with family members. They included well-known Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti who had been sentenced to life imprisonment for "separatism" in 2014.[7] There was no information about the status or whereabouts of ethnographer Rahile Dawut, who was reportedly sentenced to life imprisonment in 2023 for "endangering state security".

Tibet

Tibetan monk Rinchen Tsultrim was released on 1 February after serving a four-year sentence. He was imprisoned for "inciting secession" in relation to his social media posts. In July, 13 UN experts wrote to the Chinese government raising concerns about reports of beatings and arbitrary arrest of hundreds of Tibetan civilians and monks during protests against the construction of a hydropower plant on the Drichu river in Sichuan province. According to the letter, the

plant, which is being built by a state-owned company, could result in the forced displacement and relocation of local residents, destruction of important cultural and religious sites and environmental damage.

Closure of schools providing instruction in Tibetan and other non-Mandarin languages continued as part of the authorities' campaign to curtail Tibetan culture and languages. In July, authorities closed the Jigme Gyaltsen Vocational School, a private school in Gansu province teaching courses in Tibetan languages, whose pupils were mainly Tibetan boys. Concerns also persisted about the coercive residential school system imposed on Tibetan children. In October, Tibetan language education activist Tashi Wangchuk was reportedly detained for 15 days on charges of "disturbing social order". He had previously served a five-year prison term for "inciting separatism".

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In May a Beijing Fengtai District People's Court ruling in a child custody dispute recognized the rights of a same-sex partner to monthly visits with her daughter. The ruling marked an important development in a system that does not recognize and lacks protections for same-sex relationships. However, repression of LGBTI activism continued, with activists facing risks including arbitrary detention and interrogation, and censorship of LGBTI-related topics.

DEATH PENALTY

The death penalty was believed to be extensively used but the number of executions was not known because such data remained classified as a state secret.

Access to information about state secrets, including the use of the death penalty, was further restricted by revisions to the State Secrets Protection Law, enacted in February, and to its implementation measures in July. The amendments broadened the scope of classified information and tightened government control over its disclosure. In November, national and international media reported the case of a civil servant who was sentenced to death for violating the State Secrets Protection Law.

On 21 June the Supreme People's Court of China, the Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Ministries of Public Security, State Security and Justice jointly issued the "Opinions on Punishing 'Taiwan Independence' Diehards for Conducting or Inciting Separatism in Accordance with Law". The Opinions included directives to prosecute and harshly punish, including with death, individuals advocating for or taking action in support of Taiwan's independence.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Substantial progress was made towards expanding renewable energy, with the government's 2030 target for wind and solar power generation achieved six years early. As a result, China's capacity for non-fossil fuel energy generation exceeded that from fossil fuels for the first time.

Nevertheless, energy consumption relied mainly on fossil fuels, which remained the largest contributor to China's greenhouse gas emissions. According to a report by the NGO Greenpeace, the number of new permits issued by the government for domestic coal-fired power plant construction decreased by 79.5% during the first half of the year. However, the pace of coal plant construction remained high, driven by projects approved in previous years.

Despite previous pledges by the government, the building of new coal-fired power plants abroad continued, and fewer existing projects were halted in 2024 than in the previous two years.

In March, IQAir reported that, in 2023, China's five-year trend of improving air quality was reversed, with thick smog returning to several cities and provinces, largely the result of burning coal.

HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

Freedom of expression

The space for free speech, already highly restricted under the National Security Law

(NSL) and other repressive laws, diminished further.

In March, following inadequate public consultations, the Hong Kong Legislative Council unanimously passed the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO). This local law created new national security offences and increased penalties for existing offences. It also entrenched the local government's sweeping powers of enforcement. The ordinance introduced mainland China's broad and vague definitions of "national security" and "state secrets" which could potentially cover almost any conduct or information. The SNSO replaced a widely-used colonial-era sedition law, but expanded provisions that punish intention to cause "hatred or enmity amongst residents of different regions of China", and that expressly cover acts or speech which do not incite violence.[8] The maximum prison sentence for sedition was increased from two to seven years, or up to 10 years if involving collusion with external force.

Following the adoption of the SNSO, 15 people were arrested under its sedition provisions. Four were subsequently charged. In September, three were convicted in separate trials for wearing a T-shirt and a mask printed with protest slogans; expressing political comments against the government on online platforms; and writing protest slogans on bus seats. They were sentenced to prison terms of between 10 and 14 months.

In June and December the authorities used new powers under the SNSO to cancel the passports of first six and then seven Hong Kong activists living overseas for whom arrest warrants had been issued in 2023. Another six activists living overseas were placed on a wanted list with a bounty of 1 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 128,500) each.

In May the Court of Appeal granted the government an interim injunction to ban the pro-democracy protest song "Glory to Hong Kong".[9] The decision, which overturned a lower court ruling, prohibits individuals from broadcasting, performing, distributing, disseminating, displaying or reproducing the song with an intent against national security, such as intention of sedition or to incite secession. Anyone breaching the injunction could be held liable for contempt of court and jailed. Following the decision, YouTube blocked users in Hong Kong from accessing 32 videos featuring the song.

Also in May, in a major case against 47 pro-democracy activists, the High Court found 14 people guilty of "conspiracy to commit subversion" under the NSL for organizing unofficial primaries for the 2020 Legislative Council elections that were ultimately postponed. Another 31 defendants had previously pleaded guilty to the same charges. In November the court handed down sentences to the 45 ranging from four years and three months to 10 years in prison. Two other defendants were acquitted, but the Department of Justice appealed against one of the acquittals.

The trial of Jimmy Lai, the 77-year-old founder of the pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily, on charges under the NSL of "colluding with foreign forces" continued and was still ongoing at years' end. There were concerns about Jimmy Lai's declining health after he was absent from a hearing in June. A trial monitor from Reporters Without Borders was barred from entering Hong Kong in June.

In August the Court of Final Appeal dismissed appeals by Jimmy Lai and six other activists against a previous conviction for taking part in an unauthorized assembly during the 2019 protests, for which Lai was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment.

Several people were charged with "insulting" the Chinese national anthem. In June, three people were arrested under the National Anthem Ordinance for turning their backs while the anthem was played at a football match.[10] In August, another person was sentenced to eight weeks' imprisonment for covering his ears and singing a song associated with the pro-democracy movement while the anthem was played at a volleyball match in 2023.

In August, two former editors of the closed media outlet Stand News, Chung Pui-kuen and Patrick Lam, were convicted for "conspiring to publish seditious publications". In September they were

sentenced to 21 and 11 months' imprisonment, respectively. Patrick Lam filed an appeal against his conviction in October.

Freedom of assembly

The authorities continued to prevent commemorations of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. On 4 June the 35th anniversary of the crackdown, a heavy police presence was reported in and around Victoria Park where vigils had been held for 30 years before they were banned in 2020. Four people were formally arrested while another five were "brought to police stations". Bringing people to police stations is an intimidatory tactic that allows the police to remove a person from the scene without a formal arrest.

In January the Court of Final Appeal reinstated the conviction of Chow Hang-tung for "inciting others to take part in an unauthorized assembly" in 2021 on the anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown. Chow Hang-tung's trial on a separate charge under the NSL of "inciting subversion" was repeatedly delayed. She remained in pretrial detention for her role in a group which held annual Tiananmen candlelight vigils in Victoria Park.

In late May the police initiated additional proceedings, under the SNSO, against Chow Hang-tung, and arrested her mother and six of her friends for "exploit[ing] an upcoming sensitive date to repeatedly publish posts with seditious intention on a social platform".

Freedom of association

In July the Legislative Council passed a law to give government appointees a majority on the Social Workers Registration Board, the licensing body for social workers. The move followed criticism of the Board by a government official for its refusal to ban people convicted of national security offences from becoming social workers.

Also in July the Hong Kong Christian Institute announced that it was disbanding because of the "social environment" and inability to freely fulfil its mission. The Institute supported the 2014 pro-democracy movement and protests in 2019 against a bill that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China.

In September the High Court ruled in favour of the government's claim that the General Union of Hong Kong Speech Therapists, whose registration was revoked in 2021, had used funds to endanger national security. The court granted the government a confiscation order to seize HKD 116,000 (approximately USD 14,900) from the pro-democracy union.

LGBTI people's rights

The Hong Kong government failed to provide any meaningful updates on progress towards the implementation of a 2023 ruling by the Court of Final Appeal requiring it to provide an alternative legal framework for the recognition of same-sex partnerships.

In November the Court of Final Appeal dismissed the government's appeal against a lower court decision which gave same-sex couples who married overseas the same inheritance and public housing rights as heterosexual married couples.

According to media reports, the Hong Kong government cut funding to at least three LGBTI groups, and enforced administrative measures to obstruct fundraising and promotion activities of one of the groups.

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1. "China: Chinese director arrested for protest film: Chen Pinlin", 30 April ↑
2. "China: Prominent artist arrested for his work: Gao Zhen", 5 December ↑
3. *China: "On my campus, I am afraid": China's Targeting of Overseas Students Stifles Rights*, 13 May ↑
4. "China: Activist Li Qiaochu unjustly convicted 'for speaking out about torture'", 5 February ↑
5. "China: 'Malicious' conviction of #MeToo and labour activists shows Beijing's growing fear of dissent", 14 June ↑
6. "China: Activists approaching one year in detention: Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan", 22 March ↑
7. "China must end decade of injustice", 18 September ↑
8. "What is Hong Kong's Article 23 law? 10 things you need to know", 22 March ↑
9. "Hong Kong: Protest song ban a 'worrying sign' of shrinking freedoms", 8 May ↑

10. "Hong Kong: National anthem football arrests are an attack on freedom of expression", 7 June †

COLOMBIA

Republic of Colombia

Despite peace talks and ceasefires, civilians continued to be affected by human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law caused by armed conflict, with Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant and peasant communities disproportionately affected. Enforced disappearances continued and searches remained challenging. Violence against human rights defenders was pervasive, despite measures by the government to improve protection. Comprehensive police reform remained pending. Violence against journalists, women and girls and LGBTI people was ongoing. There was controversy over the alleged use of spyware by security forces. Some progress was made in reparations and justice for violence at the hands of the armed forces, but impunity continued. There were concerns about the rights of Venezuelan refugees, despite some progress. The Escazú Agreement was deemed constitutional. The pension reform bill was enacted.

BACKGROUND

According to the ICRC, eight non-international armed conflicts persisted in Colombia. Several armed groups expanded their presence in different regions of the country and armed confrontations escalated. The government's "Total Peace" policy remained in effect, facilitating ongoing negotiations between the government and various armed groups.

Negotiations between the government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) stalled in September, after the expiration of a ceasefire in August and an attack on a military base in Arauca department. Both parties met in November to discuss the resumption of negotiations. In September a formal agreement was announced for negotiations between the government and an armed group separate from the ELN, Southern Commoners. Meanwhile, in March, a ceasefire between the government and the Central General Staff (EMC) was suspended in Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Nariño departments, and negotiations fractured. Some factions of the EMC, under the name of General Staff of the Blocks and Fronts (EMBF), continued talks with the government and agreed a ceasefire in October. The Second Marquetalia also split up, with a faction now called the Bolivarian Army National Coordinator publicly expressing in November its willingness to continue negotiations with the government.

During the year, the government announced the start of negotiations with armed groups such as the Gaitanist Self-Defence Army (EGC) and the Sierra Nevada Conqueror Self-Defence Forces. Talks with other urban armed groups continued in the cities of Medellín, Quibdó and Buenaventura.

In March the UN International Expert on human rights called for the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement and for all negotiations and dialogues with armed groups to focus on human rights.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Violations of international humanitarian law were documented throughout the year, particularly impacting regions and departments such as Arauca, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Magdalena Medio, Nariño, Putumayo and Valle del Cauca.

The Human Rights and Displacement Consulting Group (CODHES) documented 121 large-scale group forced displacements up to December, affecting at least 49,002 people. OCHA reported that at least 176,500 individuals had been forcibly displaced up to November.

CODHES also reported 90 instances of forced confinement up to December, affecting at least 195,447 people. OCHA claimed that forced confinement tactics were used by armed groups as social and territorial control mechanisms that negatively impacted

affected communities' access to rights and services.

The Ombudsperson's Office reported 282 cases of child recruitment by armed groups up to early November. Meanwhile, Mine Action Area of Responsibility estimated that approximately 607,910 individuals could be at risk due to the presence of landmines or unexploded devices, or subject to confinement as a result.

Between January and 22 December, the Institute for Development and Peace Studies reported the killing of 31 former combatants who had signed the 2016 Peace Agreement.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Between December 2016 and July 2024, the ICRC documented 1,730 new enforced disappearances and warned that, even though Colombia had strong institutions to deal with this issue, searches were still challenging.

Since its creation in 2017, the Search Unit for Missing Persons had found alive and identified 23 people up to June and, jointly with other institutions, had recovered 1,626 bodies, of which 375 were between January and June 2024.

A National Search System was launched in May, with the aim of coordinating the different institutions in charge of the search for missing people, including enforced disappearances.

In June, Congress passed a bill recognizing the work of women searching for forcibly disappeared people and establishing a set of measures to guarantee these women's rights, including to safety, a life free of violence, education, health, housing, justice, and others. At the end of the year, these women were still claiming their rights and demanding for the law to be fully implemented.[1]

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In June the Ministry of Interior issued a call for applications to the restructured Comprehensive Programme on Security and Protection for Communities and Organizations in the Territories. This collective protection initiative was aimed at enhancing the capacity of communities and organizations, with a specific focus on safeguarding human rights defenders.

In July the government and human rights organizations reactivated the Guarantees' National Roundtable, designed to facilitate dialogue between state institutions and civil society regarding the protection and promotion of the defence of human rights. In November, human rights organizations announced that the Roundtable had not met again because of postponements by some high-ranking officers who should have participated in the meetings.

Nevertheless, violence against human rights defenders remained widespread. The situation in departments and regions such as Antioquia, Arauca, Cauca, Magdalena Medio, Norte de Santander and Valle del Cauca was particularly concerning.[2]

The We Are Defenders Programme recorded 355 attacks against 318 human rights defenders between January and June, including killings, threats, arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, abduction and forced displacement – a 24% decrease in aggressions compared with the same period in 2023. Between July and September the programme recorded 205 attacks against 190 human rights defenders, a 23% increase compared with the same period in 2023. Between January and November the OHCHR reported 186 allegations of killings of human rights defenders in Colombia, of which 80 cases had been verified, 11 were still under verification and 95 were inconclusive.

In March the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found Colombia responsible for a campaign of persecution against the Lawyers Collective "José Alvear Restrepo". The court determined that from 1990 to at least 2005 various Colombian institutions conducted arbitrary intelligence activities targeting the collective and its members, violating their right to defend human rights, among others.

DISCRIMINATION

According to OCHA, as of March, 23% of the 8.3 million people with humanitarian needs resulting from the combined negative effects

of the actions of armed actors, the loss of ancestral territories and climate change were Indigenous and Afro-descendant.

Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities continued to disproportionately suffer human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law. As of December, CODHES reported that at least 2,446 victims of large-scale group forced displacements were Afro-descendants living in collective territories under the authority of community councils. At least 8,336 Indigenous People who lived in reservations were also victims. As of 5 November, the Ombudsperson's Office reported that 50% of the children recruited by armed groups were from Indigenous communities.

Violence against human rights defenders was predominantly concentrated in rural communities and disproportionately affected peasant, Indigenous and Afro-descendant defenders. The We Are Defenders Programme reported that of the 355 aggressions against human rights defenders recorded up to June, 111 had targeted Indigenous leaders, four had targeted Afro-descendant leaders, and 39 had targeted peasant leaders.

Civil society organization ILEX Legal Action and the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent insisted that the methods of data collection on Afro-descendant people continued to marginalize those communities and hindered the development of more targeted policies to address inequalities, discrimination and racism.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The NGO Temblores registered 78 cases of police violence in Colombia between January and June. Of those cases 19 involved action by the police during protests, the context in which police violence was most documented.

In August the Coalition for Police Reform called for the government to move forward with the comprehensive police reform promised since 2022. The coalition recognized that the government had opened dialogues several times and that steps had been taken to modify the regulations on the use of force, but it called for deeper reform within the police. The coalition presented a report on these issues to the Ministry of Defence and the police in November.

In September, several UN human rights experts expressed concern about the lack of truth, justice and accountability over the killings and other human rights violations committed during the 2021 National Strike.

Also in September, the Attorney General issued a directive with guidance on the prosecution of possible crimes committed during protests, outlining the applicable human rights standards. Meanwhile, police and military judges continued requesting cases of human rights violations against protesters to be handed over to the military justice system. In September, the Constitutional Court ruled that the case regarding the attack on Leidy Cadena had to remain within the ordinary criminal justice system.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In September, in compliance with an order issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the *Bedoya Lima v. Colombia* case, the government established the "It's Not a Time to be Silent" Fund, intended to support prevention, protection and assistance programmes for women journalists who were victims of gender-based violence.

In the same month, President Gustavo Petro signed an executive order on the duties of authorities regarding freedom of expression including that of the press, aimed at enabling public debate and plurality of information. Despite this, throughout the year the Foundation for Freedom of the Press (FLIP) urged the president to de-escalate tensions with the media. In July, following confrontations between the president and a journalist, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called on the authorities to take appropriate measures to prevent violent discourse against the press and to ensure the protection of journalists from threats. In September, FLIP, along with the NGO El Veinte and a group of women journalists, filed for legal protection against stigmatizing statements by the president.

In February the Ombudsperson's Office released the results of a survey of journalists indicating that 37% of respondents reported having been subjected to actions that posed a serious threat to their safety while performing their journalistic duties. FLIP recorded 524 attacks against journalists, including two killings, 213 threats and 72 cases of stigmatization.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Ombudsperson's Office recorded 1,310 cases of violence against women in January and February. The Colombian Observatory on Feminicides reported 815 cases from the beginning of the year up to November.

In September, the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation reported threats and increased violence by the armed group EGC against women in Chocó department, especially in the department's capital Quibdó.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI activists and human rights defenders continued to face threats and attacks because of their work. Violence against LGBTI people in general also continued. In December, the NGO Affirmative Caribbean reported that throughout the year a provisional figure of 44 LGBTI people had been killed, including 21 transgender women killed up to October.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In August, the health authorities published regulations granting access to abortion services until 24 weeks of pregnancy, as mandated by a 2022 Constitutional Court ruling. Nevertheless, in September organizations including Profamilia and Ríos Rivers reported the persistence of obstacles preventing access to abortion services, especially in rural municipalities and where people had fewer financial resources.

UNLAWFUL TARGETED SURVEILLANCE

A report by Israeli newspaper Haaretz initiated controversy around the alleged purchase in 2021 of Pegasus, highly invasive spyware that enables full and unrestricted access to a device, and its use in Colombia. In September the president reported having proof of the purchase. In November the Colombian ambassador in the USA reported that the US government had confirmed having purchased Pegasus for use in anti-drugs operations in Colombia and that its use had been suspended in 2022. Authorities including the Ministry of Defence stated that they had not had access to the software. On several occasions members of the 2021 government denied the purchase.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Throughout the year, various stakeholders called upon the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) to deliver its first rulings. They put particular emphasis on the rulings concerning the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and its abduction policy, as well as the extrajudicial executions carried out by military personnel to falsely claim fulfilment of combat objectives. The president of the JEP and some victims' organizations called for the independence of the jurisdiction to be respected.

The JEP started implementing restorative, justice-based, early "proper sanctions", including those applicable to members of the military involved in extrajudicial executions. The State Crimes Victims' Movement and several human rights organizations called for greater, binding and more meaningful participation in their design and implementation.

In January, the government revoked the decorations of a former major general who was convicted for his involvement in the enforced disappearance of five individuals during the 1985 retaking of the Palace of Justice, an operation under his command.

In May, Congress passed a bill reforming the Victims' Reparation Law proposed by the Ombudsperson's Office.

In September the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies reported that Colombia was probably not going to fulfil the commitments of the ethnic chapter or those relating to the ethnic approach in the 2016 Peace Agreement, given the rate of progress so far. The report also noted that less

progress had been made on the ethnic-related commitments than the general ones.

In September, the president of the JEP reiterated concerns regarding the insufficient financial resources available for the implementation of "proper sanctions" against perpetrators who accepted early responsibility for crimes committed during the armed conflict.

Also in September, the first adversarial proceedings in the JEP started. The case involved a former colonel allegedly responsible for more than 70 extrajudicial executions carried out between 2002 and 2004 during his command of a battalion in Valledupar city, Cesar department.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

As of November, Migration Colombia reported the presence of 2.8 million Venezuelan nationals in the country. Among these, 2,086,436 individuals held regularized migratory status, 336,786 were awaiting the completion of the regularization process, and 384,943 had irregular migratory status.

In April the Constitutional Court reiterated that requiring Venezuelan nationals seeking recognition of refugee status to relinquish temporary regularization measures was unconstitutional.

In July, NGO Diverse Colombia insisted on the need to gather statistical information about LGBTI migrants in the country. The NGO reported that transgender Venezuelan people in Colombia faced significant obstacles to access regularization programmes using their chosen identity names and gender.

In September, many Venezuelan human rights defenders reported that they had received threats from armed groups while in Colombia.

Following a visit to the country in April, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in its preliminary findings, acknowledged that Colombia had progressed in implementing certain integration and temporary protection policies for Venezuelans. However, the commission emphasized the urgent need to strengthen these measures.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also expressed concerns regarding the absence of migratory and health authorities in municipalities near the Darién Gap, the border region between Panama and Colombia, which serves as a migratory route for individuals travelling northward through the Americas.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In April the Constitutional Court reviewed an application for legal protection filed by a peasant couple seeking recognition as victims of forced displacement due to a river flood. The court issued an order directing Congress to enact a legislative framework addressing displacement caused by environmental events, including those linked to climate change.

In August, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Escazú Agreement was in line with the Colombian constitution, paving the way for its ratification.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Congress rejected the health and education reform bills presented by the government in the first half of the year, while the pensions reform was enacted into law in July. Discussions on labour reform persisted throughout the year, with new bills on health and education announced during the second half of the year.

1. *Transforming Pain Into Rights: Risks, Threats and Attacks on Women Searchers in Colombia*, 3 December ↑
2. "Colombia: Investigate threats and attacks against defenders", 23 February ↑

CONGO

Republic of the Congo

Hundreds of people were arbitrarily arrested during a police operation. Opposition figures were arbitrarily detained. NGOs denounced the absence of public data on gender-based violence and impunity for

incidents of sexual violence. The authorities granted an oil exploration permit within a protected natural park. The Ministry for the Environment suspended the activities of a lead recycling company in Vindoulou due to health risks and ordered its dismantling. The right to health was undermined by lack of progress on health projects. The authorities forcibly relocated residents of Mpili village to make way for potash extraction.

BACKGROUND

In September, opposition parties requested that President Sassou Nguesso set up a national political dialogue before the 2026 presidential election.

The same month, the International Monetary Fund approved a USD 43 million loan to support the Congolese economy but requested more efforts to improve the transparency of public finances and the hydrocarbon sector, and a continuation of work to fight corruption. In March, US federal prosecutors alleged that "funds embezzled from the state coffers" were used to purchase a luxury apartment at Trump International Hotel and Tower for the use of Sassou Nguesso's daughter.

Congo experienced numerous power cuts, often leaving districts in the capital, Brazzaville and in Pointe-Noire in darkness.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

In May, the Brazzaville authorities launched Opération Coup de Poing to combat crime. In June, the public prosecutor announced in a public statement that 580 individuals had been arrested, of whom 247 were later released. The Action Development Centre – a Congolese NGO – described the arrests as arbitrary and criticized the lack of access to legal representation and the ill-treatment of detainees.

André Okombi Salissa and Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko remained in prison. The two men had been candidates in the 2016 presidential election and were sentenced in 2019 and 2018 respectively to 20 years' imprisonment for "undermining state security" and "illegal possession of arms and munitions of war". The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared that their detention was arbitrary.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

A report submitted by several NGOs to the UN Human Rights Council's January UPR session highlighted that, despite progress with the 2022 Mouebara Law to combat violence against women, significant barriers remained, particularly in victims' access to justice. The NGOs highlighted the absence of official, consolidated public statistics on gender-based violence disaggregated by gender, age or type of violence, and reported that the number of prosecutions for gender-based violence remained very low. According to data collected by International Solidarity Actions in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire from 2020 to 2022, out of 332 victims of gender-based violence whose cases were monitored by the organization, only 130 filed complaints with police or gendarmerie services. Of these, 46 reached the courts, resulting in only seven convictions (2%). Additionally, 60 cases (18%) were resolved through out-of-court settlements. The organization also denounced the lack of training for judicial personnel and hospital staff in dealing with victims, particularly children.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In January, dozens of Congolese and international organizations denounced the granting by the state authorities of an oil exploration permit to China Oil Natural Gas Overseas Holding United in Conkouati-Douli National Park. The deal was made despite a recent USD 50 million agreement with international donors for forest protection. The park, known for its rich biodiversity and traditional fishing communities, is protected by a 1999 decree that prohibits oil extraction.

In June, the Ministry for the Environment ordered the suspension of operations by the Metssa Congo recycling company in Vindoulou, Pointe Noire department, due to potential risks to the health of the surrounding populations and environment.[1] The Ministry initiated a "technical investigation" in August on air pollution

caused by the company, in which blood tests were conducted on employees and residents. In December, following the technical investigation, the company began its dismantling operations, and the authorities announced their intention to establish a commission tasked with identifying victims and facilitating compensation.

The company, which manufactures lead ingots, had not conducted an environmental impact assessment before beginning operations in 2013, in violation of Congolese law, and blood tests undertaken at the initiative of residents revealed lead levels far exceeding WHO recommended limits.[2]

RIGHT TO HEALTH

On 24 April the Congolese coalition Publish What You Pay published a report revealing that only 2% of the 55 health projects they monitored between 2020 and 2022, totalling CFA 160 billion (around USD 268 million), were completed. The report highlighted that 51% of these projects had not even been started. Only 17% of pregnant women with mild cases of malaria received free treatment, and only 6% of women needing caesarean sections received the procedure for free, despite free caesarean sections being introduced by presidential decree in 2021.

FORCED EVICTIONS

In July, several residents of Mpili, Kouilou department, denounced their forced relocation to make way for the extraction of potash by the Chinese company Luyuan des Mines Congo. The residents were relocated to smaller plots, where the houses lacked an electricity supply. Those who had had larger plots used for farming and forest exploitation lost access to their livelihoods. The authorities claimed that the expropriation and resettlement were conducted in consultation with Mpili residents and in compliance with domestic law. However, the Congolese Justice and Peace Commission expressed concerns that they amounted to forced evictions.

1. "Republic of Congo: Suspension of Metssa Congo's activities must be followed by urgent investigation", 19 June ↑

2. "Republic of Congo: Authorities failing to ensure respect of human rights by big industry", 4 June ↑

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

Rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly were curtailed in law and practice. New ordinance threatened the right to freedom of association and undermined civil society organizations. An act amending the Criminal Code increased the penalties for acts of torture. Thousands of families were affected by forced evictions in Abidjan. Legal provisions contravened women's rights. There were concerns about the persistent use of child labour. The government received an International Monetary Fund loan to prepare for its energy transition.

BACKGROUND

Political tensions rose ahead of the 2025 presidential election. In August, Kando Soumahoro, a leader of the Generations and Peoples Solidarity (GPS) movement, received a three-year prison sentence including one year suspended. The conviction related to his membership of GPS, which had been established by the exiled former prime minister Guillaume Soro and suspended in 2021.

Intense rainfall in June led to flooding and landslides. At least 24 people died in Abidjan according to the National Office of Civil Protection.

By August, there were over 56,000 registered asylum seekers who had fled conflict in Burkina Faso.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Legal provisions continued to contravene international human rights standards by imposing prison sentences for acts which

should be decriminalized. The Criminal Code's Article 183 imposed "a one to three-year prison sentence" for publishing, disseminating, divulging or reproducing "by any means whatsoever fake news… when doing so results in or could result in a failure to abide by laws, damage to public morale, or disrepute for the institutions or their operation." Articles 197 to 199 carried a prison sentence for anyone participating in, or organizing, an undeclared demonstration.

In September, the police violently repressed a march – previously banned by the authorities – in Abidjan, arresting around 20 people. The Acting for the People movement had organized the protest against the high cost of living and forced evictions.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

On 12 June, the government adopted an ordinance regulating civil society organizations' activities with the stated aim of ensuring that they complied with requirements to fight transnational organized crime. Organizations were required to submit activity reports annually and reports on ongoing projects upon request. The ordinance also allowed the authorities to dissolve an organization by decree, with no mechanism for appeal. The move was denounced by some Ivoirian NGOs who feared that the authorities would use the law to interfere in their finances and control their activities.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In its concluding observations, published in August, the UN Committee against Torture welcomed the adoption of Act No. 2024-358 of 11 June 2024 of the Criminal Code, which strengthened penalties for acts of torture committed by public officials or anyone acting at their instigation or with their consent. However, the committee was concerned about a Code of Criminal Procedure provision which might give judges scope to admit evidence obtained by coercion or torture.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In March, the Council of State declared that it lacked the jurisdiction to rule on a 2019 application from human rights organizations requesting the repeal of a 2018 amnesty law. The law benefited hundreds of people accused or convicted of offences committed during the 2011 post-electoral violence.

FORCED EVICTIONS

Large-scale operations to demolish neighbourhoods in Abidjan and evict their inhabitants were launched in January on sites considered to be at risk of flooding. The Boribana neighbourhood was demolished in January, followed by Gesco and Banco 1 in February and Abattoir in June as part of a plan by the Autonomous District of Abidjan to demolish 176 sites. Thousands of affected families were not meaningfully consulted on the conditions of their eviction, or given adequate notification in advance of the demolitions. Most households and owners were not given prior compensation or rehoused.[1] On 21 November, the authorities decided to suspend the eviction operations and committed to take measures for rehousing and compensating those affected.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Legal provisions continued to contravene women's rights, including Article 403 of the Criminal Code, which allowed impunity for men who rape their wives by stating that consent can be presumed, unless "proved otherwise".

In June, the National Assembly adopted a legislative amendment to the Criminal Code to allow abortion in cases of incest, formerly available only in cases of rape or where the mother's life was threatened.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In his July report, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery expressed his concern about the persistent use of child labour, particularly in the artisanal gold mining sector, and in agriculture and domestic work.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In February, the International Monetary Fund agreed a USD 1.3 billion loan to help Côte d'Ivoire improve climate resilience and transition to renewable energy. The funding aimed to improve governance of climate policies, create a framework for green and sustainable finance, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It did, however, increase the country's debt burden.

1. "Côte d'Ivoire: Thousands of families still awaiting support measures after forced evictions in Abidjan", 14 August ↑

CROATIA

Republic of Croatia

Strategic lawsuits against public participation threatened media freedom. Access to abortion remained restricted. Femicide became a criminal offence. Victims of wartime rape faced obstacles in accessing rights. Roma continued to experience discrimination in housing and education.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) remained a serious threat to media freedom. According to a study by the Croatian Journalists' Association, 40% of over 1,300 lawsuits brought against media outlets and journalists in the preceding eight years, including by senior public officials, demonstrated elements of a SLAPP.

Despite repeated calls to decriminalize defamation, it remained a criminal offence and was used to bring both criminal and civil charges against journalists. The human rights organization Article 19 warned that this practice "suffocates journalism".

In March, parliament adopted a new criminal offence of "unauthorized disclosure of information from ongoing criminal investigations". Although the legislation expressly exempted journalists and disclosures of "public interest", media organizations described it as violating international standards on freedom of expression.

In September the NGO Media Freedom Rapid Response called the state of media freedom "alarming".

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Women and pregnant people continued to face barriers to abortion services due to widespread refusal by doctors and clinics to perform abortions on grounds of conscience. Abortion remained particularly inaccessible in rural and economically deprived areas.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In March, parliament introduced femicide as a separate criminal offence and imposed longer sentences for rape, among other measures aimed at strengthening victims' rights.

Civil society groups noted that, despite the legislative changes, conviction for femicide was rare and urged the government to strengthen education and prevention programmes.

The authorities registered 17 cases of femicide in 2024. Domestic violence offences increased by 9% in comparison with 2023. The Gender Equality Ombudsperson said that the length of criminal proceedings and lenient penalties were causing many women to refrain from reporting violence.

A gynaecologist at Osjek hospital continued to work for six months after receiving a first-instance verdict of raping a patient, causing a public outcry. He was finally removed in September. The ombudsperson urged the government to adopt urgent legislative changes to ensure that individuals charged with or convicted of certain criminal offences, including rape, could not be employed in health institutions.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The ombudsperson asked the authorities to ensure that the new Law on the Central Register of the Population, which was pending adoption by parliament, included robust safeguards for data protection and protection against discrimination.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In September the Administrative Court in the capital Zagreb upheld the detention of Vladislav Arinichev, a Russian anti-war activist who applied for asylum in Croatia. In July the authorities rejected his application after the State Intelligence Agency declared him a threat to national security following his public criticism of the conditions in a reception centre for asylum seekers. Vladislav Arinichev was finally released in October after 106 days in detention.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Most victims of wartime sexual violence remained unregistered for a special status guaranteeing certain welfare benefits and support, due to barriers in the application process, including onerous documentation. According to civil rights organizations, less than 15% of those eligible applied.

In August the NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights called on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to work together to ensure access to justice and reparations for the victims of a refugee massacre in 1995 in which the Croatian Air Force killed 14 Serb refugees near the Bosnian town of Petrovac.

The UN Human Rights Committee urged Croatia to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries to locate and try suspected perpetrators of crimes under international humanitarian law and to ensure that victims and their families receive full reparation for human rights violations.

In February, Croatia signed the 2023 Ljubljana – The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes.

DISCRIMINATION

LGBTI people

Legal gender recognition continued to require a mental health diagnosis or psychological evaluation. The Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner urged the authorities to repeal these conditions, saying that they perpetuate the "pathologization of trans people".

Roma

Roma continued to live in segregated neighbourhoods and informal settlements without adequate infrastructure and with limited access to basic services.

Roma children had low rates of enrolment in preschool education and tended to be in ethnically segregated classes or special education programmes, leading to high dropout rates.

In July the UN Human Rights Committee called on Croatia to intensify efforts to address the de facto segregation of Roma and guarantee non-discriminatory access to adequate housing, education and basic services.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In June the government announced that more than 75% of total electricity production capacity would come from renewable sources by 2030 and that the country's updated National Energy and Climate Plan would be more ambitious.

CUBA

Republic of Cuba

Social services were reduced and people struggled to access food and medicine. Freedom of expression was further restricted. Arbitrary arrests and the criminalization of activists, human rights defenders, journalists and protesters persisted. Detainees experienced harassment and ill-treatment. Discrimination continued against women, Afro-descendants and LGBTI people.

BACKGROUND

In July, an independent study revealed that the population had declined by 18% over the previous two years, largely due to people

leaving the country, often taking dangerous routes to do so.

Several legal amendments were approved that impacted the existence and operation of the so-called "new private forms of economy", limiting the growth of the sector and economic and employment opportunities, and affecting access to basic goods and services provided by them.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Changes to economic policy and a reduction in social services affected vulnerable people, especially those over 65 years. According to media reports, the supply of subsidized "basic food baskets" by the government was significantly reduced and people had to stand in long queues to access groceries. In September, the government decreased the subsidized bread ration due to a shortage of ingredients.

Health services and access to medicines were severely limited. In July, official media such as Granma reported that the authorities acknowledged a significant shortage of supplies in pharmacies.

Access to electricity and fuel was restricted leading to difficulties in food preservation, suspension of education and health services. In October and November, there were three total failures in the national electricity supply, according to government communications. Significant parts of the country remained without power for up to 96 hours, severely affecting millions of people.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In October the Social Communication Law came into force, further restricting freedom of expression.

The authorities continued labelling activists and journalists as "common criminals, mercenaries and foreign agents" and called independent media outlets, journalists and influential individuals that criticize state policies "financial and media terrorists".

In October a new wave of state repression affected independent media. At least 20 journalists and activists reported that their mobile phones and laptops had been confiscated by state officials, and that they had been threatened with criminal prosecutions.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

The authorities subjected artists, intellectuals and other critical voices to arbitrary detention including in their homes, with serious implications for their privacy and right to freedom of movement.

In June, academic Alina Bárbara López was arbitrarily and violently detained while on her way to the capital city, Havana.

Berta Soler, the leader of activist group Ladies in White was arbitrarily detained on several occasions, including a three-day enforced disappearance in September.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The authorities regularly deployed police in areas where protests had taken place and other key areas such as Havana.

According to human rights organizations, at least 109 people were detained for participating in protests in 2024.[1] In November, the authorities reported the arrest and prosecution of several people for their participation in protests following Hurricane Rafael, on charges of contempt, public disorder and damage.

In April, 14 people were convicted for participating in peaceful protests in August 2022 in the municipality of Nuevitas. The charges included sedition, "continued enemy propaganda", and acts against state security. According to available information, the harshest sentence of 15 years' imprisonment was handed down to a young woman, Mayelín Rodríguez Prado, who was charged with sedition and enemy propaganda for streaming the protests on Facebook.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Repressive tactics against dissent included the criminalization and harassment of activists, journalists and human rights defenders, internet shutdowns, and fines under cybersecurity legislation.[2]

The authorities subjected human rights activists and defenders, including relatives of prisoners, to alarming harassment and surveillance.

Persistent patterns of repression targeting activists, human rights defenders, artists and journalists included bans on leaving the country and forced exile.

In June, Yuri Valle Roca, who was serving a sentence of five years' imprisonment for "continued enemy propaganda" because of his work as an independent journalist, was released and forced to leave the country.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

There were alarming patterns of human rights violations against people detained for dissent against the government, including some practices that could amount to torture.

Human rights organizations reported harassment and ill-treatment by prison officials of people detained for political reasons, including the denial of adequate medical care resulting in the deterioration of their health.

The health of prisoners of conscience Loreto Hernández and Pedro Albert deteriorated and their families reported serious difficulties providing them with the food and medicines they needed.[3] In November, Pedro Albert was released on a one-year "extra-penal" leave of absence for health reasons.

Prisoner of conscience and opposition leader José Daniel Ferrer was held for months in solitary confinement and isolated from other prisoners, and his family was systematically denied the right to visit him. In November, his family reported that he had been the victim of a brutal beating. In December, following a hunger strike, the authorities allowed his family visiting rights and telephone calls, and he was moved to an area with other prisoners.

DISCRIMINATION

Women, LGBTI people and Afro-descendants continued to experience discrimination, as did others on political and religious grounds.

Femicide continued without recognition as a specific crime in law. In July, the government approved a national system of "registration, attention, follow-up and monitoring" of gender- based violence in the country. Activists and independent organizations reported 55 femicides up to 25 December.

1. "Cuba: Three years after the protests of 11-12 July 2021: authorities must release those unjustly imprisoned and repeal repressive laws", 7 July ↑
2. "Cuba: Amnesty International names four people as prisoners of conscience amid new wave of state repression", 23 October (Spanish only) ↑
3. "Cuba: Teacher in need of medical attention", 7 July (Spanish only) ↑

CYPRUS

Republic of Cyprus

The premises of an anti-racist NGO were attacked with an explosive device. Unlawful forced returns to Lebanon reportedly continued. The processing of asylum applications of Syrian nationals was suspended. An inquest into the death of army conscript Athanasios Nicolaou concluded that he had been strangled.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In January, the premises of anti-racist NGO KISA were severely damaged by an attack with an explosive device, following reports of threats and harassment against KISA and its associates by anti-migrant and nationalist groups. Concerns were raised about the criminal prosecution of KISA's former executive director Doros Polykarpou, which appeared to be motivated by his human rights work.

In April, the authorities suspended the processing of applications for international protection by Syrian nationals, "pending developments" on the assessment of the situation in Syria, which the authorities called for at EU level.

In June, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, expressed concerns about the summary return of asylum seekers to the UN buffer zone. In November, following an interim measures request by two NGOs to the European Court of Human Rights, asylum

seekers who had been stranded for many months in the buffer zone were transferred to the Limnes pre-departure centre in Kofinou and given access to asylum procedures. In the context of increased numbers of asylum seekers arriving by sea, reports emerged during the year of summary and therefore unlawful returns by sea to Lebanon, including incidents in 2023 in which Syrians were subsequently returned to Syria. In October, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Cyprus for summarily returning a group of Syrians to Lebanon in 2020, in violation of the prohibition of collective expulsion, and for failing to assess the risks upon return.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

In April, there were reports of excessive use of force during the arrest, and ill-treatment in detention, of people protesting at the death of a Bangladeshi man after he jumped from his bedroom window during a police raid in Limassol.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In June, concerns were raised by civil society about a draft bill seeking to regulate protests, including provisions criminalizing organizers of and participants in a banned gathering, as well as protesters wearing face coverings.

IMPUNITY

In May, a new inquest into the 2005 death of army conscript Athanasios Nicolaou ruled that his death was murder by strangulation. The Council of Ministers appointed two independent criminal investigators to reopen the case.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Cyprus fell seven places in the Climate Change Performance Index. The index noted that Cyprus's share of renewable energy sources was low and that so-called "natural" gas was being promoted as a transition fuel for domestic energy production.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Between 2006 and December, the remains of 1,051 missing individuals – 756 Greek Cypriots and 295 Turkish Cypriots – were identified by the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Republic

Hundreds of women subjected to forced sterilization remained without full compensation. A consent-based definition of rape was introduced into law. The Constitutional Court abolished sterilization as a requirement for legal gender recognition. Parliament failed to finish adopting a law that would have created a new children's ombudsperson. Irresponsible arms transfers continued. Most employed Ukrainian refugees worked below their qualifications. Climate action policies remained inadequate.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The law regulating abortion access remained outdated. Many medical facilities refused to provide abortions to non-Czech EU citizens due to incorrect claims by the Czech Medical Chamber – refuted repeatedly by the Ministry of Health and the ombudsperson's office – that the law did not allow it.

By year's end the Ministry of Health had compensated 720, mainly Roma, women, who were subjected to forced sterilizations between 1 July 1966 and 31 March 2012. The deadline for applying for compensation expired at the end of the year. The government's Committee against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment called for an extension to the deadline, but the government did not act. In September, the ombudsperson reprimanded the government for illegally delaying compensation. Hundreds of women were still waiting for compensation payments of CZK 300,000 (around EUR 12,000).

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Senate refused to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

A new definition of rape in the Criminal Code became law. From 2025, rape will be defined as "any sexual intercourse committed against the victim's will" or where they were unable to give consent due to factors such as fear or intoxication.

A Court of Appeal judge gave a suspended sentence to a man who had repeatedly raped his stepdaughter for more than two years, sparking mass demonstrations. The Ministry of Justice introduced a bill that would require judges to undertake additional training courses to further their professional development. However, it did not make training on topics including sexual violence and domestic violence mandatory.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

After many years of campaigning, parliament passed a new law granting additional rights to same-sex couples but falling short of full marriage equality. From 2025, same-sex couples can enter into a civil partnership that is supposed to give them the same rights as married heterosexual couples. However, it will not include full parental rights.

The Czech Republic was among the few countries in Europe where sterilization remained a requirement for legal gender recognition. The Constitutional Court issued a decision in May which would abolish this requirement but gave legislators until the end of June 2025 to amend the law.

DISCRIMINATION

A holocaust memorial to the Roma and Sinti in Bohemia was finally opened on the site of a former concentration camp.

The Czech nationalist Freedom and Democracy movement used racist and xenophobic rhetoric and posters in an anti-immigration campaign. The party leader also faced criminal complaints brought by representatives of the Roma people.

RIGHT TO LIFE

The Czech Republic had some of the laxest gun laws in Europe. Following a mass shooting at a university in 2023 during which 17 people were killed, in June, the minister of the interior created a working group to examine tightening gun laws.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The government proposed a law in June to ban corporal punishment of children. The law was awaiting approval by parliament. Parliament failed to finish adopting a law that would have created a new children's ombudsperson.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

The Czech Republic continued to export arms to Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, despite lack of accountability for past violations and substantial risks that they could be used in serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

As of 4 August, there were over 370,000 Ukrainian refugees in the country, according to data from UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. According to the government's Commissioner for Human Rights, approximately three-fifths of them were working below the level of their qualifications.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government again failed to adopt a legally binding climate law aimed at setting specific targets and enacting concrete measures to tackle climate change.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Attacks against civilians continued as the conflict between armed groups and government forces escalated. At least 100 civilians were killed as a result of indiscriminate shelling by government forces and armed groups. Government forces extrajudicially executed 250 people. There was an alarming increase in reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. More than 7 million people were internally displaced – 80% of whom had fled armed conflict – and lived in dire conditions. The expansion of mining projects led to mass forced evictions and the denial of rights, including to housing, health, water and other essential services. The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association were restricted, particularly in the Ituri and Nord-Kivu provinces where a form of martial law was imposed. Activists, opposition members, journalists and others were subjected to arbitrary arrests and detentions and denied the right to a fair trial. An opposition party member was given a prison sentence after he said he had been raped during his arbitrary detention. More than 120 prisoners died, and hundreds of women prisoners were raped at Makala Prison when, according to authorities, some inmates made an escape attempt. There was a spike in death sentences after the government said it would resume executions. The justice minister instructed the prosecutor general to initiate legal proceedings against those who advocated for LGBTI people's rights. The ICC prosecutor announced the renewal of investigations into crimes under the Rome Statute committed in Nord-Kivu province since January 2022.

BACKGROUND

In January, President Tshisekedi was sworn in for a second term following December 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections. The new government was sworn in six months after the elections, headed for the first time by a woman as prime minister.

Armed conflict in the east persisted as political processes stalled. In September, government forces fought against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group, in Nord-Kivu province. Meanwhile, Ugandan and government forces continued their military operations in Nord-Kivu and Ituri provinces against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan armed group, and liberated at least 500 people who had been abducted by the ADF. These military operations resulted in further displacement of the population and a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Protests were held nationwide, including in the capital, Kinshasa, in relation to the armed conflict between the March 23 Movement (M23), an armed group allegedly supported by Rwanda, and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) government forces and their allies. Protests were also about the alleged support of Western countries, including France, the UK and the USA, for Rwanda.

Inter-communal violence expanded in Kasai, Kwango, Kwilu, Mai-Ndombe and Tshopo provinces and resulted in further grave human rights violations.

In October, President Tshisekedi announced his intention to revise the 2006 constitution. The Catholic Church and other civil society actors warned that the move would further destabilize the country.

In August, the WHO declared a surge in Mpox cases "a public health emergency of international concern".

Teachers in several provinces organized strikes demanding salary increases.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

Attacks against civilians continued as the conflict between armed groups and government forces escalated, leading to hundreds of deaths and many more injuries. Clashes between government forces on the

one hand and armed groups M23, the Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO) and ADF on the other, were responsible for most of the civilian killings.

At least 100 civilians were killed and many more injured as a result of the use by all parties of indiscriminate shelling in populated areas in Nord-Kivu. Government forces and M23 used explosive weapons in populated areas to attack and defend their positions.

Nineteen people were killed and at least 25 injured on 25 January after a rocket, believed to be fired by DRC forces, struck a house in Mweso, a town in Nord-Kivu province.

On 4 March, at least 17 civilians were killed and 12 injured after a shell struck a group of civilians fleeing combat in Nyanzale town in Nord-Kivu. Witnesses said that the shell was launched from a hill controlled by M23.

The ADF was responsible for some of the deadliest attacks against civilians. In April, at least 28 civilians were killed in ADF attacks carried out following reports of the killing of two of its leaders, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, an NGO. In June, the group targeted and killed more than 200 civilians in two separate attacks in the territories of Beni and Lubero, prompting condemnation and calls by national, regional and international institutions, including the AU Commission, for the effective protection of civilians.

In August, nine civilians were killed in Bwito chiefdom, in Nord-Kivu, by M23 rebels who were allegedly pursuing FDLR members. Between October and November, M23 killed 15 civilians in Binza village, Rutshuru territory in Nord-Kivu, according to media reports citing civil society organizations and local leaders.

In August, government forces killed at least nine peaceful protesters in the town of Kilwa, Pweto territory in Haut-Katanga province, according to a civil society organization representative and several media reports. The victims were suspected of belonging to the Bakata Katanga, a political-religious group that has sporadically fought against government forces.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

At least 250 people were extrajudicially executed by government forces, according to the UN Joint Human Rights Office.

On 19 May, government forces executed two people, who had been held in their custody and suspected of being involved in a coup attempt to overthrow President Tshisekedi's government in May.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Local and international organizations noted an alarming number of reported sexual violence cases, including conflict-related sexual violence. According to a UN report published in April 2024, 133,000 cases of sexual violence were registered in 2023, and the number of cases of conflict-related sexual violence doubled in the first quarter of 2024, in comparison to the same quarter in 2023.

In September, Médecins Sans Frontières said it had treated more than 25,000 survivors of sexual violence in 2023, and that this numerical trend continued in the first months of 2024. Most cases were treated in and around internally displaced people's camps in the city of Goma, Nord-Kivu province. Around 40% of sexual violence survivors were girls, according to UNICEF.

Physicians for Human Rights, which spoke to 16 organizations providing services to survivors of sexual violence, noted that the increase in such violence was linked to various conflicts, particularly in connection with M23's resurgence and the intensified fighting between M23 and government forces.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Around 7.3 million people were internally displaced, according to OCHA, 80% of whom had fled due to clashes between various armed groups. More than half of those displaced were women. Most internally displaced people lived in dire conditions, with limited access to education, health, and sexual and reproductive services. The conditions were partly due to lack of funding from the international community to address the humanitarian crisis and the continuous

attacks by armed groups against internally displaced people's camps.

FORCED EVICTIONS

In the city of Kolwezi in Lualaba province companies continued their expansion of industrial-scale mining for cobalt and copper, materials which are critical for the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. These operations, as in previous years, led to forced evictions and other human rights violations. Affected individuals and communities said they were frustrated at the continuous forced evictions and lack of fair compensation for their losses. Community representatives told Amnesty International that those affected also faced other human rights violations associated with displacement, including the denial of access to education, health and water, and other essential services.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Authorities continued to restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The "state of siege" (a form of martial law), imposed since May 2021, further restricted these rights for people in the Ituri and Nord-Kivu provinces. Its enforcement and continued renewal violated the constitution, and regional and international human rights obligations.

Pro-democracy activists, opposition members, human rights and environmental defenders, and journalists were subjected to arbitrary arrests and detentions (see below), judicial harassment and exile.

In February, security forces used tear gas to disperse peaceful demonstrations against the alleged support by some Western countries of the Rwandan government's military operations in the DRC and its backing of M23.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In September, Jacky Ndala, a member of the opposition party Together for the Republic, publicly recounted for the first time his experiences during his arbitrary detention at the National Intelligence Agency (ANR) in 2022. He claimed that he was raped and subjected to inhumane detention conditions. A ruling party member stated on social media in September that she had instructed ANR officers to rape him. Authorities launched an investigation into his allegations, which were made in the context of widespread claims by activists about the use of torture and other ill-treatment in detention centres run by the ANR. On 18 December, Jacky Ndala was sentenced to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment for "spreading rumours" in connection with his allegations.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Youth activists remained unlawfully detained and scores of opposition members, journalists and others were arbitrarily arrested for criticizing the government or simply doing their legitimate work.

Opposition leader and businessman Seth Kikuni was arrested on 2 September and held incommunicado for several days before being presented to a public prosecutor. He was transferred to Makala Prison in Kinshasa on 28 September and charged with "inciting civil disobedience and spreading false information".

On 19 March, journalist Stanis Bujakera was released from prison having served a six-month sentence after he was convicted on false charges of "spreading false information". He had been arrested in September 2023.

King Mwamisyo, a member of civil society movement Fight for Change (Lutte pour le Changement), remained in detention after being convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment in June 2023 on a trumped-up charge of "contempt of the army", for criticizing the state of siege.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

In September, at least 129 prisoners were killed during what authorities described as an attempt by some inmates to escape from Makala Prison. According to the interior minister, 24 prisoners were shot dead by security forces while the rest died of suffocation in the overcrowded prison. The prison was built to hold 1,500 prisoners but,

at the time, housed between 14,000 and 15,000. More than 250 women prisoners were raped during the incident, according to the UN.

DEATH PENALTY

The last known execution took place in 2003. However, in March the then minister of justice announced that executions would resume to address "treason" in the army amid increasing armed conflicts, mainly due to the resurgence of M23; and to curb violence in urban areas, including Kinshasa. International and national organizations opposed the decision as a violation of the fundamental right to life and on grounds that the judicial system had demonstrated its limitations in ensuring that regional and international standards for fair trial were applied. Prior to the minister's announcement, the president had described the justice system as "sick". In October, OHCHR expressed concerns over the minister's decision and noted a significant increase in death sentences passed by military courts since March.

In September, a military court passed death sentences against people convicted in relation to the May coup attempt. In October, a military court in Kinshasa sentenced to death a policeman involved in the killing in September of Gires Mukungi Manzanza, a member of the Commitment for Citizenship and Development political party.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Weeks after taking office in June, the justice minister instructed the prosecutor general to initiate legal proceedings against those who advocated for LGBTI people's rights. Earlier, in April, as a member of parliament he claimed to have introduced a bill to criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In April, the ICC's Trust Fund for Victims ended the Katanga Reparation Programme that had benefited victims of an armed attack on 24 February 2003 in Bogoro village, Ituri province. The ICC Trial Chamber II delivered the reparations order in 2017 which was confirmed on appeal in 2018, and reparations were implemented between 2017 and October 2023.

In September, President Tshisekedi named the new director general of the National Reparation Fund for Victims of Sexual Violence (FONAREV). Critics, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, raised concerns about FONAREV's ineffectiveness. The fund was created in 2022 and placed under the office of the First Lady. In June, FONAREV had announced the launch of a process to identify victims of sexual violence linked to conflicts in Beni territory with a view to awarding compensation.

On 14 October, the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC announced it would "renew its investigative efforts" in the DRC. This announcement came in response to the referral made by the government to the ICC in May 2023. In the statement, the ICC prosecutor stressed that the investigation would give "priority focus" to crimes committed in Nord-Kivu province since January 2022, including crimes committed by all actors and not only crimes by particular armed groups.

In November, the Ministry of Justice organized a conference to discuss the future of the judicial system. Authorities were also involved in ongoing discussions about new initiatives to address conflict-related crimes, including the possible establishment of a special court that would look into crimes under international law.

In July, members of the steering committee in charge of the Special Fund for the Distribution of Compensation to Victims of Uganda's Illegal Activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were dismissed and replaced following allegations of embezzlement of funds. Legal proceedings were launched against the former members.

DENMARK

Kingdom of Denmark

Surveillance in social security led to discrimination against marginalized groups. Parliament incorporated into the Penal Code crimes covered by the statute of the ICC. Civil society organizations started legal proceedings to halt arms exports to Israel. The Supreme Court ruled that Denmark must assist in the return of a Danish child and his mother from a prison camp in Syria.

DISCRIMINATION

In November, Amnesty International issued a report about surveillance and discrimination in social security, examining the consequences of the new automated and digital system.[1] The report highlighted potential violations of the right to privacy, equality and non-discrimination, as well as the right to social security. The move towards digitization and the introduction of algorithms created a system of surveillance, leading to direct discrimination against marginalized groups, including those with disabilities, racialized people, migrants and refugees.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In June, a preparatory law committee submitted to the minister of justice recommendations on the incorporation of certain crimes under international law into the Danish Penal Code.

In December, parliament approved a new chapter in the Penal Code that would allow for the prosecution in national courts of crimes of aggression, genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture – crimes covered by the statute of the ICC. Civil society groups welcomed these reforms as an important tool to fight impunity and promote the protection of human rights.

In August, the Supreme Court overturned rulings by the High Court and the District Court that Denmark was not obligated to help with the evacuation of a Danish boy and his mother from al-Roj prison camp in Syria. The Supreme Court stated that sufficient consideration had not been given to the best interests of the child, including his particular vulnerability and specific needs. The boy and his mother were returned to Denmark in October. This was the first time that the Supreme Court had ruled on whether the authorities were obliged to ensure children with Danish nationality detained with their mothers can return to Denmark.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

In March, civil society organizations initiated legal proceedings against the Danish state, seeking an end to arms exports to Israel. They claimed there was a clear risk such exports would be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law against Palestinian civilians in Gaza. The organizations requested that the court assess whether the exports violate the rules on the arms trade to which Denmark has committed itself. The hearings were due to begin in 2025.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In May, the Kosovan parliament approved an agreement with Denmark to rent out 300 prison cells in Kosovo for foreign nationals convicted of crimes in Denmark who were due to be deported at the end of their sentence. This raised concerns for the human rights of people detained under the scheme.

1. *Denmark: Coded Injustice: Surveillance and Discrimination in Denmark's Automated Welfare State*, 12 November ↑

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Dominican Republic

Discrimination was pervasive, including racial profiling. Harassment against human rights defenders continued unabated.

Excessive use of force was reported in raids against migrants and asylum seekers. Women's and girls' rights were severely infringed, including gender-based violence and discrimination.

BACKGROUND

In May, Luis Abinader was re-elected as president.

DISCRIMINATION

Racial discrimination remained widespread and structural, particularly towards Dominicans of Haitian descent and Haitian asylum seekers seeking protection, impacting their rights to access healthcare and education. Racial profiling was common in immigration operations.

The president made no commitment to promote or develop comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, and there were no reforms to strengthen investigations into torture and other ill-treatment, despite evidence that discriminated groups were at heightened risk.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders were threatened and harassed, especially those working on racism, gender or LGBTI issues. Activists and lawyers reported receiving death threats and experiencing harassment on social media.

Anti-rights groups harassed and threatened with impunity, while authorities failed to protect defenders and organizations.

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF NATIONALITY

Eleven years since the Constitutional Court ruling that retroactively deprived thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent of their nationality, the government had still not taken sufficient measures to mitigate and repair the human rights violations caused, despite an order by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.[1]

In September, members of the Reconoci.do movement protested against the racism and institutional barriers faced by thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent and demanded the restoration of their nationality.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Civil society organizations and victims of migration raids reported that violence and excessive use of force were recurrent during raids. There were reports of warrantless raids carried out by non-uniformed agents using violence and stealing belongings, some during the night.[2]

People in need of international protection faced barriers to seeking asylum. The state failed to inform new arrivals about the asylum process and imposed barriers to applying for visas and renewing residence permits. In April, residence permit renewals resumed.

In October, the president announced a plan to deport up to 10,000 Haitians weekly, risking violations of international law.[3] According to the International Organization for Migration, the Dominican Republic deported 193,508 Haitians during the year, despite the crisis and violence in that country.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Abortion remained prohibited. In July, the approval of a new Penal Code that would have maintained the total prohibition of abortion and further jeopardized women's reproductive autonomy and the rights of LGBTI people failed.

Femicide and hate crimes remained unrecognized as specific criminal offences. According to official figures, 94 women were murdered up to September.

Sexual and gender-based violence during immigration operations was reported by media outlets. In April, the media reported the alleged sexual assault of a 14-year-old Haitian girl by a member of the military during an immigration raid. Deportation continued of pregnant people, especially Haitian asylum seekers and Dominicans of Haitian descent. Stigmatization and fear of detention or deportation discouraged them from seeking medical attention, putting their rights to life and health at serious risk.

1. "Over a decade of enduring and resisting statelessness in the Dominican Republic", 23 September ↑
2. "President Luis Abinader's second mandate must prioritize respect for human rights and put an end to racist migration policies", 28 August ↑
3. "Dominican Republic: End racist deportations of Haitians", 8 October ↑

ECUADOR

Republic of Ecuador

Gas flaring and oil drilling in the Amazon continued. Conditions in prisons remained extremely poor. There were reports of possible extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances. Human rights defenders continued to face security risks and the government failed to protect them. Arbitrary arrests were prevalent. Mining went ahead without the consent of Indigenous Peoples. Access to abortion remained severely restricted. Impunity prevailed for human rights violations committed by security forces in 2019 and 2022.

BACKGROUND

In January, President Daniel Noboa declared an "internal armed conflict" and state of emergency in response to actions by organized crime groups. Authorities maintained states of emergency throughout the year, deploying the military to patrol the streets. In April, voters in a national referendum approved further powers for the military in public security tasks.

In May, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights reported on "a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity", predominantly affecting racialized sectors of the population who continued to experience discrimination based on intersecting markers of identity.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government continued to allow gas flaring in the Amazon, despite a 2021 court ruling that flares, which can be harmful to the environment and people's health, must be extinguished.[1]

At the end of the year, the authorities had failed to halt oil drilling in the Amazon's Yasuni National Park, missing the deadline imposed by a 2023 referendum.

Executive Decree 754 remained in force, even though human rights organizations continued to express concern that it was not in line with international standards on the right to participation in environmental decision-making processes.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Prisons remained chronically overcrowded and reports of torture and other ill-treatment increased after the military was given control of prisons in January. Access to food and medical services was inadequate. At least three prison directors were killed during the year.

The UN Committee against Torture called on Ecuador to address the prison crisis and its systemic causes, "prioritizing policies of rehabilitation, re-education and social reintegration, [and] the demilitarization of control of prisons."

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

The Public Prosecutor's Office noted a spike in reports of possible extrajudicial executions, with 27 reported in the first half of 2024, an increase on previous years.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Human rights organizations and residents in coastal regions reported several arbitrary detentions by security forces during their operations, some of which could constitute enforced disappearances, according to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

In December, the Public Prosecutor's Office pressed charges against 16 members of the military for the alleged enforced disappearance of four children in Guayaquil, who were later found dead.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders continued to face hostility and security risks, particularly land, territory and environmental defenders.

Incidents included threats, intimidation, online violence and killings.

Numerous human rights defenders from Las Naves, Bolívar province, faced criminal proceedings in relation to their work on the right to water in the context of mining operations. At least six of these defenders were sentenced to prison.

President Noboa repeatedly stigmatized human rights defenders working for the rights of detainees. The government failed to carry out meetings with civil society to ensure a participative approach in designing its security policy.

In November, at least two human rights defenders were arrested while observing protests against power shortages in the capital, Quito.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Security forces carried out thousands of possible arbitrary arrests, resorting to the pretext of on-the-spot arrests of people caught committing a crime, apparently with little justification. Civil society organizations and media sources suggested that these arrests were disproportionately directed at groups historically subject to discrimination, including Afro-descendants, Indigenous Peoples, people of lower socio-economic status and young people. Authorities failed to maintain fully transparent records of these arrests.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In March, in Cotopaxi province, more than 70 individuals, including Indigenous leaders and human rights defenders, faced criminal investigations following protests against mining activities and a consultation process they deemed illegitimate.

The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty recommended strengthening the anti-discrimination framework by "guaranteeing legal security of tenure concerning Afro-descendants' and Indigenous peoples' traditional land, territories and natural resources and by ensuring free, prior and informed consultation and consent for establishing and managing protected areas."

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Several UN experts highlighted the importance of the Constitutional Court hearing in April relating to grave human rights violations, including forced labour and servitude, suffered by hundreds of agricultural workers in Ecuador's *abaca* plantations over decades. Many of the workers were Afro-descendants. At the end of the year, the Constitutional Court ruled that a foreign company had maintained "a practice of servitude akin to slavery" and ordered the company to pay individual reparations to the victims as well as ordering a public policy to combat servitude.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Despite legal advances in recent years, access to abortion remained severely restricted even in circumstances allowed by law. The lack of information about legal protections, social stigma and denial of lawful services for reasons of conscience, among other barriers, impeded pregnant people from exercising their reproductive rights.

IMPUNITY

Human rights violations committed by security forces during protests in 2019 and 2022 remained unpunished.

1. *Ecuador: The Amazon is Burning, the Future is Burning!*, 12 August ↑

EGYPT

Arab Republic of Egypt

The authorities continued to crack down on criticism, stifle civil society and restrict street protests. Authorities carried out mass arrests to prevent planned anti-government protests and forcibly dispersed the few small peaceful protests that took place. Authorities released 934 prisoners held for political reasons but arrested another 1,594. Those targeted included journalists,

lawyers, protesters, dissidents, opposition politicians and those critical of the government's human rights record and handling of the economic crisis. Dozens of individuals were subjected to enforced disappearance. Torture and other ill-treatment remained routine. Death sentences were imposed, including for crimes other than "intentional killing", after grossly unfair trials. Executions were carried out. Impunity prevailed for grave human rights violations committed in 2024 and previous years. Women and girls, religious minorities and LGBTI individuals experienced discrimination, violence and prosecution for exercising their human rights. Authorities failed to protect economic and social rights in the economic crisis, adequately adjust social security measures or ensure private companies complied with the minimum wage requirement. The government introduced new legislation jeopardizing the accessibility and affordability of healthcare. Forced evictions from informal settlements continued. Thousands of refugees and asylum seekers, most from Sudan, were arbitrarily detained and expelled.

BACKGROUND

In April, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was sworn in as president for a third term after winning elections from which genuine opponents were barred.

The National Dialogue between the government and the opposition resumed in February after being suspended in September 2023, with critics lamenting the lack of tangible results and failure to implement any of the recommended political and human rights reforms.

Amid Egypt's deepening economic and financial crisis, the International Monetary Fund, the EU, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) pledged around USD 57 billion in investment, loans and financial assistance. In March the EU announced a EUR 7.4 billion (USD 8 billion) funding package to Egypt, without human rights benchmarks. In September the USA delivered USD 1.3 billion in aid, waiving human rights requirements. The cost-of-living crisis persisted with annual inflation measuring 24.9% in September.

The Rafah border crossing with Gaza remained closed since May after Israeli forces took control of the Palestinian side of the border and an Egyptian soldier was killed in a cross-border shooting.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Authorities continued to criminalize dissenting forms of expression and peaceful assembly, targeting journalists, lawyers, protesters, dissidents, opposition politicians and those critical of the government's human rights record and handling of the economic crisis.

Between January and March, security forces arbitrarily arrested at least four individuals who complained about price increases in comments on social media.[1]

On 31 July, authorities arbitrarily arrested opposition politician Yehia Hussein Abdelhady after he published a Facebook post criticizing the president and the army and calling for regime change.[2] He remained arbitrarily detained at the end of the year over trumped-up charges of terrorism and publishing "false news".

Women's rights defender and journalist Rasha Azab, a vocal critic of the Egyptian government's response to Israel's offensive on Gaza, was subjected to repeated threats and harassment after hostilities erupted on 7 October 2023. This included being followed on several occasions by a group of three unidentified men and receiving warnings via intermediaries that security agencies would arrest her.

At least 14 media workers remained imprisoned in relation to their work, including for publishing content criticizing the government. Among them were Ashraf Omar, arrested in July after he published a cartoon criticizing the government's plan to sell state assets, and Khaled Mamdouh, a journalist at the news website Arabic Post. Both remained arbitrarily detained on trumped-up charges of terrorism and spreading "false news".

At least 562 human rights, news and other websites remained blocked by the authorities, according to the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, an independent rights group.

Authorities carried out arrests prior to planned anti-government protests to prevent them from materializing and forcibly dispersed the few small peaceful protests that took place. In March, security forces forcibly dispersed a small demonstration in Alexandria and arbitrarily arrested protesters who raised signs blaming President al-Sisi for "starving" the poor.

In July the authorities arbitrarily arrested dozens of men, at least seven women and one child in connection with online calls for protests and for the ousting of President al-Sisi's government due to price increases. Dozens remained in detention for expressing solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza by peacefully protesting, posting comments online, hanging signs or writing slogans on walls.

On 20 March, after 13 years of investigations, authorities announced the closure of Case 173/2011, widely known as the "foreign funding" case, which had involved asset freezes and travel bans for NGO staff. However, a travel ban against human rights lawyer Hoda Abdelwahab remained in place.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Between January and October the authorities released at least 934 people detained for political reasons, mostly after they exceeded the two-year maximum limit for pretrial detention. During the same period, authorities arrested 1,594 people, including five children, on political grounds, according to the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, an independent NGO. Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) prosecutors and judges routinely renewed pretrial detention orders for thousands of detainees without allowing them to meaningfully challenge the legality of their detention.

In February a court sentenced the politician Ahmed Al Tantawy, his campaign director and 21 of his supporters to one year's imprisonment in relation to his unsuccessful bid to run in the 2023 presidential election. In May the verdict was upheld on appeal and in December it was confirmed by the Court of Cassation.

On 26 June the Emergency State Security Criminal Court sentenced protester Mahmoud Hussein to three years in prison for wearing an anti-torture T-shirt.[3] He was released in October having already spent two years and 10 months in pretrial detention.

In August, parliamentary discussions started on a draft Code of Criminal Procedures that would provide no safeguards against the misuse of prolonged pretrial detention and would enable severe violations of the right to a fair trial, including adequate defence.[4]

In September, prominent activist Alaa Abdel Fattah completed his unjust five-year prison sentence but the authorities failed to release him.[5]

In December a military court sentenced 62 residents of North Sinai governorate to prison terms ranging from three to 10 years on charges of damaging military vehicles and using force against public servants. The trial followed a sit-in in October 2023 by residents of Sheikh Zuwayed city, which was dispersed forcibly by the military. The residents were demanding to return to their homes, from which authorities had forcibly evicted them. On 24 December, President El-Sisi issued a presidential pardon for 54 of them.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Security forces, including the National Security Agency (NSA), subjected dozens of individuals held for political reasons to enforced disappearance for periods ranging from a few days to several weeks.

Torture and other ill-treatment remained routine in prisons, police stations and NSA-run facilities. In February, NSA officials beat a man and gave him electric shocks while subjecting him to enforced disappearance for

eight days after he was arrested for publishing videos criticizing the government.

Prisoners continued to be held in conditions violating the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, including through deliberate denial of healthcare and prolonged solitary confinement. In Badr 1 prison and 10th of Ramadan prison, dozens of prisoners began a hunger strike in early June to protest their cruel and inhuman detention conditions, lack of access to adequate healthcare, reduction in the time allowed for exercising outside their cell, and restrictions on family visits. The prison authorities forced many to end the strike by transferring striking prisoners to other facilities and placed others in solitary confinement.

DEATH PENALTY

Criminal courts, including those handling terrorism-related cases, imposed death sentences following unfair trials. Offences punishable by death included crimes that did not amount to "intentional killing", such as drug trafficking and rape, in violation of international law and standards. Executions were carried out.

IMPUNITY

Impunity prevailed for unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearance and other grave human rights violations committed in 2024 and previous years, including the unlawful killings of at least 900 people when sit-ins by supporters of the ousted president, Mohamed Morsi, were violently dispersed on 14 August 2013.

Authorities failed to investigate adequately the causes and circumstances of at least 43 deaths in custody following reports of physical torture and other ill-treatment or denial of healthcare. No investigations were opened into the death of Ibrahim al-Ajeery on 1 January at Badr 3 prison after years of medical negligence, including denying him adequate diabetes medication.

Prosecutors, particularly SSSP prosecutors, dismissed or ignored most complaints of police torture. In a rare case known to Amnesty International, a regular prosecutor opened an investigation into a complaint made by a protester who said that a police officer beat her, but no information was made available on the progress of the investigation by the end of the year.

On 23 May a group of women who were arrested at a pro-Palestine protest reported that they had filed a complaint with the public prosecutor that some of them had been subjected to sexual assault during body searches and harassment during detention. The public prosecutor referred the complaint to the SSSP, which failed to investigate.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Economic and social rights, including the rights to an adequate standard of living and to health, were severely undermined by the economic crisis. The government failed to meet the constitutionally mandated allocation of at least 3% of GDP to health and 6% of GDP to education.

Repeated rises in fuel prices affected the price of food and essential services. In June the authorities quadrupled the subsidized price of bread. The government failed to adequately mitigate the effects of inflation on people living in poverty, with spending on social protection representing only 0.2% of GDP.

In September the government announced the end of daily power cuts in place since July 2023.

In June, President al-Sisi ratified a new law privatizing healthcare, jeopardizing the accessibility and availability of health services, particularly for those lacking health insurance and/or living in poverty.[6]

WORKERS' RIGHTS

In February, President al-Sisi raised the minimum monthly wage for public sector workers from EGP 4,000 (around USD 82.50) to EGP 6,000 (around USD 125). In April, the government also raised the minimum wage for private sector workers to EGP 6,000 but took no measures against companies paying below the minimum wage.

In February, NSA agents arrested two workers from Ghazl al-Mahalla, a public sector company, after questioning dozens of

workers for striking to demand the minimum wage. They were provisionally released in May pending investigations by the SSSP into charges of "joining a terrorist group" and publishing "false news".

On 17 August, workers at another public sector company, Samanoud Weaving and Textile, organized a strike demanding the minimum wage. On 25 August, authorities arrested five men and four women and investigated them over charges including "inciting the intentional obstruction of a means of production". They were released within two weeks, according to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), an independent NGO.

In September, to address the ongoing teacher shortage, the Ministry of Education announced it would hire 50,000 teachers on limited hourly contracts under which their monthly earnings would fall significantly below the minimum wage.

In April the State Council, Egypt's administrative court, began reviewing appeals submitted by the EIPR on behalf of teachers who were excluded from appointments in public schools on discriminatory grounds such as being pregnant or "overweight".

RIGHT TO HOUSING

In February, without prior consultations with residents or offers of compensation, authorities began to carry out forced evictions and house demolitions in El-Gameel neighbourhood, Port Said, which was home to around 2,500 households. The government justified the demolitions by citing plans to develop the region. One man died during the demolitions, but the authorities failed to carry out an impartial and independent investigation into the causes and circumstances of his death.

In July the government announced a partnership between Emirati and local investors to develop a real estate project on Warraq Nile Island. On 26 September, police fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse a protest organized by residents in response to reports of police abuse. At least seven residents were injured according to Mada Masr, an independent media outlet. In October, residents of the island publicly demanded adequate compensation. Security forces cordoned off the island, preventing residents from bringing in construction materials to build new homes or extend existing homes. Authorities had kept the island's only health facility closed since 2021, restricting residents' access to healthcare.

In February the UAE and Egypt signed a USD 35 billion agreement to develop the approximately 16,430 hectares of Ras al-Hekma, a village located on Egypt's Mediterranean coast. Residents ignored government orders to vacate their houses as they considered the compensation offered by the government to be inadequate. Authorities imposed a media blackout on the issue. On 10 March, authorities arrested Mada Masr journalist Rana Mamdouh while she was travelling to report on the situation in Ras al-Hekma. She was released on bail later that day after the SSSP questioned her about complaints that she had incited residents to terrorism. In April, videos circulated on social media showing skirmishes between residents and members of the security forces who had attempted to enter houses to take inventories of residents' belongings. On 16 December, prime minister Moustafa Madbouly announced that the government had paid EGP 5.5 billion (around USD 108,154 million) to residents who were required to vacate their homes. He did not specify whether this amount covered all those affected.

DISCRIMINATION

Women

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice, including in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and political office. Long-promised amendments to the Personal Status Law stalled amid concerns over lack of meaningful consultation with women human rights defenders.

In October the General Authority for Passports, Immigration and Nationality issued discriminatory directives requiring women from "lower classes" to obtain permission from the authority if they wished

to travel to Saudi Arabia. According to the EIPR, communications sent by the Ministry of the Interior to travel agencies specified that women from "lower classes" included housewives, unemployed women and those in low-skilled jobs.

At least four women were arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted on vague morality charges in relation to publishing content on TikTok.

LGBTI people

The authorities continued to harass and prosecute individuals for their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In its second NDC, issued in June 2023, Egypt pledged to reduce carbon emissions by ensuring that 42% of its electricity would come from renewable energy sources by 2030. However, the government continued to issue new gas exploration licences, potentially jeopardizing its decarbonization efforts.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

The right to build or repair churches remained restricted by a 2016 law requiring approval from security agencies and other state bodies. In October a government spokesperson said that the government had approved the legalization of 3,453 churches out of the 5,540 requests that had been submitted since the law was enacted.

In April, security forces failed to protect Coptic Christian residents in two villages in al-Minya governorate from sectarian attacks. The attacks followed reports of the establishment of Christian places of worship in the two villages, and involved Muslim residents marching, chanting anti-Christian slogans and damaging the homes of Coptic Christians.

In July a military court sentenced a Coptic Christian conscript to three years in prison for electronic messages he sent to a Muslim man which were deemed to be "offensive to Islam", according to the EIPR.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Egyptian security forces, including EU-funded border guards, carried out mass arrests of thousands of Sudanese refugees for irregularly entering or staying in Egypt. The security forces kept the refugees in squalid detention conditions before forcibly returning them to Sudan without allowing them to access asylum procedures (see Sudan entry). Authorities also continued to arrest asylum seekers and refugees from other countries, including Eritrea, over their migration status.

In September the government extended by one year the deadline requiring all foreign nationals to regularize their status through an Egyptian sponsor and the payment of USD 1,000.

On 16 December, President al-Sisi ratified Egypt's first asylum law, which failed to prohibit refoulement, lacked due process safeguards and allowed for the arbitrary detention of refugees and asylum seekers.

1. "Egypt: Halt crackdown on people voicing concerns over economic crisis", 13 May ↑
2. "Egypt: Politician detained over social media posts: Yehia Hussein Abdelhady", 9 August ↑
3. "Egypt: Three-year prison sentence for anti-torture protester a 'travesty of justice'", 27 June ↑
4. "Egypt: Reject draft Criminal Procedure Code", 2 October ↑
5. "Egypt: Ensure Alaa Abdel Fattah is not detained after completing length of unjust prison term", 26 September ↑
6. "Egypt: New law threatens to reduce access to healthcare for millions", 30 July ↑

EL SALVADOR

Republic of El Salvador

Poverty increased and the government cut spending on health and education. Arbitrary detentions and human rights violations continued to arise due to the state of emergency. There were serious failings in the judicial system. Prison overcrowding persisted, with incarceration rates among the highest globally. Detention conditions

were inhumane, with reports of torture and other ill-treatment, and the government failed to act to address the situation. Freedom of expression and the public's right to information were eroded, and journalists were at risk of harassment and violence. Security forces restricted the freedom of movement of protesters challenging budget cuts, and public sector workers were dismissed for participating. Human rights defenders were at increased risk of attacks and harassment under the state of emergency.

BACKGROUND

The state of emergency that began in March 2022 was ongoing. Regional and international human rights mechanisms continued to raise concerns over human rights violations committed during the state of emergency, as documented by various local and international organizations.[1]

In February, Nayib Bukele was re-elected as president following a controversial interpretation of the constitution by the Supreme Court that allowed him to stand again despite a prohibition on immediate re-election.

Recent constitutional reforms raised concerns over the restriction of public participation in the reform process, narrowing the space for debate and discussion on matters of public interest. The concentration of power within the ruling party and the absence of institutional checks and balances allowed these reforms to pass without civil society consultation, exacerbating the human rights crisis and further weakening the rule of law.[2]

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The Legislative Assembly approved the government's 2025 budget proposal that prioritized spending on security and defence, while key sectors such as health and education faced significant cuts, impacting the population's access to these rights, in turn deepening social inequalities. According to a 2024 World Bank report, extreme poverty rose between 2019 and 2023. In 2023, more than 1.9 million people were living in poverty – 55,097 more than in 2022 – with a poverty rate of 30.3%, compared with 26.8% in 2019.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Since the state of emergency began in 2022 up to the end of 2024, according to the authorities there had been 83,900 detentions. Most detainees had been charged with "illicit associations" and other gang-related crimes. According to local human rights organizations, one third of people detained under the state of emergency had no gang affiliations or criminal records of any kind, reflecting the indiscriminate application of these measures across the population.

A special report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights confirmed that the state of emergency had led to mass arbitrary detentions and systematic human rights violations, including the lack of effective judicial oversight of these detentions and the imposition of preventive detention without sufficient evidence. The commission also expressed concern over mass judicial hearings and restrictions on the right to defence, which severely undermined due process and fundamental judicial guarantees.

Civil society organizations continued to denounce the inefficacy of the judicial system, particularly the Supreme Court's failure to process habeas corpus petitions, increasing detainees' vulnerability. A recent study from the Due Process of Law Foundation, published in May, found that between March 2022 and March 2023 the Constitutional Chamber admitted only 1.6% of habeas corpus petitions filed in the context of the state of emergency, with favourable rulings in just 0.4% of cases. According to the findings of this study, excessive delays and unnecessary formalities in processing these petitions effectively amounted to a denial of justice, further entrenching detainees' defencelessness.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

The prison system continued to be critically overcrowded, with an occupancy rate of

350%, according to local NGOs, making it one of the highest incarceration rates globally. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, detention conditions were inhumane, with reports of torture and other ill-treatment, lack of access to medical services, and excessive use of force by prison guards.

Detained women continued to be denied specific care to meet their needs, including reproductive health services and protection against gender-based violence by prison guards.

According to reports from Salvadoran organizations, more than 300 deaths in state custody were recorded between March 2022, when the state of emergency was declared, and 15 December 2024. These deaths were attributed to torture and other ill-treatment as well as inadequate medical care.

Human rights organizations denounced the state's failure to effectively address these conditions, calling for an urgent review of sanitary conditions in prisons and immediate measures to ensure access to medical care. Despite repeated requests for intervention, the government's response was inadequate, with reports of deaths in custody continuing throughout the year. Local human rights victims' movements voiced grave concerns, prompting heightened scrutiny from international and regional human rights mechanisms over the inhumane treatment of detainees.

The lack of state transparency in investigations and reporting on alleged ill-treatment and medical neglect in specific cases was flagged by UN human rights mechanisms; these requested further information from the Salvadoran government regarding these abuses and the dire detention conditions.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

The prolonged state of emergency continued to erode freedom of expression. Attacks on journalists and media outlets increased by 66% in 2024 compared with 2023, according to the Salvadoran Journalists' Association (APES).

Journalists were frequently subjected to social media attacks and digital monitoring. Female journalists were particularly at risk, facing not only harassment but also digital violence and sexual harassment, according to APES.

The Inter-American Press Association and the Committee to Protect Journalists raised alarms over the escalating repression against the independent press. On 20 November 2022, digital media outlet El Faro filed a lawsuit in a US federal court against NSO Group, the Israeli company behind the Pegasus spyware, alleging surveillance of more than 20 of its journalists. In July, technology companies including Google, Microsoft and LinkedIn supported El Faro's appeal by submitting briefs in favour of the case.

In the context of the electoral process, the OAS electoral observation mission reported inequalities and challenges. These were the result of a series of legal reforms and restrictions on fundamental freedoms imposed by the state of emergency, which created an atmosphere of self-censorship that hindered open political participation.[3]

The authorities severely restricted the public's access to accurate and timely information, also hindering access to public information held by the state.

In October, media sources reported that security forces had imposed restrictions on the free movement of demonstrators, limiting their rights to peaceful assembly and expression during protests by the public education and healthcare sectors against the proposed budget cuts in 2025. Local organizations documented multiple dismissals of public sector employees, primarily those who had actively organized and participated in the protests. At least 66 dismissals of people who had protested were reported across the education and healthcare sectors. Labour unions denounced these actions as reprisals for participation in protests. By the end of the year, local media had reported more than 3,000 dismissals in the public sector, many of whom were believed to have been involved in the protests. The government presented these

dismissals as part of a general budget-cutting policy affecting various government institutions.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The situation for human rights defenders worsened significantly under the prolonged state of emergency. A collective of local human rights organizations reported a 24.2% increase in attacks on human rights defenders in 2023 compared with 2022. These attacks, mostly perpetrated by state agents, targeted women defenders, journalists, and organizations advocating for freedom of expression, women's rights and environmental protection. LGBTI and Indigenous rights defenders were also subjected to violations.

Harassment against human rights defenders included police surveillance, threats and arbitrary detentions. Human rights organizations reported the use of undercover agents and defamatory social media campaigns against people defending victims of human rights violations committed during the state of emergency.

The government continued its attempts to silence critical voices by criminalizing and repressing human rights defenders, especially those seeking justice for arbitrarily detained individuals, environmental defenders, and those advocating for land and territory rights.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Abortion remained prohibited under all circumstances. In January, the last woman convicted of aggravated homicide after an obstetric emergency and part of the global campaign *"Las 17 y más"* was released after serving eight years of a 30-year prison sentence. According to the Citizens' Group for the Decriminalization of Abortion, seven women were facing legal proceedings relating to obstetric emergencies, although they had not been incarcerated, at the end of the year.

On 20 December, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights condemned the Salvadoran state in the case of *Beatriz and others*. Beatriz was a young Salvadoran mother who experienced a pregnancy that gravely endangered her health and whose fetus was incompatible with life. Against her explicit will, the Salvadoran authorities denied her timely access to terminate her pregnancy in 2013.[4]

1. "El Salvador: The institutionalization of human rights violations after two years of emergency rule", 27 March ↑
2. "El Salvador: Constitution 'à la carte' could deepen human rights crisis in coming years", 3 May ↑
3. "El Salvador: Human rights crisis could deepen during Bukele's second term", 6 February ↑
4. "El Salvador: IACtHR advances reproductive justice with ruling in favor of Beatriz and her family", 23 December ↑

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Republic of Equatorial Guinea

A cybercrime bill raised new concerns over the right to freedom of expression. Arbitrary arrests and detentions of human rights defenders continued. The residents of Annobón island were persecuted for protesting about damage to their lands allegedly caused by mining operations. The Spanish High Court ordered that an arrest warrant be issued for the president's son over abduction and torture charges. Plans to increase mass surveillance of citizens intensified.

BACKGROUND

In July, Prime Minister Manuela Roka Botey and her government resigned at the request of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who cited the government's failure to resolve the economic crisis. In June, representatives of the International Monetary Fund visited to support the implementation of key policies for improving living conditions.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In March, parliament began debating a cybercrime bill that would introduce new restrictions on the use of social media, raising concerns that these could threaten people's

right to express views opposing official positions.

On 10 July the Bar Association confirmed the suspension of human rights lawyer Gemma Jones for two years for alleged serious infringements of the institution's statutes. She had been under initial suspension since December 2023, after posting a video on TikTok calling for an independent judiciary.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

On 26 January, human rights activist Anacleto Micha Ndong was arrested by four men at his home in the capital, Malabo.[1] He was later accused of slander by a police officer who, he alleged, had tortured him during a previous detention in the city's Black Beach prison in 2023. He was then detained without charge for over a month in the gendarmerie in Malabo. On 1 March, he was sent to Black Beach, before being transferred in April to Oveng Ansem prison, Mongomo.

In March, during its 99th session, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted an Opinion calling for the immediate release of two South African citizens, Peter Shane Huxham and Frederik Johannes Potgieter. It found that the two men had been arbitrarily detained on drug trafficking charges since February 2023.

On 5 July, former justice minister Rubén Maye Nsue Mangue, who had been arbitrarily arrested in August 2022 after criticizing the president on social media, was granted a presidential pardon and released.

On 1 August, human rights defender Joaquín Elo Ayeto was arrested in his house in Malabo,[2] accused of carrying out illegal activities through the civil society platform Somos+, which the authorities claimed was not legally registered. In June 2020, he had applied to the Ministry of Interior and Local Corporations for legal registration of the platform. He was notified that the application should be validated by the General Directorate of Human Rights, although such validation was not required by the law. He was sent to Black Beach prison on 9 August then transferred on 13 August to Oveng Ansem prison where he remained in detention.

Joaquín Elo Ayeto's lawyer, Angel Obama Obiang Eseng, was detained for more than 48 hours when he went to the police station in Malabo to assist his client. On 14 August, he was suspended by the Bar Association for representing an illegal organization. On 24 December the Bar Association issued a resolution revoking the suspension.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In July, residents of Annobón, an island of Equatorial Guinea situated some 500km from the mainland, protested against damage to their houses, farmlands and island ecosystem, allegedly due to constant dynamite explosions linked to mining operations. Following the protests, more than 30 people from Annobón were arrested and detained. Mobile phone and internet services were shut down for several weeks.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

On 22 February, the Criminal Chamber of Spain's National High Court ordered that arrest warrants be issued against Carmelo Ovono Obiang, son of the Equatorial Guinean president, and two other high-ranking government officials. This related to the alleged abduction, torture and enforced disappearance in 2019 of four opposition activists legally resident in Spain, including two Spanish citizens. One activist, Julio Obama Mefuman, a dual Spanish and Equatorial Guinean citizen, died in custody in 2023, having accused authorities of torturing him multiple times.

MASS SURVEILLANCE

Vice-president Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue pressed ahead with plans to strengthen surveillance systems in the country, citing the ongoing need to fight criminality. The plans, announced in May, included installing and monitoring some 6,500 cameras with the capacity for live monitoring and facial recognition, linked to command centres nationwide. There were concerns that the additional surveillance could be used to repress dissenting voices.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

In May, the government adopted the Djibloho Declaration, which outlined concrete actions to address gender disparities and promote women's empowerment, reaffirming Equatorial Guinea's commitment to international instruments protecting women's rights.

In June, a report of the National Institute of Statistics analysing women's participation in decision-making processes in state institutions concluded that, in 2023, women occupied just 29.5% of decision-making positions.

1. "Equatorial Guinea: Human rights defender's whereabouts unknown", 29 May ↑
2. "Equatorial Guinea: Human rights defender arrested once again", 29 August ↑

ERITREA

State of Eritrea

The use of mandatory indefinite military service, sometimes amounting to forced labour and slavery, persisted. Returning refugees faced human rights abuses. The right to education was violated. The right to freedom of expression was stifled and the fate of government critics forcibly disappeared in 2001 remained unknown. The government continued in its failure to implement the UN Commission of Inquiry's recommendations to investigate crimes under international law; and denied access to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea.

FORCED LABOUR

The decades-long use of mandatory indefinite military service for those aged between 18 and 40 continued, as well as the forced labour and other gross human rights violations associated with it. The policy requires conscripts to complete their final secondary school year at the notorious Sawa military training camp, where forced labour, sometimes amounting to slavery, was documented (see below *right to education*).

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Eritrean refugees faced human rights abuses in countries to which they fled for safety. The government regarded claiming asylum abroad as evidence of treason, and anyone forcibly returned to Eritrea could be detained. According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, returnees also faced torture and sometimes death. In May, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea (Special Rapporteur on Eritrea) said that the authorities "reached across borders… to control Eritrean diaspora politics and silence pro-democracy activists, journalists, political opponents and human rights defenders." Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia were rounded-up, detained and summarily expelled to Eritrea. Women and girls in particular suffered violations by the Rapid Support Forces and others in Sudan, including sexual violence and domestic servitude. In August, Türkiye forcibly returned around 180 Eritreans to Eritrea, in contravention of their legal rights to protection.[1]

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Eritrea had a debt-to-GDP ratio of 211%, one of the highest globally. In 2022, it spent 33.4% of the national budget on debt servicing. This high expenditure on debt servicing threatened the financing of education and other public services. Low spending on education, according to most recent reports, appeared to have stagnated at under 2% since 2020, below the average spending levels in Africa of 3% to 4% of GDP. This was compounded by factors including corruption and a lack of financial transparency.

According to the UN, 48% of primary school-age children were out of school, while only 4% of males and 3% of females of university age were enrolled in tertiary education. There was a shortage of properly trained teachers. Meanwhile, the forced conscription policy that could compel teachers into military service undermined

educational standards and increased the already high student-to-teacher ratio. Many young people were forced out of education into military service or exile. There were also reports of the conscription of children, effectively denying them their right to education.

According to UNESCO, the high rate of early and child marriage was a key reason for many students' failure to complete their schooling.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Eritrea continued to be one of the few countries without any form of registered, privately owned media. The free press was dismantled in 2001, when the government arrested 15 politicians known as the G-15 - along with 16 supporting journalists, after they demanded that President Afwerki implement the draft constitution and hold open elections. The fate and whereabouts of 11 of the politicians, as well as the 16 journalists accused of links to the G-15, remained unknown.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The government continued in its failure to implement recommendations of the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Eritrea, established in 2014 by the UN Human Rights Council. The COI concluded in 2016 that crimes under international law had been committed in Eritrea since 1991, including crimes against humanity and other inhumane acts. In July the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea reiterated that most recommendations made by international and regional human rights mechanisms, including the COI, remained unimplemented. Meanwhile, the authorities continued to deny him access to Eritrea. Also in July, Amnesty International urged the Human Rights Council to intensify its efforts to assess the human rights situation in Eritrea and to reflect on ways to collect and preserve evidence for future criminal judicial proceedings.[2]

1. "Türkiye: Eritreans at imminent risk of forced return", 6 September ↑
2. "Eritrea: At the 56th session of the UN Human Rights Councils states should extend the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea and step-up efforts towards accountability in the country", 19 June ↑

ESWATINI

Kingdom of Eswatini

The government failed to investigate extrajudicial killings, including of the human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko. Journalists and other government critics continued to face widespread political repression, including arbitrary arrests and detentions. Detainees were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. The economic crisis deepened, creating conditions that exacerbated inequality. Gender-based violence was widespread and the rights of LGBTI people were severely undermined.

BACKGROUND

Social unrest increased and there were ongoing demands for democratic reforms under the absolute monarchy of King Mswati III. The government acknowledged the high levels of poverty and unemployment as a national emergency. Unemployment reached 35.4% overall and 48.7% among young people.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

The government failed to conduct transparent, independent and impartial investigations into extrajudicial killings carried out between 2021 and 2024. The lack of a transparent judicial process and the government's failure to heed calls for accountability effectively denied the rights of victims of government violence, or their family members, to justice, compensation and reparations. Such cases included that of Thulani Maseko, who was killed by

unidentified gunmen in his home in 2023, amid an escalation in attacks on state critics.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities used the 2008 Suppression of Terrorism Act (STA) to target activists, journalists and pro-democracy advocates. Its vaguely worded provisions allowed the government to justify arbitrary arrests and detentions of its critics.

Journalists increasingly faced harassment and intimidation, particularly when covering human rights abuses and government corruption. Intimidation could extend to legal threats, as in the case of Swazi journalist Zweli Martin Dlamini, editor of the Swaziland News newspaper, who had been living in exile in South Africa for several years. In February the government filed a case against him and Swaziland News to the Mpumalanga High Court in South Africa for articles which it claimed defamed King Mswati III and various government ministers and public officials, and proved a threat to national security.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

On 15 July, MPs Mduduzi Bacede Mabuza and Mthandeni Dube were sentenced to 25 and 18 years in prison respectively under the STA for their involvement in protests in 2021 calling for political reform. Their cases became symbolic of the government's crackdown on political dissent.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Detainees, especially those imprisoned for expressing political opinions, were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in custody. Following Mduduzi Bacede Mabuza's sentencing (see above), prison guards at the Matsapha Correctional Complex denied him food, including food brought to him from outside the prison that he required as part of his dietary requirements for hypertension, for at least four days.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Right to food

About 22% of the population (almost 270,000 people) were projected to face crisis-level food insecurity by March 2025 according to the Integrated Food Classification Index. This was driven by the soaring prices of food and other essential commodities resulting from inflation and disruption to imports. Rural and low-income urban households were particularly vulnerable to food insecurity.

Right to health

The government's austerity measures further reduced public healthcare spending, leading to a maternal healthcare crisis in rural areas. Women struggled to access basic services. The Health Labour Market Analysis Report projected that, without urgent government intervention, there would be a shortage of 26,563 health workers by 2032, which would further threaten essential services.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

High rates of gender-based violence persisted, with the government failing to protect women and girls from, or enforce laws against, such abuses, leaving perpetrators largely unpunished. A national NGO, Swatini Action Group Against Abuse, said in April that rape continued to be a major problem. The number of women and girls affected remained unknown because most survivors did not report abuse or withdrew their testimonies following coercion to do so, among other factors.

Discriminatory and weak legal protections for rural women, including those relating to land inheritance, exacerbated the economic marginalization of rural women in particular and left them with limited access to land, healthcare and education.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The government continued to deny the Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities its right to register as a non-profit organization, despite a 2023 Supreme Court decision ordering the minister of commerce, industry and trade to reconsider the application.

ETHIOPIA

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Authorities suppressed the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including by intimidating human rights defenders and others, and blocking internet access in Amhara region. Activists, human rights defenders, journalists and artists were arbitrarily arrested and detained and some people fled the country during the imposition of state of emergency laws that were used to target peaceful dissenters. Reports of crimes under international law, including war crimes, were documented in the armed conflict in Amhara region; the Ethiopian National Defence Force carried out unlawful killings, including extrajudicial executions. The prime minister and his government continued to deny such acts and no significant steps towards justice were taken. There was an increase in cases of sexual violence against women and girls; incidents of conflict-related sexual violence continued.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

Activists, human rights defenders, journalists and artists reported increased harassment and intimidation by the authorities. A nationwide state of emergency, declared in August 2023 during the outbreak of armed conflict in Amhara region between Fano militias and members of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), was renewed for four months in February. It expired on 2 June. It granted sweeping powers to the security forces and was used by authorities to crack down on dissent and suppress the media.

During this period, people involved in peaceful dissent nationwide were arbitrarily arrested, often without due process (see below, Arbitrary arrests and detentions). This forced scores of human rights defenders and journalists to flee the country. In November and December, authorities arbitrarily suspended five prominent human rights organizations. The Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy, Lawyers for Human Rights and Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia's (AHRE) were suspended in November, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center the following month. In December, the AHRE suspension was lifted. Suspensions of this kind demonstrate further crackdown of the civic space amid ongoing armed conflicts in the country.

Human rights defenders who travelled abroad to engage with international human rights bodies said they were harassed and intimidated by the authorities on their return. Some also reported that Ethiopian government officials, including diplomats, intimidated and harassed them in the countries to which they had travelled.

The authorities blocked internet access in Amhara region, lifting the restrictions in July almost one year after they were imposed. Telephone communication was also frequently restricted.

In August the police banned women's rights defenders from carrying out a candlelit vigil in the capital, Addis Ababa, in honour of Heaven Awot, a victim of sexual violence (see below, Gender-based violence).

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Authorities arrested hundreds of people nationwide under the state of emergency which had granted them excessive powers of arrest. They flouted constitutional provisions, including the requirement to publicize, via the State of Emergency Inquiry Board (an oversight committee), the names of anyone arrested and the reasons for their arrest within one month. People were repeatedly arrested without warrants and detainees were denied their rights, including legal counsel and access to courts.

In September, Belay Manay, chief editor of the online publication Ethio News, fled the country three months after being released from the notorious Awash Arba military camp where he was held in harsh conditions. Arrested in November 2023, he was never brought before a court, nor given access to

healthcare or legal representation, and was frequently denied family visits in detention.

In Amhara region, the federal army and security forces launched a new mass arrest campaign on 28 September. Within four days, thousands of civilians, including academics, were rounded up without search and arrest warrants. Authorities largely failed to bring those detained before a court within the 48-hour period required by Ethiopian law.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

There were continued reports of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the ongoing armed conflict in Amhara region. The extent of such violations, which included crimes under international law, was likely to be far greater than indicated by the numbers that were publicly documented during the year. The prolonged restrictions on the internet and telephone communications, coupled with the government's denial of access to the country for human rights organizations, limited the ability to report on crimes and other violations. In addition, the threat of reprisals for speaking out was likely to deter civilians from sharing their testimonies, or human rights defenders and journalists from reporting on the issues.

Unlawful killings, including extrajudicial executions, of civilians were documented in the region. Witnesses said that, following armed clashes between the ENDF and FANO militias in Merawi town on 29 January, ENDF officers rounded up civilian men from their homes, shops and the streets, and shot and killed scores. Residents said the killings began after Fano fighters withdrew from Merawi. Eyewitnesses described finding the bodies of their loved ones on the street the following day. Three people said that ENDF soldiers burned 11 three-wheel vehicles, known as *Bajajs*, and a motorbike.

The State of Emergency Inquiry Board announced in February its intention to investigate the killings but, despite continued alarming reports of human rights violations, had communicated no further public updates by the end of the year. Neither did the authorities announce investigations into the army's actions, which included potential war crimes.

IMPUNITY

The authorities made no significant efforts to investigate and hold accountable perpetrators of crimes under international law, denying victims their rights to truth and justice. They continued to dismiss crimes documented by human rights bodies, including the killings in Merawi (see above). Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said in a televised speech to parliament that the army does not "commit massacres". His speech coincided with the federal government's implementation of the transitional justice process, which focuses on reconciliation rather than justice and accountability. Nearly two years after discussions on the process began, the government's claims that it would deliver justice and accountability remained unrealized. It was largely a paper exercise, marked by significant shortcomings including the lack of inclusive pre-policy consultation processes, non-compliance with key international accountability guidelines, and disregard for input from a limited number of consulted victims and survivors on the draft policy options on crucial accountability measures.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

There was a surge in reports of sexual violence against women and girls. The rape and murder of seven-year-old Heaven Awot, whose body was also mutilated by her attacker, in the city of Bahir Dar, Amhara region, sparked national outrage and became emblematic of the prevalence of sexual violence against women and girls nationwide.

In Tigray region, high levels of sexual violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, were documented, leading to protests across the region.

A June report by the Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy revealed that women and girls in the Guji zone of Oromia region were subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by government forces and members of the Oromo Liberation Army.

FIJI

Republic of Fiji

The government supported a proposal to introduce the crime of "ecocide" in the Rome Statute of the ICC. Policing of peaceful protests remained restrictive. The authorities failed to investigate allegations of torture against a Fijian senior military officer who was appointed as a deputy commander in the Australian Defence Forces. Levels of sexual violence against women remained high, and LGBTI people were at risk of violence.

BACKGROUND

In August, the attorney general launched the National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-Up to support Fiji's reporting to UN human rights bodies.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In September, Fiji, together with Samoa and Vanuatu, proposed an amendment to the Rome Statute of the ICC to recognize the international crime of "ecocide". If adopted, it would enable the prosecution by the ICC of individuals responsible for severe environmental damage.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Provisions under the Public Order Act requiring permits to convene a meeting in a public park or road remained in place and the police continued to take an overly restrictive approach against protests.[1] In May, at a vigil at the premises of the Fiji Women's Crisis Center (FWCC) to protest against the human rights situation in Gaza and Papua, Indonesia, police intimidated demonstrators including by photographing and videoing participants. In July, police banned demonstrators from carrying either the Israeli or Palestinian flags at a rally for justice and "decolonization" of New Caledonia and Papua.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In February, a Fijian military officer, Colonel Ben Naliva, was appointed as a deputy commander in the Australian Defence Force, but was removed in April after Australian media reports about allegations of torture committed by him in Fiji. The Fijian government had not investigated reports that he was responsible for the torture of government opponents after the 2006 coup, or concerns documented by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture that he participated in the assault of a Fijian businessman in 2011.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

LGBTI people faced various forms of violence. Human rights groups criticized the police for failing to adequately investigate the murder in April of a 19-year-old transgender sex worker Setariki Ravato, known as "Esther", who died a few weeks after she was kidnapped and assaulted. Despite her serious injuries, the police initially claimed that she had died of a pre-existing medical condition. Police investigations were ongoing at year's end. The minister for women, children and social protection, Lynda Tabuya, was dismissed in late December after an explicit video of her was leaked online in an alleged act of technology facilitated gender-based violence.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Six South Korean nationals accused of mistreatment and other abuses of migrants employed by the Grace Road company challenged proceedings – first initiated in 2023 – to deport them to South Korea. The leadership of the company, which operates a church and owns restaurants and other businesses in Fiji, faced charges of exploitation and physical abuse of its employees and supporters in both Fiji and South Korea.

1. "Fiji, Joint Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review 48th Session of the UPR Working Group", 18 July ↑

FINLAND

Republic of Finland

Cuts to social security and healthcare disproportionately affected marginalized groups. Legislative amendments weakened protections in immigration and asylum policies. Police used unnecessary force to disperse a climate protest. Six NGOs took the government to court for lack of climate action. A new action plan against racism failed to include legislative measures against hate speech and hate crime. New legislation criminalized forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

The government continued to impose austerity measures in the form of cuts to the social security and healthcare systems. These disproportionately affected people experiencing unemployment, those with limited capacity to work due to health problems, single-parent families, persons with disabilities, older people, and young adults. Significant cuts to social security risked the right to an adequate standard of living for those already on low incomes and increased the need for last resort social assistance. Cuts to healthcare decreased the accessibility and affordability of services for those who were dependent on public healthcare.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Throughout the year, the government introduced several legislative amendments rolling back existing protections in migration and asylum policies. These included changes to make international protection temporary; prevent asylum seekers from applying for residence permits on grounds other than asylum, such as a work or a study based permit; expand the use of migration detention, and increase the requirements for family reunification and citizenship. The amendments were introduced hastily and there was no assessment of their combined impact on the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Claiming to act in response to an alleged attempt by Russia to "instrumentalize" asylum seekers and migrants, the government kept all crossing points at the Russian border closed. Construction continued of a barrier fence at the eastern border to prevent migrants crossing into Finland in situations of "instrumentalized migration".

In July, parliament adopted an emergency law allowing the government to limit the reception of asylum applications at the border, grant border guards additional powers to prevent entry, including by force, and deny any genuine possibility of appeal.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In June and September, in the capital, Helsinki, police broke up peaceful climate protests that disrupted traffic and arrested dozens of peaceful protesters after they failed to comply with a dispersal order. In June, police used unnecessary physical force against peaceful climate protesters while dispersing a roadblock in Helsinki.

A peaceful protest camp at Helsinki university campus expressing solidarity with Palestinians was dispersed by the police in June after the university administration decided to ban the camp.

Police did not always recognize the role of independent protest observers or acknowledge their responsibility to protect and facilitate independent monitoring.

Police were inconsistent in their interpretation of which obligations of the Assembly Act were considered to be incumbent on the organizers of a demonstration, with requirements varying from region to region.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In August, Amnesty International and five other NGOs filed an appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court regarding the government's lack of adequate climate action, arguing this risked Finland's target of net zero by 2035.[1]

The government significantly reduced its climate funding to lower income countries.

DISCRIMINATION

In March, 33 NGOs including Amnesty International criticized the government for taking numerous measures, including in its migration, social and health policies, which deepened structural racism and discrimination. The government's action plan to combat racism and promote equality, published in September, did not include legislative measures to combat racism, hate speech and hate crimes.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

A national citizen's initiative that proposed banning conversion practices remained pending in the Law Committee of the parliament.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In November, parliament adopted two bills to criminalize forced marriage and female genital mutilation of girls under 18.

In December, parliament adopted legislation to ban mediation in cases of intimate partner violence and sexual violence, aiming to ensure that cases of violence lead to appropriate criminal sanctions.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

A bill to reform the Act on the Sámi Parliament to enhance protection of the rights of Sámi people was pending at the end of the year in the Constitutional Law Committee of the Parliament.

1. "Finland's famous climate target under threat – NGOs take the state to court", 29 August ↑

FRANCE

French Republic

Systemic racism and religious discrimination persisted, including against Muslim women and girls. Racial profiling continued with impunity. Excessive restrictions on peaceful protests and excessive use of force by police persisted. France continued to supply weapons to Israel. Safeguards governing video surveillance by law enforcement were insufficient. Discriminatory restrictions in relation to immigration, nationality and asylum continued. France became the first country in the world to explicitly include abortion as a guaranteed freedom in its constitution. Survivors of sexual violence from marginalized groups, particularly migrant women, transgender women and sex workers, faced systemic barriers to filing a complaint.

DISCRIMINATION

French women athletes at the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games were banned from wearing sports hijabs. Similar discriminatory bans continued to apply to sports in general at both professional and amateur levels, effectively ruling out the participation of Muslim women and girls who wore head coverings.

In September the Council of State affirmed the ban on students wearing the *abaya* or *qamis*, in accordance with the discriminatory 2004 law restricting "signs or clothing showing religious affiliation in public schools, colleges and high schools".

In December the UN Human Rights Committee expressed regret that France had failed to reconsider its restrictions on the wearing of religious symbols and clothing in public places, and indeed had extended them into the domain of sports. It noted the likely discriminatory impact of such measures, especially on Muslim women and girls.

In February, during a visit to the island of Mayotte, the then interior minister announced plans for a constitutional change withdrawing the right to French citizenship by birth for children born to foreign parents on the overseas territory. A draft bill to introduce the change was suspended but not repealed by year's end.

Serious concerns were raised by reports of increased antisemitic, Islamophobic and

racist hate crimes. The government's approach to tackling racism continued to be undermined by its refusal to address systemic racism alongside its failure to collect reliable data. The Human Rights Committee again called on the French government to develop policies to combat racial discrimination based on statistics gleaned from more effective data collection tools, relying on the principles of self-identification and anonymity.

Racial profiling

Despite concerns and questions raised by expert UN bodies throughout the year, authorities continued to deny the existence of systemic racism in policing. Meanwhile the widespread use of discriminatory identity checks persisted. In April, five French and international NGOs complained to the CERD Committee that, despite having acknowledged the existence of racial profiling in 2023, the Council of State had failed to compel the government to implement reforms.

In November the Defender of Rights said in an interview that she was "appalled" at the government's failure to make progress towards eliminating discriminatory identity checks.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

People expressing solidarity with Palestinians faced excessive and disproportionate restrictions. In response to spontaneous demonstrations against Israel's assault on Rafah in June, authorities in Paris, Lyon, Alençon and other cities across France enforced pre-emptive protest bans. Peaceful protesters and bystanders were also fined for "participation in an undeclared or banned protest".

Scores of human rights defenders, trade union representatives, politicians, journalists, academics and medical practitioners expressing solidarity with Palestinians were investigated for "apology for terrorism" – an overly-broad and vaguely defined offence that threatened free expression.

On 11 August, eight members of the Les Hijabeuses campaign collective against discriminatory bans on sports hijabs were subjected to arbitrary identity checks and arrests while watching a friend run in the marathon as part of the Paris Olympic Games. Police accused them of participating in an unlawful protest as they were displaying banners that referred to "hijabis". The women were questioned, detained overnight and arbitrarily required to remove their hijabs while in custody before being eventually released without charge.

Other groups also faced excessive restrictions. In July, climate change protests were banned by local prefects in Vienne and Deux-Sèvres departments. Following a visit to the Tarn region in February, the UN Special Rapporteur for environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention expressed concern at policing methods he had witnessed being used against environmental activists engaging in civil disobedience to protest at the construction of the A69 motorway.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

Law enforcement officers were alleged to have used excessive and deadly force in the overseas territory of Kanaky New Caledonia during unrest, which erupted after parliament adopted a bill in May changing the territory's voting rules.[1] In August, UN experts expressed concern at the allegations as well as at reports of widespread arbitrary arrests, detentions and enforced disappearances.

In December the UN Human Rights Committee expressed grave concern at reports of excessive use of force during road traffic checks, arrests, forced evacuations and demonstrations. It noted that such cases disproportionately affected members of certain minority groups, in particular people of African descent or of Arab origin, Indigenous Peoples and migrants.

The committee also pointed to lack of sanctions and apparent impunity for police, noting that no one had yet been found responsible for the killing of Adama Traoré, a young man of African descent, during a stop-and-search operation by police in 2016. In May a higher court upheld a 2023 judicial

decision dismissing prosecutions against the three gendarmes involved, prompting the victim's family to file a second appeal.

In November the government put out a new tender worth EUR 27 million for sting-ball grenades, an inherently dangerous military-grade weapon used by police and known to have caused serious injuries among protesters.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

A lack of transparency continued to shroud arms transfers, with the government failing in its legal requirement to submit a report on the previous year's transfers by 1 June.

France continued to license arms exports to Israel despite calls by UN experts for the immediate cessation of such transfers, which were likely to violate international humanitarian law, and despite President Emmanuel Macron's call in October for an embargo on arms for use in Gaza.

French-manufactured weapons systems supplied to the United Arab Emirates continued to be used on the battlefield in Sudan, likely in violation of the EU and UN arms embargoes on Darfur.[2]

IMPUNITY

In June the Paris Court of Appeal upheld the validity of an arrest warrant issued in 2023 against the then-Syrian president Bashar al-Assad for chemical attacks against civilians in Eastern Ghouta and Douma. In July, however, the French public prosecutor subsequently challenged this decision before the Court of Cassation.

Following the ICC's decision to issue arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant, as well as senior Hamas leader Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri, in connection with alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, France initially signalled that it would fulfil its obligations to make arrests should any of the men visit the country. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs later claimed that the Israeli ministers had immunity as Israel was not a member of the ICC.

MASS SURVEILLANCE

In June the National Commission for Human Rights concluded that there were insufficient safeguards in place to ensure that video surveillance by law enforcement was necessary and proportionate.

In July the Orléans administrative court declared that the city's installation of an artificial intelligence-powered audio surveillance system linking microphones to CCTV cameras was a disproportionate interference with privacy rights and illegal as it had no basis in law.

In December the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern that the use by law enforcement of mass video surveillance technology powered by artificial intelligence during the Olympic Games was a disproportionate interference with the right to privacy.

A coalition of rights groups brought a complaint before the Council of State in October, calling for the Social Security Agency's National Family Allowance Fund to stop using a discriminatory risk-scoring algorithm to detect potentially fraudulent receipt of benefit payments. The algorithm discriminated against low-income households, people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, those spending a significant portion of income on rent, and working people in receipt of a disability allowance.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In January the Constitutional Council removed many measures from the discriminatory, xenophobic Immigration Control and Integration Act of November 2023. However, the final version retained provisions including increased administrative powers to detain and expel foreign nationals deemed a "threat to public order" regardless of their link to France.[3] In December the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern that the law weakened procedural safeguards for asylum seekers, including safeguards against the risk of expulsion when appeals were pending.

Ten decrees linked to the Immigration Control and Integration Law were issued in July. One made the issuing of residency

documents for foreign nationals conditional upon "respect for Republican values", an overly broad condition that risked arbitrary and discriminatory interpretation.

The demonizing, xenophobic rhetoric that marred debates over this legislation continued to be encouraged by many politicians. In September the interior minister promised increased powers for local and regional authorities to deport irregular migrants and prevent them from regularizing their status. He also renewed calls to further restrict their access to state medical aid.

French and British authorities continued to neglect their human rights responsibilities as 2024 became the deadliest year on record for migrants attempting to cross the English Channel irregularly by boat. More than 70 people died trying to reach the UK from France. In October the French interior minister noted that deaths during crossings were "harmful consequences" of "efficient" law enforcement.

France continued to issue expulsion orders to, and detain citizens from, countries including Afghanistan, Haiti, Iran, Syria and Sudan, where a forced return would amount to refoulement. In July the National Asylum Court recognized Afghan women as a social group warranting refugee protection on the grounds of their gender. However, France made no progress towards ensuring access to visas for Afghan women in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran. As a result, there continued to be almost no regular and safe pathways for them to find sanctuary in France.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In March, France became the first country in the world to explicitly include abortion as a guaranteed freedom in its constitution. However, this precedent-setting legislative development failed to guarantee the right to abortion for all who could become pregnant including transgender men and non-binary people.

In July the European Court of Human Rights ruled against sex workers seeking redress for the infringement of their rights resulting from the criminalization of their work. In *MA and others v. France*, the court had examined the human rights impact of the so-called "Nordic model" – a legal framework adopted by France in 2016 making it illegal to buy sex and criminalizing organizational aspects of sex work.[4]

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Migrant women, sex workers and transgender women faced systemic barriers when trying to file complaints of sexual violence. Barriers included denial of their right to register a complaint and threats of expulsion, as well as being subjected to prejudiced attitudes and stereotyped assumptions from law enforcement officials.[5]

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

According to figures for January to September, France slowed its progress in reducing fossil fuel emissions, compared to 2023. Expansion of the renewable energy sector remained insufficient to meet long-term targets, with gaps in both policy and implementation. Climate and the environment were deprioritized, with delays in the adoption of energy and adaptation policies.

In June the Paris Court of Appeal deemed two separate cases against energy companies to be admissible. The cases were brought under the Duty of Vigilance law which requires companies to set out how they will prevent human rights abuses and environmental damage arising from their activities.

1. "Kanaky New Caledonia: French authorities must uphold rights of the Indigenous Kanak people amid unrest", 17 May ↑
2. "Sudan: French-manufactured weapons system identified in conflict – new investigation", 14 November ↑
3. "Asylum and immigration" law: France's historic setback", 25 January (French only) ↑
4. "Europe: Failure to recognise harm caused by criminalization of sex work is a 'missed opportunity'", 25 July ↑
5. "Sexual violence: The ordeal of migrant, transgender and sex worker women who file complaints in France", 17 September (French only) ↑

GAMBIA

Republic of the Gambia

Parliament maintained a ban on female genital mutilation, but the practice was still prevalent. Child trafficking for sexual exploitation and children working in the streets remained a concern. Rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continued to be severely restricted. More than a quarter of the population were food insecure. Progress was made on accountability for crimes committed under former president Yahya Jammeh.

BACKGROUND

In August the government published a draft of a new constitution, amid criticism for lack of transparency and consultation. In December the draft was tabled at the National Assembly.

Migrants at sea continued to die in large numbers. In the first five months of the year, nearly 5,000 migrants – including Gambians – died while trying to reach the Canary Islands.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Sexual Offences Act continued to exclude marital rape as an offence, despite calls by human rights activists to criminalize it.

In March a bill was tabled in the parliament to overturn the ban on female genital mutilation.[1]On 15 July, parliament rejected the bill after efforts by activists and survivors to highlight the negative health consequences of the practice.[2]UNICEF reported that an estimated 73% of Gambian girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 had been subjected to female genital mutilation.

Maternal mortality remained high, with 289 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the latest statistics in 2019-2020 from the Demographic and Health Surveys Program. In February the board of Bansang General Hospital in the Central River Division announced that 146 pregnant women died between 2016 and 2020 due to health complications linked to their pregnancies.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap 2024 report revealed slow progress towards gender parity in the country. Gambia rose to 110th place out of 146 countries, compared to 119th the year before. However, gender parity in education, political participation and health remained poor. In November the president expressed his government's commitment to gender equality while introducing Gambia's National 10-Year Gender Policy (2025-2034).

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In January the minister of gender, children and social welfare reiterated the government's commitment to promoting children's rights and announced the second phase of the Project to Support the Protection of Children Victims of Rights Violations, which includes a plan to support children with disabilities and strengthen regional child protection mechanisms. However, children working in the streets continued to face the risk of abuse and were deprived of education. In September the director of Samaritana Gambia, an NGO working with victims of human trafficking, also warned of a resurgence in child trafficking for sexual exploitation in the country.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INFORMATION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

According to the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom index, Gambia dropped to 10th place in Africa, compared to fifth the year before, and from 46th to 58th worldwide. Draconian media laws restricting the right to freedom of expression – such as the law on sedition – remained in force.

In March the Gambia Press Union expressed concerns about the CyberCrime Bill 2023 – which at year's end was pending at the National Assembly – due to vague sections that could lead to abuses and restrictions to the right to freedom of expression online. In April the government

established the Access to Information Commission and in September the commissioners were sworn in.

In April, eight activists were arrested and detained for seven hours and subsequently charged with "common nuisance", "unlawful assembly" and "disobeying lawful order" after they planned a sit-down protest against the disruption of ferry services and alleged corruption.

In September, two journalists of the newspaper The Voice were charged with false publication and broadcasting after the newspaper published an article alleging that the president had picked his successor for the next presidential elections. In November the president dropped the civil suit he had filed against one of the journalists and The Voice for defamation. In December the criminal case was withdrawn.

Human rights defender Madi Jobarteh was still facing criminal charges at the end of the year, including "false publication and broadcasting" for 2023 Facebook posts criticizing the government.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

A shortage of affordable housing affected mainly vulnerable people. In July the minister for lands, regional government and religious affairs announced plans to build 10,000 affordable homes by December 2025, and 200,000 in the next 10 years to address the crisis.

Activists and parliamentarians expressed concerns over the increasing impact of Kush, a cheap synthetic drug, on the health of young people and the need for government intervention.

Food security continued to be a concern. According to the 2023 National Food Security Survey Report, 29% of people in Gambia were food insecure in 2023, a 3% increase from 2022. In addition, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by foreign trawlers affected the livelihoods of local fishermen and resulted in a shortage of fish for local consumption. In March, eight industrial trawlers were apprehended for violating fisheries laws. In August the government held a workshop with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and created a Technical Working Group to facilitate communication between agencies to address the issue.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

There was progress towards accountability for crimes committed under former president Yahya Jammeh.

In April the National Assembly passed the Special Accountability Mechanism Truth Reconciliation and Reparation Commission (TRRC) Bill and the Special Prosecutor's Office Bill, establishing the office of the special prosecutor. Both bills laid the groundwork for the prosecution of cases of serious human rights violations identified in the TRRC Report. On 15 December the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS approved the statute of the "Special Tribunal for The Gambia", a hybrid court with Gambian and international personnel, and a mandate to prosecute crimes against humanity, torture and other serious crimes committed during the Jammeh regime. In May the Federal Criminal Court in Switzerland sentenced Ousman Sonko, former minister of interior, to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity.

In August the ECOWAS Court of Justice issued a ruling requiring the Ghanaian government to release critical information relating to the torture and killing of West African nationals in Gambia in 2005.

The Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violations expressed frustration at the lack of forensic experts to identify the bodies exhumed in 2019 of the victims of the 11 November 1994 coup, among other victims.

In August a former general and alleged member of the "junglers", a paramilitary unit suspected of extrajudicial killings under Yahya Jammeh's government, was arrested.

1. "Gambia: Parliament must not lift the ban against female genital mutilation", 15 March ↑
2. "Gambia: Continued ban on FGM is good news but authorities must urgently address its root causes", 15 July ↑

GEORGIA

Georgia

The ruling party continued to usurp power and suppress dissent. New legislative amendments expanded state and police powers while unduly restricting peaceful protests and undermining civil society. Police repeatedly used unlawful force to disperse peaceful protesters, arresting and ill-treating hundreds. Parliament adopted new discriminatory legislation. Reports of civilians subjected to inhumane detention conditions in the breakaway territories persisted.

BACKGROUND

Against a background of intense public protests, the ruling Georgian Dream party pushed through a number of legislative initiatives that restricted human rights and undermined both civil society and the independence of the judiciary and state institutions. This led the EU in May to suspend Georgia's accession process. Georgian Dream's victory in the October parliamentary elections – accompanied by widespread reports of voter fraud and intimidation – was widely disputed and provoked ongoing protests and international criticism. Further protests erupted in November and December after the government announced that it in turn would suspend EU membership negotiations.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In May, parliament enacted the Transparency of Foreign Influence law, which obliged organizations receiving over 20% foreign funding to declare themselves as agents of foreign influence, and comply with onerous and intrusive reporting and oversight requirements. The law was then used to stigmatize and discredit organizations critical of the government. It was deemed by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission to violate the rights to freedom of expression, association and privacy, and the principles of proportionality and non-discrimination.

On 9 October, the Constitutional Court accepted a submission to review the law but refused to suspend it pending its decision.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Dissenting voices, including opponents of the Transparency of Foreign Influence law and pro-EU protesters, faced harassment, smear campaigns and violence. Over a dozen activists, many of whom participated in protests, were violently attacked, ambushed and injured by unidentified assailants, often resulting in serious injuries requiring hospitalization. Some of these assaults appeared to be coordinated, condoned and encouraged or instigated by authorities.

On 11 June, activist Zuka Berdzenishvili was severely beaten near his home hours after the parliamentary speaker publicly accused him of participating in a politically motivated campaign against the ruling party.

By the end of the year none of these incidents had been effectively investigated.

Legislation adopted in December enabled the government to restructure public institutions and dismiss public servants for arbitrary and political motives. By year's end, over 100 public servants who had publicly expressed solidarity with the protests were reportedly arbitrarily dismissed from their jobs.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Protests were widespread, particularly against the Transparency of Foreign Influence Bill in April and May, the disputed election results in October and the suspension of the EU accession process in November.

Police used unlawful force to disperse largely peaceful protesters, including targeting them with chemical irritants and water cannons, at close range and without warning, beating, injuring and detaining hundreds.[1]

Police also pursued protesters outside of demonstrations, conducting searches and arrests in their homes and offices. During the November-December protests alone, some 500 protesters were reportedly detained.

Police also targeted journalists covering the crackdowns. During the November-December protests, over 50 journalists were reportedly injured and subjected to degrading and humiliating treatment as well as having their equipment destroyed by the police and being otherwise prevented from carrying out their professional activities.

On 3 May a group of plain-clothes men drove into a crowd of protesters in the capital, Tbilisi, then surrounded and assaulted some of the demonstrators. On several occasions in December, protesters and journalists were threatened and assaulted by groups of unidentified masked individuals while police stood by. None of these incidents was effectively investigated and no police officers or masked persons committing violence were identified or held accountable.

New legislation effective from 30 December imposed further arbitrary restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, introducing hefty fines for putting up protest slogans or posters, wearing face coverings and allowing minors to take part in protests. It also granted police the power to detain individuals "preventatively" for up to 48 hours, on suspicion of potentially committing an offence.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

During the April-May protests, over 100 people reported ill-treatment, including physical and verbal abuse, by law enforcement officers during arrest and in detention. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment were especially widespread during the November-December protests, with more than 300 protesters – the majority of those detained – alleging mistreatment and more than 80 people said to have been hospitalized with serious injuries.[2]

Detained protesters were as a rule taken to undisclosed locations, including outside Tbilisi, denied contact with family and lawyers and detained for 24 to 48 hours without a reasonable justification as required by national law. In several instances, the injured detainees were denied medical treatment and emergency surgery.

On 14 May, police officers filmed themselves beating and throttling peaceful protester Davit Katsarava. He was hospitalized with severe concussion and facial bone fractures. On 24 July, Davit Katsarava was fined 2,000 Lari (US$720) for allegedly disobeying the police. An investigation into his torture allegations, however, had produced no results by year's end.

UNFAIR TRIALS

In hundreds of unfair hearings that followed the April-May and November-December protests, courts imposed administrative penalties on anti-government protesters for alleged offences including petty hooliganism and disobeying the police.

More than 50 protesters were prosecuted on bogus protest-related charges, including for alleged obstruction of strategic facilities, group violence, criminal damage and disrupting public order. Some reported being coerced into signing forced confessions, without legal representation. Most of the trials were pending at year's end.

Omar Okribashvili and Saba Meparishvili were arrested on 14 May for damaging temporary police-installed barriers, and charged with crimes punishable by three to six years' imprisonment.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In August, a court granted injunctions against demonstrations begun in March by residents of Shukruti in the Chiatura region. The residents accused a mining company of damaging their homes and farmland through manganese extraction and failing to provide them with adequate compensation. By September, several demonstrators had relocated to Tbilisi, staging hunger strikes outside parliament, demanding government intervention and an independent damage assessment. The negotiations between the protesters and the company, mediated by the government, yielded no meaningful outcome.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

On 17 September, parliament approved a law on "family values and the protection of

minors", which contained numerous homophobic and transphobic measures. These included a ban on sharing information or holding public gatherings that were deemed to promote same-sex relationships. The following day, a well-known trans woman was killed in her home. LGBTI rights campaigners raised concerns that the new law, and the government rhetoric that preceded it, fueled homophobic and transphobic crime.

ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA/TSKHINVALI REGION

Right to life

On 9 April, the European Court of Human Rights found that Russia had been in violation of several human rights, including the right to life, while setting up and policing the boundaries of the breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It ruled that the border incidents were "sufficiently numerous and interconnected" to conclude that Russia was allowing systematic violations to take place.

Inhumane detention conditions

Throughout the year, civilians were reportedly subjected to detention in the South Ossetia region, in harsh conditions, with limited access to legal representation or medical care.

1. "Georgia: authorities must stop using unlawful force against peaceful protesters and ensure accountability", 3 May ↑
2. "Georgia: Police committing shocking human rights violations amid ongoing crackdown on protesters", 13 December ↑

GERMANY

Federal Republic of Germany

Germany deported 28 individuals to Afghanistan in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. Reports persisted of excessive use of force by police during peaceful protests by climate activists and supporters of Palestinians' rights. A crackdown continued on expressions of solidarity with Palestinians. Legislation passed in October disproportionately reduced benefits for asylum seekers and extended biometric surveillance and police checks, without a reasonable suspicion standard, increasing the risk of racial profiling.

DISCRIMINATION

In January, journalists exposed racist plans for mass expulsions, framed as "remigration", drawn up by far-right politicians, business people and other actors.

In March, Germany appointed its first ever federal police commissioner to handle complaints of discrimination and other violations by federal police forces. However, an overall lack of effective independent complaints mechanisms and lack of mandatory identification badges for police at federal and state levels continued to hamper investigations into allegations of abuses.

Racist and anti-migrant rhetoric continued throughout the year, especially after stabbing attacks in the cities of Mannheim and Solingen in May and August, which were allegedly carried out by perpetrators from Afghanistan and Syria respectively.

Such harmful rhetoric influenced legislation. In October, parliament adopted a new "security package" of regulations, which conflated criminality with race, ethnicity and nationality. It disproportionately reduced benefits for asylum seekers and extended biometric surveillance and police checks, without a reasonable suspicion standard, increasing the risk of racial profiling.

Serious concerns were raised by reports of increased antisemitic, Islamophobic and racist hate crimes, as well as hate crimes against LGBTI people and other minoritized groups.

LGBTI people

In April, parliament passed a Self-Determination Act enabling transgender, non-binary and intersex people to obtain legal gender recognition by making a simple declaration at the registry office. Coming into force in November, the new law replaced the

Transsexuals' Act of 1980, which had obliged transgender people to undergo discriminatory psychological assessments and a court procedure to obtain legal gender recognition.

Despite the progress made, rights groups complained that the new law had been influenced by trans-hostile narratives – for example, in a provision allowing private contractors to deny access to single-gender venues at their discretion – and did not focus adequately on the protection of transgender, non-binary and intersex people.

Gender-based violence

In November the Federal Criminal Police Office reported a rise in gender-based crimes against women in 2023. Increases were noted in misogynistic hate crimes (+56.3%), online violence (+25.0%), human trafficking (+6.9%), sexual violence (+6.2%) and domestic violence (+5.6%); 16.5% more women were killed by their partners or ex-partners compared to the preceding year.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

On 21 May the Public Prosecutor's Office in Neuruppin brought charges under section 129 of the Criminal Code against five members of the Last Generation climate campaign group, accusing them of "forming a criminal organization". This further criminalized the climate movement.

Reports surfaced throughout the year concerning excessive use of force – including pain compliance holds – in the policing of peaceful protests by climate activists and supporters of Palestinians' rights. In September, during a peaceful Palestinian solidarity protest, a young man was knocked unconscious by police. Civil society organizations expressed concern at the role of racism, including anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, in the authorities' response to Palestinian solidarity protests.

On 12 April, Berlin police banned and then dissolved the so-called "Palestine Congress" shortly after it had begun. Several invited speakers were banned from entering the country or from taking part in public activities.

On 26 April, in Berlin's government district, police banned a protest camp against arms transfers to Israel, citing "danger to public security" without sufficient reason, and then reportedly used excessive force to disperse it.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Authorities continued their attempts to criminalize the slogan "from the river to the sea", which was banned in 2023 because it was deemed "a symbol of Hamas". In June, a Berlin District Court convicted an activist under section 140 of the Criminal Code for having used the slogan during a protest in October 2023. In November, the Berlin Regional Court convicted a woman under section 86 of the Criminal Code for having posted the slogan on social media, thereby stipulating that the slogan "constitutes the use of a sign of a terrorist organization".

In May the Federal Ministry of Education started an internal assessment as to whether academics could be denied state funding for publicly opposing the forcible eviction of students protesting in solidarity with Palestinians at Freie University.

On 7 November, parliament adopted a resolution which established that the working definition on antisemitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) should be used by all legislators to address any perceived deficits with regard to tackling antisemitism. The definition would form a benchmark against which various laws, such as criminal and asylum laws, should be reviewed and state funding allocated.

Civil society groups and prominent legal scholars found the IHRA definition to be incompatible with international standards on freedom of expression. The resolution thus created legal uncertainty and raised fears of violations of freedom of expression, academic freedom and artistic freedom.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In January, parliament passed the Repatriation Improvement Act, which expanded authorities' powers of entry to premises, search and detention, and further

increased the risk of unlawful detention for asylum seekers in Germany.

In June the government announced plans to resume deportations to Afghanistan and Syria. In August, Germany deported 28 individuals to Afghanistan, violating the principle of non-refoulement.

Schengen border controls were implemented from 16 September without a requirement for reasonable suspicion as grounds for police checks, thereby heightening the risk of racial profiling and the denial of access to asylum and automatic detention.

In October, as part of its "security package" legislation, parliament introduced new regulations excluding from benefits those asylum seekers whose applications were being processed in another EU member state under the Dublin III Regulation. These individuals were granted only two weeks of interim assistance, with exceptions only in rare cases.

The humanitarian admission programme for Afghanistan – designed in October 2022 to admit 1,000 individuals per month – was ended prematurely by the government. A total of only 1,093 nationals had been transferred to Germany by the end of 2024. Around 2,000 Afghans admitted to the programme remained in Afghanistan or Pakistan awaiting transfer to Germany.

On 9 December, the German asylum authority suspended asylum applications for Syrians, plunging nearly 50,000 Syrian asylum seekers into more precarious circumstances. These included mandatory residence in reception centres, work prohibitions, limited access to healthcare services and a ban on applying for family reunification.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Revelations from a parliamentary inquiry and a series of reports by investigative journalists revealed that police had used facial recognition technology in at least six federal states without sufficient legal basis to do so.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In April an expert government-appointed commission on "reproductive self-determination and reproductive medicine" presented proposals to decriminalize and regulate abortion. In April, the preliminary findings of a multi-year research project on "experiences and life situations of unintentionally pregnant women" underlined the need to bring regulations in line with international human rights standards and the WHO guidelines on safe abortion care. In December, parliamentarians introduced a draft law to partially legalize abortions, but at year's end abortion remained criminalized.

In November a law came into force to protect pregnant people from harassment outside abortion clinics and mandatory counselling centres. The law prohibited actions such as deliberate obstruction of access to facilities, pressurizing a pregnant person, or confronting them with untrue or disturbing material.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

On 16 May the Berlin-Brandenburg Higher Administrative Court ruled that the federal government was in breach of the Climate Protection Act because its climate protection plans in various sectors were deemed insufficient to meet legally binding emission reduction targets stipulated by the law.

On 17 July an amended Climate Protection Act entered into force, eliminating the basis of the court's ruling. Overall emission reduction targets remained unchanged. However, the amended act removed binding reduction targets for individual sectors, as well as the requirement to present emergency measures if such targets were missed.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

In June, UN Special Experts called on states to end all transfers of military equipment to Israel to avoid the risk of responsibility for human rights violations. While the number of licences granted for such transfers from Germany to Israel reduced, some continued. Germany also licensed transfers to Saudi Arabia of arms and military equipment,

despite a lack of accountability for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in relation to the Yemen conflict.

GHANA

Republic of Ghana

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly was restricted. Women's and girls' rights continued to be threatened. An affirmative action bill to promote gender equality was finally enacted. An anti-LGBTI bill was passed in parliament but faced legal challenges delaying its enactment. Important progress was made in fighting malaria. Illegal mining had a negative impact on the environment and on the livelihoods of cocoa farmers.

BACKGROUND

In January, six people, including three soldiers, were sentenced to death for an attempted coup in 2021. The constitution still allowed the death penalty for high treason.

Consumer inflation, having fallen well below the hyperinflation seen in 2023, was still high, at 23.8% in December. In October, international bond-holders agreed to reduce Ghana's USD 13 billion debt by 37%. There were frequent power cuts due to a gas shortage.

John Dramani Mahama won the presidential elections held in December.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Ghana improved its ranking in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters without Borders, ranking 50th out of 180 countries surveyed, up 12 places from 2023. However, high levels of intimidation and violence against journalists continued.

In January a journalist was physically assaulted by a ruling party member of parliament and his supporters during the party's parliamentary primaries in Yendi, ahead of the general elections due in December. In May the Ghana Journalists Association called on all politicians to condemn attacks on journalists after another journalist was physically assaulted by supporters of the ruling party in the city of Tamale while covering political events.

In July a planned protest in the capital city, Accra, to demand government action on the cost-of-living crisis was banned at the request of the police, who cited lack of personnel available to provide security. In September over 50 people were arrested during protests in Accra against allegations of corruption linked to illegal mining. They were all subsequently released but, at the end of the year, 31 were still facing various charges including unlawful assembly, causing unlawful damage and "offensive conduct conducive to breaches of peace".

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women's and girls' rights continued to be threatened. In April, activists condemned the marriage of a 12-year-old girl to a priest. The girl was put under police protection but no arrests were made.

Also in April, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice organized a dialogue with 25 stakeholders, including governmental officials, which called for the president to sign into law a bill criminalizing accusations of witchcraft; the bill had been passed by parliament in 2023. Hundreds of accused women in the northern and north-east regions remained in "witch camps" they had fled to after being rejected from their communities.

The Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Bill to increase the participation of women in public life was passed in parliament in July and signed into law by the president in September. The new law aimed to increase women's participation to 30% by 2026 and 50% by 2030.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI people's rights were further undermined. In February, parliament passed the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, which further criminalized LGTBI people and introduced prison sentences for anyone advocating for LGBTI rights. In March the

president stated that he would await a decision by the Supreme Court on the legal challenges to the bill before deciding whether to sign it. In December The Supreme Court dismissed the two legal challenges to the bill stating that it could not review it since it was not yet an act. By the end of the year, the president had not signed the bill into law.

In July, rejecting a constitutional challenge over breaches of the right to privacy, the Supreme Court upheld section 104 of the Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29), including the criminalization of "unnatural carnal knowledge". This was interpreted to include consensual same-sex sexual relations.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Food prices continued to be high, threatening the right to food and health. In July a BBC news report suggested that young people were budgeting by eating less protein and fewer meals. Food inflation peaked at 29.6% in March.

There was progress in fighting malaria. In April the World Health Organization reported that over 700,000 children in seven regions had been vaccinated as of September 2023, and that the prevalence of malaria in children less than five years old had gone from 20.6% in 2016 to 8.6% in 2023. The WHO also reported that in-patient malaria deaths had dropped from 428 in 2018 to 155 in 2022.

In September, UNICEF reported that Ghana had administered 1 million doses of malaria vaccine since 2019, significantly reducing cases of severe malaria, and announced the expansion of the vaccine roll-out to a further 125 districts between 2025 and 2029.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Illegal mining and illegal logging had disastrous environmental impacts.

According to data updated in 2024 by the online platform Global Forest Watch, Ghana lost 1.64 million hectares of tree cover from 2001 to 2023, a 24% decrease compared to 2000. The platform recorded 5,170 deforestation alerts in a single week in October.

The price of cocoa continued to soar because of falling harvests from land that cocoa producers claimed had been destroyed by illegal small-scale mining – known as *galamsey* – as well as climate change. In March alone, prices increased by at least 60%. In addition, Ghana's cocoa industry regulator reported that 500,000 hectares were infected with cacao swollen shoot disease, which may have been exacerbated by deforestation and climate change.

In April, in recognition of the damage caused to livelihoods, the government announced a 50% rise in the price paid to cocoa farmers. However, the farmers protested that the rise was insufficient given the price of cocoa on the international market.

In October, activists denounced the effects of illegal mining on rivers after a report published by Ghana Water Company found that 60% of watercourses were too polluted to be treated. The activists called on the government to suspend mining contracts and do more to stop illegal mining.

Used textiles from the fast fashion industry continued to come into the country from abroad and find their way into second-hand markets, such Kantamanto in Accra, before being dumped due to poor quality. Large volumes continued to wash up on beaches and to pollute rivers, lagoons and the sea.

GREECE

Hellenic Republic

An appeals court upheld a guilty verdict against two men for the death of LGBTI activist Zak Kostopoulos. Reports of abuses against migrants and refugees at borders continued, and asylum seekers in the Samos reception centre were held in conditions of unlawful detention. Human rights defenders continued to face criminalization for their work with refugees and migrants. Allegations of unnecessary and excessive use of force in the policing of

demonstrations persisted. Concerns were raised over an investigation which found no links between the unlawful use of spyware and state ministries or agencies. In a milestone step, Greece legalized same-sex marriage. Health workers continued to report ongoing and significant gaps in Greece's national health system.

RIGHT TO LIFE

In July an appeals court in the capital, Athens, upheld the guilty verdict on two men for lethal bodily harm in relation to the death of LGBTI activist Zak Kostopoulos in September 2018.

In August a prosecutor in Chania charged four police officers with intentional homicide with possible malice in relation to the case of Kostas Manioudakis, who died during a stop-and-search operation in the village of Vryses in Crete in September 2023.

In September migrant worker Kamran Ashiq died in police custody. Pictures of his body published in the media showed injuries indicating he had been beaten. In December, the national police complaints mechanism announced that it had started its own investigation into the case.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Deadly shipwrecks continued, as did reports of human rights violations, including summary unlawful returns by Greek law enforcement officers, against racialized asylum seekers and migrants at borders.

In January, ruling in a case from 2014 – in which the coastguard fired shots towards a boat during an interception at sea, hitting a Syrian man who later died – the European Court of Human Rights found Greece in violation of the right to life, both regarding the investigation of the incident and the use of lethal force.

Despite the ruling, officials' use of firearms during border control operations remained of concern. In July a man died after the coastguard fired shots at a boat during a pursuit operation off Symi.

In December the preliminary domestic investigation into the actions of the authorities in the June 2023 Pylos shipwreck – in which over 600 people died – was finally completed. Survivors had claimed that the Greek coastguard was responsible for the incident. NGOs representing survivors and victims' families criticized the prosecution's failure to summon to provide written explanations those authorities responsible for coordinating the search and rescue operation and their superiors. In May, in separate proceedings which raised fair trial concerns, nine survivors were acquitted of charges, including causing the shipwreck.

Asylum seekers living in the EU-funded Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) on the island of Samos, mostly racialized individuals, were routinely subjected to "restrictions of freedom" amounting to unlawful detention. There were also shortcomings in the provision of basic services in the CCAC, including running water and healthcare. Those deprived of their liberty may have experienced inhuman and degrading detention conditions, especially during times of overcrowding.[1]

Similar concerns relating to other CCACs were made public by the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee (CPT) in July, following their 2023 visit.

The system of containment implemented on Samos and other CCACs disproportionately affected racialized people and furthered the racialized exclusion of migrants and refugees.

In October the Court of Justice of the EU ruled on a case concerning the readmissions of asylum seekers from Greece to Türkiye under the 2014 EU-Türkiye readmission agreement, which Türkiye had suspended since March 2020. The court found that if the country of return did not ensure readmission, asylum applications could not be rejected as inadmissible under the "safe third country" rule.

There were negative developments in access by asylum seekers and refugees to social and economic support. The Helios programme, run by the International Organization for Migration with funding from the Greek authorities, ceased on 30 November. It had provided housing and other support to beneficiaries of international

protection and EU temporary protection. The NGO Refugee Support Aegean reported that from May the authorities had stopped paying the financial assistance owed to asylum seekers by law.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In January, 16 aid workers involved in search and rescue operations for refugees and migrants were acquitted of misdemeanour charges, including espionage, by a court on Lesvos.

Concerns remained about the criminal charges ongoing against Panayote Dimitras, spokesperson of the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor, and Tommy Olsen, head of the NGO Aegean Boat Report, in relation to their work assisting refugees and migrants at Greece's borders. Panayote Dimitras remained subjected to restrictive measures, including a ban on leaving Greece, as part of this investigation. In May, the authorities issued a national arrest warrant for Tommy Olsen.

In August an NGO criticized further judicial harassment against Panayote Dimitras who, together with his wife Nafsika Papanikolatou, faced a criminal investigation for alleged breach of trust and money laundering.

In November, concerns were raised about the trial of human rights defender Alexia Tsouni, on charges including "false testimony" and defamation, which appeared to be in response to her anti-racism work and activism in support of refugees.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Reports persisted of the police using unnecessary and excessive force, including by misusing less-lethal weapons, against protesters and journalists.

In December, human rights lawyer Anny Paparousou and a group of peaceful protesters were taken to a police station for identity checks ahead of a demonstration. This move appeared to be unlawful, and aimed primarily at preventing the protesters from participating in the protest.

In October a court awarded compensation to photojournalist Orestis Panagiotou for the serious injury he sustained after being hit directly and at close range by a water cannon while covering a demonstration in Athens in 2021. In November, an Athens court handed an eight-month suspended prison sentence to a police officer found guilty of causing bodily injury by negligence to Orestis Panagiotou.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Greece had yet to introduce an effective legislative framework to tackle strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs).

In September an Athens Court heard the appeal of journalist Stavroula Poulimeni and media cooperative Alterthess against a ruling that partially accepted a 2021 lawsuit following their reporting on a case relating to environmental damage. The 2021 lawsuit was considered to bear the hallmarks of a SLAPP.

In October an Athens court dismissed a 2022 defamation lawsuit by Grigoris Dimitriadis, the prime minister's former chief of staff, against three journalists including Thanasis Koukakis and the media outlets Newspaper of Editors and Reporters United, in relation to an investigative article on Greece's surveillance scandal. Press freedom NGOs characterized the lawsuit as a SLAPP.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

In January the European Court of Human Rights found that Greece had breached the right to a private life after authorities in 2012 disclosed identities and medical data of women diagnosed with HIV.

In July, serious concerns were expressed by opposition parties, civil society and lawyers representing victims of unlawful surveillance after an investigation by the Prosecutor's Office of the Supreme Court concluded that there were no links between the unlawful use of Predator spyware and state ministries or agencies.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In April, Kyriaki Griva was murdered by her former partner outside an Athens police station where she had gone to seek protection. The handling of her complaint by police caused an outcry and led to the

investigation of four police officers for the offence of "exposing a person's life to risk".

In November the UN Human Rights Committee urged Greece to consider amending the 2021 legislation on joint custody to ensure the protection of all victims of domestic violence, and to specifically criminalize femicide.

LGBTI PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In February, parliament legalized same-sex marriage although a failure to address some further gaps in the legal framework left LGBTI persons, including transgender persons and their children, at ongoing risk of discrimination.

According to the Greek Transgender Support Association, transgender people faced multiple barriers in their lives as the health system was still using a medical classification list that refers to trans status as a "gender identity disorder".

In a report published in April concerning its 2023 findings, the Network for Recording Incidents of Racist Violence documented 158 incidents, 61 of which concerned LGBTI persons.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' RIGHTS

The civilian alternative to compulsory military service remained punitive and discriminatory. Following a landmark 2021 UN Human Rights Committee ruling, which found multiple violations of the ICCPR in the case of conscientious objector Lazaros Petromelidis, Greece had yet to make full reparations to him or to enact reforms "to ensure the effective guarantee of the right to conscientious objection".

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Experts for the Climate Change Performance Index criticized Greece's substantial expansion of gas infrastructure as increasing the country's dependency on fossil fuels.

An extreme heatwave, attributed by scientists to the effects of climate change, caused heat-related deaths. In August, a pan-European study predicted that temperature-related deaths would increase in Europe in this century, and that, "in the 3°C warming scenario, heat-related deaths in Greece would increase annually from 1,730 today to 4,767".

Large wildfires in the region of Attika in August and the municipality of Xylokastro in September burned thousands of acres of land and many homes, and resulted in three deaths. In June a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development noted that climate change increasingly exacerbated wildfire hazards in Greece.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Health workers and experts continued to report ongoing and significant gaps in Greece's national health system. These included staff shortages, long working hours, difficulty in taking leave, and clinics at risk of closure or operating at reduced capacity due to lack of staff and/or equipment.

1. *Greece: Samos: "We Feel in Prison on the Island": Unlawful Detention and Sub-Standard Conditions in an EU-Funded Refugee Centre*, 30 July ↑

GUATEMALA

Republic of Guatemala

Human rights defenders, journalists and political opponents were harassed and criminalized. Unfounded criminal prosecutions indicated a lack of judicial independence. There were signs of progress in the state's attitude towards Indigenous Peoples, but leaders protecting territories and rights were still criminalized. The prosecution of crimes against humanity perpetrated during the 1960-1996 internal armed conflict was delayed. The government took steps to recognize human rights violations against women, regulate the health service and improve water quality. Same-sex marriage remained prohibited.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

Politically motivated persecution continued against human rights defenders, prosecutors, judges, journalists and political opponents who had fought against impunity and corruption, and their respective lawyers. Unfounded criminal proceedings caused multiple due-process violations, often with a gender bias affecting criminalized women.[1]

In January, prisoner of conscience and former prosecutor Virginia Laparra was finally released after almost two years in arbitrary detention. In July, a court declared her guilty in a second unfounded criminal proceeding, which forced her to go into exile. In March, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated that journalist Jose Rubén Zamora's detention was arbitrary and recommended his release. In October, after more than 800 days in pretrial detention, he was released from prison and put under house arrest. Cases against leaders of the suspended political party Semilla Movement continued to proceed. At the end of the year, former prosecutor Stuardo Campo remained in pretrial detention.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

The Public Prosecutor's office and a significant part of the judiciary often led unfounded criminal prosecutions. During a visit to Guatemala in July, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights pointed out that unfounded criminalization was evidence of a lack of judicial independence.

In October, Congress appointed more than 300 new magistrates for the appellate chambers and supreme court of justice, several of whom were alleged to be involved in corruption and the criminalization of critical voices, according to the media. International experts pointed out that the process did not meet international standards for the appointment of these positions and had been subject to the interests of powerful stakeholders.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Local organization Unit for Attacks on Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala registered at least 2,763 attacks on human rights defenders between January and October.

The body responsible for the analysis of risks to human rights defenders, convened by the Ministry of Interior, was reactivated. At the end of the year, the public policy for the protection of human rights defenders was still pending approval, and the state had not ratified the Escazú Agreement.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

For the first time in many years, the government established a direct dialogue with several Indigenous authorities and committed to promoting a comprehensive development agenda that took their needs into account. In many parts of the country, however, Indigenous leaders faced criminalization for defending the territory and rights of Indigenous Peoples. Dozens of peasant (*campesino*) and Indigenous communities were at risk of forced evictions in the context of conflicts around land tenure.

IMPUNITY

Delays and irregularities hindered the search for justice for crimes against humanity and war crimes perpetrated during the internal armed conflict from 1960 to 1996, including the Military Diary case. A court overturned the CREOMPAZ (former military detention centre) case and freed the accused retired military officers. In November, in the middle of the genocide trial against former general Benedicto Lucas, the attorney general unjustifiably dismissed prosecutors from the Human Rights Prosecutor's Office who had been assigned to the case. Days later, a higher court cancelled the trial.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The government acknowledged state responsibility for the feminicides of María Isabel Véliz Franco and Claudina Velásquez in the early 2000s, as ruled by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2014 and 2015. The government also committed to compensate for the deaths of 41 girls who were locked-in during a fire at a state-run shelter, Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción,

in 2017. Criminal proceedings against possible perpetrators had not concluded.

The Comprehensive Sex Education Bill was still pending approval at the end of the year.

The NGO LAMBDA Association registered at least 35 killings of LGBTI people from January to November. Same-sex marriage remained prohibited.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

According to official data, levels of severe child malnutrition remained high. The government initiated dozens of complaints against the previous administration alleging misuse of public funds allocated to public services, including health and education. It announced measures to regulate the purchase of medical resources and prevent shortages that have undermined access to quality healthcare.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In March, the government published a national action plan on gender and climate change. In September, the government created the "water cabinet" to coordinate management of water resources, amid concerns over access to clean water.

1. *"The Entire System Against Us, Criminalization of Women Justice Operators and Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala"* 23 May ↑

GUINEA

Republic of Guinea

Authorities intensified the crackdown on peaceful dissent. The ban on all protests was still in force and security forces used excessive force to disperse protests. Access to the internet was restricted, and licences of several radio and TV stations were revoked. Activists were arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared. Eight people were convicted for crimes against humanity in the trial about the massacre of 28 September 2009.

BACKGROUND

Sanctions imposed by ECOWAS since the September 2021 coup were lifted in February. A draft of a new constitution was presented in July. The transitional regime put in place since the 2021 coup did not end in 2024 as previously agreed between the authorities and ECOWAS.

The country suffered further repeated power cuts because of an explosion in a fuel depot in December 2023, leading to an increase in the costs of food and fuel for households and affecting businesses.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The May 2022 ban on all protests was still in force, but demonstrations supporting the president were allowed. On 17 January, the minister of territorial administration threatened political parties and civil society organizations that defied the ban on protests with the suspension or withdrawal of their licences. Despite the ban, protests were organized but violently repressed, resulting in deaths and serious injuries of protesters.

On 26 February the trade union movement began a strike for a reduction in the cost of basic necessities, an end to media censorship and the release of a journalist trade unionist. In the Tamouya district in Boffa prefecture, a 17-year-old protester was shot dead, allegedly by security forces.

On 12 March, a power cut in the city of Kindia sparked protests, in which two boys aged 8 and 14 were shot dead, allegedly by security forces. The prosecutor of the Court of First Instance of Kindia announced an investigation into the killings.

Between September 2021 and 15 March 2024, at least 47 protesters were killed.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

The transitional authorities continued to restrict civic space.

On 21 May the minister of information and communication ordered the revocation of licences authorizing the installation and operation of the radio stations FIM FM, Espace FM, Sweet FM and Djoma FM, as well as TV stations Djoma TV and Espace TV,

"for non-compliance with the content of the specifications".

Internet restrictions imposed in November 2023 were lifted in February.

On 2 September, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization suspended the renewal of NGOs' operating licences for four months pending an assessment of their activities in line with their status.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

On 18 January, at least nine journalists were arrested during a protest at the Guinean press house for the "release of jammed media airwaves and the restoration of access to social networks in Guinea". They were released the following day, when another journalist, Sekou Jamal Pendessa was arrested. On 28 February, the Conakry Court of Appeal sentenced him to three months in prison, including two suspended, but released him immediately, as he had already spent a month in detention.[2]

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

On 9 July, Omar Sylla, Mamadou Billo Bah and Mohammed Cissé, all members of the National Front for the Defence of the Constitution, were arrested at Omar Sylla's house. According to Mohammed Cissé, who was released the next day, they were arrested by gendarmes and detained by members of the special forces on the island of Kassa. Mohammed Cissé was violently assaulted and said that all three were tortured during interrogation.[3] In a statement issued on 17 July, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Court of Appeal in Conakry (the capital), said the activists had not been arrested by the authorities and that no prison in the country was holding them. At the end of the year Mamadou Billo Bah and Omar Sylla remained forcibly disappeared.

On 3 December, journalist Habib Marouane Camara was arrested by gendarmes, according to witnesses, and his whereabouts remained unknown at the end of the year. The authorities claimed they were not informed of his arrest.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

On 5 May, three people died in disciplinary premises of the gendarmerie and police "due to the intense heatwave that the country has been experiencing over the past 72 hours", according to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

On 25 June the military prosecutor of Conakry announced the death of former army chief of staff Sadiba Koulibaly on 22 June. He had been arrested on 4 June and sentenced to five years in prison for "desertion and illegal possession of weapons".[4] The Military Court Prosecutor's Office attributed his death to cardiac arrest; his lawyer said that his client was in good health before his incarceration.

OHCHR warned of detention conditions of children in Guinea. According to its August report, children – often imprisoned without trial – live in overcrowded prisons in terrible conditions.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 31 July, the Dixinn Criminal Court convicted eight people for crimes against humanity in a trial about the massacre of 28 September 2009, during which more than 150 protesters were killed and over 100 women were subjected to rape and other sexual violence by members of the defence and security forces.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

According to a 2024 UNICEF report, 95% of girls and women in Guinea aged 15 to 49 had undergone female genital mutilation.

Survivors of sexual violence continued to face difficulties accessing adequate medical and psychological care.

1. *Wounded Youth: Care and Justice Urgently Needed for the Victims of Unlawful Use of Force in Guinea*, 15 May ↑
2. "Guinea: Trade Unionist Sékou Jamal Pendessa must be released", 23 January (French only) ↑
3. "Guinea: Urgent investigation needed into enforced disappearance of two FNDC activists missing since 9 July", 30 August ↑

4. *Guinea: Ongoing Human Rights Violations: Submission to the 49th Session of the UPR Working Group, April-May 2025*, 10 December ↑

HAITI

Republic of Haiti

Food insecurity reached an alarming level, the health system was in a state of collapse and schools were forced to close because of violence. Hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes and were at risk as displaced people. Criminal gangs continued to perpetrate abuses, including against children. Sexual and gender-based violence increased. Impunity prevailed as the justice system struggled to function. The USA and the Dominican Republic failed to provide international protection to Haitians fleeing the country and continued forcibly returning them.

BACKGROUND

Political instability and violence further weakened state institutions and aggravated deficiencies in basic services. Various spikes of violence occurred, including massacres, resulting in increased internal displacement and the temporary closure of the Port-au-Prince airport. Several armed gangs grew stronger and controlled important parts of the country, including strategic infrastructure such as ports and airports, exposing the population to generalized violence and human rights violations.[1]

In March, after intense pressure, Ariel Henry resigned as prime minister. In April, a Presidential Transitional Council was formed of different political forces. In November, the transitional council dismissed the prime minister appointed in June and appointed Alix Didier Fils-Aimé as the new prime minister.

In June, the first soldiers of the Kenyan police-led Multinational Security Support Mission, approved by the UN Security Council in 2023, arrived in Haiti. In September, the UN Security Council renewed the mission for another year. By year's end, there were more than 500 soldiers from the Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica and Kenya, based in Haiti.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Almost half the population needed humanitarian assistance, with alarming levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. According to the UN's World Food Programme in September, 2 million faced extreme food shortages, acute malnutrition and high disease levels. The health system faced serious challenges that brought it to the brink of collapse. Many hospitals and health centres had been vandalized and robbed. In the capital, Port-au-Prince, only 37% of health facilities were fully functional and access was difficult due to the security concerns, according to a UN expert. The education system had also been impacted by the violence, with schools forced to close due to shootings or having been robbed and burned.

According to the International Organization for Migration, by October, more than 700,000 people, half of whom were children, had fled their homes due to violence. Many internally displaced people faced criminal gang violence and lack of access to food and healthcare.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

Abuses by criminal gangs continued unabated. According to a report by the OHCHR in 2024, at least 5,601 people were killed, 2,212 people injured and 1,494 abducted. Criminal gangs were responsible for countless abuses, including against children. These included recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions and denial of humanitarian access.

In December, at least 180 people were killed in a gang-organized attack in Cité Soleil.[2]

The UN Secretary-General reported on Haiti for the first time in his *Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict*, stating that the

UN had verified 383 grave violations against children in Haiti in 2023.[3]

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, increased in the first half of the year, according to a UN report, and "gangs have continued to use sexual violence to punish, spread fear and subjugate the population".

IMPUNITY

The justice system struggled to operate, and human rights violations, crime and corruption continued to go unpunished.

The deployment of the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti took place amidst serious concerns about the absence of transparency relating to human rights safeguards. Information was lacking on the accountability mechanism for possible human rights abuses and violations.[4]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Several countries in the region failed to provide international protection to Haitians fleeing violence and the disastrous situation in the country.

Haitians faced racism and discrimination. The USA and the Dominican Republic continued their policy of forcibly and unlawfully returning Haitians and failed to ensure access to asylum for those seeking international protection.[5]

In October, new government measures by the Dominican Republic tripled the number of deportations. By the end of the year, 199,170 people had been deported to Haiti from the USA and the Dominican Republic.

1. "Haiti: Severe crisis calls for lasting solutions, not impunity", 10 May ↑
2. "Haiti: Justice and protection must follow reports of mass killing in Cité Soleil", 11 December ↑
3. "Child protection urged as the Multinational Security Support Mission deploys to Haiti", 2 July ↑
4. "Haiti: Human rights safeguards and transparency must guide security mission deployment", 4 June ↑
5. "Dominican Republic: End racist deportations of Haitians", 8 October ↑

HONDURAS

Republic of Honduras

The militarization of public security continued. Conditions in prisons remained concerning. Human rights violations persisted during the state of emergency and human rights defenders lacked protection. The impacts of climate change exacerbated the precarious situation of thousands. Abortion and same-sex marriage remained prohibited.

BACKGROUND

The creation of an international commission against impunity and corruption was still pending.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

The government took steps to acknowledge state responsibility for the persecution and repression of social movements and protests in the 1980s and between 2009 and 2021, but obstacles to justice persisted.

Despite the concerns of human rights organizations, the government extended the state of emergency aimed at combating insecurity and organized crime, and announced disproportionate new counterterrorism measures. By October the Ombudsperson (CONADEH) had received more than 700 complaints against the police and security forces since the start of the state of emergency in December 2022.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Overcrowding and the militarization of prisons continued. UN experts reported that conditions in many prisons amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The government announced the construction of a "mega prison".

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Honduras was the most lethal country in the world for defenders of land and environment, according to Global Witness. They faced

stigmatization, intimidation, arbitrary detention and criminalization, most of which went unpunished. Attacks mainly occurred in the context of disputes relating to mining projects, land-tenure insecurity, and violations of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants, including Garifuna human rights defenders.

Local organizations raised concerns over the weakness and ineffectiveness of the national protection mechanism for human rights defenders. In September, Juan López of the Municipal Committee for the Defence of Common and Public Goods of Tocoa was shot dead.[1]

In November, the Supreme Court of Justice confirmed sentences against eight men responsible for the murder of Indigenous defender Berta Cáceres in 2016.

By the end of the year, the state had not signed the Escazú Agreement.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In October, land recovery for the Garifuna community of Punta Piedra began, as part of the implementation of the ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Communities in the Gulf of Fonseca reported negative impacts on their livelihoods caused by rising sea levels, coastal erosion and environmental pollution. Prolonged drought in the Central American Dry Corridor in western Honduras affected access to water and food security. Climate change impacts, exacerbated by high levels of inequality, contributed to forced migration from Honduras.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Abortion remained prohibited in all circumstances and access to the emergency contraception pill was hampered due to limited availability at public health facilities. The UN Human Rights Committee received a complaint against Honduras about an Indigenous woman and human rights defender who was denied an abortion after she was raped.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Congress passed a Safe Houses Law for women victims of gender-based violence, but the Integral Law against Violence against Women Bill was still pending at the end of the year.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Same-sex marriage remained prohibited. There was no progress towards a procedure for the recognition of gender identity, which had been ruled by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

1. "Honduras: Water defender killed", 20 September ↑

HUNGARY

Hungary

A new state office targeted civil society organizations, independent media and activists. Thousands of people fleeing from Ukraine lost their state-supported housing in Hungary. The Court of Justice of the EU imposed a significant fine on Hungary for refusing to apply the EU common policy on migration and denying asylum seekers access to protection. Repressive legislation continued to exert a far-reaching and chilling effect on LGBTI people.

BACKGROUND

The European Court of Human Rights stated that Hungary had not contravened the European Convention on Human Rights by prohibiting assisted suicide or euthanasia, including when assistance was given in a foreign state. In January, after years of conflict with the central administration of the Hungarian courts, 128 judge-delegates elected 14 new members of the National Judicial Council tasked with supervising the lawful operation of the central administration of courts and the Supreme Court.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In February a new authority named the Sovereignty Protection Office began investigating organizations and individuals considered to be a threat to national sovereignty. Its remit gave it broad discretionary powers to stigmatize and intimidate those critical of the authorities. The office launched investigations against NGOs, including Transparency International Hungary, and an investigative media outlet. Reports published by the office concluded that Transparency International and other civil society organizations served foreign interests and harmed the political, economic and societal interests of Hungary.

Due to concerns about the activities of the Sovereignty Protection Office, the European Commission launched an infringement procedure against Hungary and referred the country to the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) in October. Despite several calls from civil society, the commission did not request an interim measure from the court. The case was pending at the end of the year.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

In November the parliament overturned a ban on physical contact between prisoners and their visitors, which had been in place since 2017. Although plexiglass separation screens would remain in some settings, the new rules would allow approximately 5,000 prisoners more intimate and personal contact with their loved ones from March 2025.

The changes followed a European Court of Human Rights decision against the ban in 2023.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

Following a death in police custody in 2018, the Supreme Court in April repealed the former judgment acquitting a police officer and ordered a new investigation to assess whether the police had used unlawful force.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The 2024 Gender Equality Index, published by the European Institute of Gender Equality, ranked Hungary 26th out of the 27 EU member states based on its overall performance, and placed it last in the domain of gender equality in positions of political and economic power.

An EU survey published in November found that 55% of Hungarian women had faced gender-based violence at some point and that 8% were currently living in an abusive relationship.

UNLAWFUL TARGETED SURVEILLANCE

In March the Budapest Metropolitan Court found that the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information had violated the human rights of four citizens targeted by Pegasus spyware, by not investigating their complaints effectively.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Temporary protection of people fleeing from Ukraine was prolonged until 4 March 2025. However, the government decided that, after 21 August, only pregnant women, children, people living with disabilities, and those aged 65 and older fleeing from "active combat zones" in Ukraine were eligible for state-supported housing. Approximately 3,000 people lost their housing as a result of these changes; most were women with small children, many of them Roma.

In June the CJEU imposed a fine of EUR 200 million (approximately HUF 80 billion) on Hungary for "deliberately evading the application of the EU common policy" on migration by not allowing people to claim asylum at the border. Additionally, Hungary faced a fine of EUR 1 million (approximately HUF 400 million) per day. This was to be applied until Hungary amended legislation allowing often violent pushbacks of asylum seekers at the country's borders.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

Hungary made no attempt to implement the recommendations of the European Commission's Rule of Law Report to address systematic deficiencies in judicial independence, media freedom and the country's anti-corruption framework.

In December the president of the National Judicial Council resigned after approximately

2,000 judges and court staff protested against a deal that required their agreement to a vaguely worded judicial reform proposal as a precondition for receiving a salary rise. Judges and judicial organizations described the deal as "blackmail" and criticized the government's proposal, fearing it could compromise their independence. However, the parliament adopted some elements of the reform in December.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Adding to its ongoing anti-LGBTI campaign, the government introduced further limitations on publications or products in cases where their "defining element" was deemed to portray or promote LGBTI themes or sexuality. The changes added to a sense of uncertainty among companies, creating a chilling effect and the likelihood of increased self-censorship.

The CJEU held a hearing in November as part of a European Commission infringement procedure against Hungary's anti-LGBTI "Propaganda Law" of 2021. The law continued to have a far-reaching effect on LGBTI individuals and groups, entrenching negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and restricting the right to freedom of expression. Government and European Parliament representatives from 16 member states intervened at the CJEU hearing.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Hungary ranked 45th in the Climate Change Performance Index in 2024, placing it among the low performers especially on renewable energy use. While Hungary's climate policies aligned with EU targets, they were vague and lacked actionable measures. Despite the growth of solar panel installations and the lifting of a ban on wind turbines, Hungary planned to increase domestic production of fossil gas and extend to 2030 the operating life of a coal-fired power plant responsible for 14% of Hungary's CO2 emissions.

INDIA

Republic of India

National financial and investigation agencies were weaponized against civil society, human rights defenders, activists, journalists and critics, further shrinking civic space. Authorities continued to unlawfully demolish properties belonging to religious minorities as a means of meting out extrajudicial punishment. India's colonial-era criminal procedure and penal laws were repealed to bring in new laws that continued to carry problematic provisions such as sedition. Travel restrictions were imposed on academics, journalists and human rights defenders by suspending their work visas, denying them entry to the country and cancelling their Overseas Citizen of India status. The Election Commission conducted state legislative assembly elections after 10 years in Jammu & Kashmir. Manipur continued to reel under ethnic violence.

BACKGROUND

General elections were held from 19 April to 1 June, against a backdrop of repression of peaceful protesters and systematic discrimination against religious minorities. Despite not winning the majority of constituencies, the ruling political party, Bharatiya Janata, started its third consecutive term in government by forming a coalition with the National Democratic Alliance.

On 22 January, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a Hindu Ram temple in Ayodhya town, Uttar Pradesh state, on the site of Babri Masjid, a medieval-era mosque that was demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992. The inauguration ahead of the elections was marked by religious tensions in the country, leading to incidents of violence against Muslims.

In June the global Financial Action Task Force (FATF) concluded its fourth evaluation of India's efforts to stamp out money laundering and to counter the financing of

terrorism. It called on India to ensure that the restrictive measures it had put in place around the regulation and monitoring of non-profit organizations and their funding follow a risk-based analysis in line with the FATF definition.

India's membership of the UN Human Rights Council came to an end after two consecutive three-year terms. Between 2019 and 2024 the country received a total of 83 communications from various UN experts and responded to only 20. It had accepted only one visit request since 2019 and had 19 pending, including from the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, dating back to 1999.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

The authorities passed laws that criminalized dissent, with debilitating consequences for the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and fair trial.

On 1 July, three laws – Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam and Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita – came into force. They replaced the Indian Penal Code, 1860; the Indian Evidence Act, 1872; and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1882. Claimed to overhaul colonial-era laws, the new laws retained problematic provisions including sedition.

On 11 April, Apple notified several users in India of potential attacks by "mercenary spyware", including the cyber-intelligence firm NSO Group's Pegasus malware. Iltija Mufti, media advisor and daughter of Kashmiri political leader Mehbooba Mufti, and Pushparaj Deshpande, founder of the non-profit organization Samruddha Bharat Foundation, reported receiving the notifications.

Legislative attempts to stifle freedom of expression were thwarted. Following a public backlash, in August the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting withdrew a draft of the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, which sought to expand the scope of "digital news broadcasters" to include content creators on social media channels. On 20 September the Bombay High Court struck down the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 – that had allowed authorities to label online content as "fake or false or misleading" – as unconstitutional.

According to the Software Freedom Law Center, a digital rights organization tracking internet shutdowns, authorities imposed 40 internet shutdowns between January and December in nine states and one union territory. These blanket shutdowns were imposed to "maintain law and order" during episodes of ethnic and communal violence, farmer protests and aptitude examinations for government jobs and higher studies.

Garment workers continued to face major challenges to their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Low wages and extreme levels of casualization of labour were endemic, especially for women and female workers from the Dalit community.

Human rights defenders

Authorities weaponized the central financial and investigation agencies to crack down on civil society organizations and human rights defenders. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act licences of at least seven NGOs were cancelled, preventing the organizations from accessing essential funds. On 25 September the Income Tax Department cancelled the tax-exempt registration of Aman Biradari, an NGO founded by activist Harsh Mander.

On 1 July a Delhi court sentenced human rights activist Medha Patkar to five months' imprisonment in a politically motivated 23-year-old criminal defamation case filed by the government-appointed Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. The sentence was later suspended on appeal.

On 17 October the United States Department of Justice filed charges of money laundering and murder-for-hire against Vikash Yadav, an employee of the Indian government. He was accused of involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate Sikh activist Gurwant Singh Pannun.

Journalists

The authorities continued to crack down on local journalists and imposed travel restrictions on foreign journalists by refusing them work visas and cancelling their overseas citizenship of India (OCI) status.

The OCI status of Vanessa Dougnac, a former South Asia correspondent for various international media organizations, was cancelled for her "malicious and critical" reporting. Avani Das, South Asia bureau chief of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and French journalist Sébastien Farcis were forced to leave India after the authorities refused to extend their work permits.

On 11 September, Australian filmmaker David Bradbury was denied entry into India without any explanation. He was interrogated about his documentary on the protests against the Kudankulam nuclear plant in Tamil Nadu state.

On 26 November, Uttar Pradesh police informed the Allahabad High Court that the first information report against news website Alt News co-founder Mohammed Zubair included "endangering sovereignty, unity and integrity of India". The police commenced its investigation into Mohammed Zubair based on the first information report.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Six students and human rights activists remained in detention for their alleged involvement in orchestrating the 2020 Delhi communal violence.

In the lead-up to the general elections the Enforcement Directorate, India's primary financial crime investigation agency, arrested Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's chief minister, and Hemant Soren, Jharkhand's chief minister. They were both members of opposition political parties. The Supreme Court granted them bail in September. On 8 May, Tamil Nadu state police arrested YouTuber Savukku Shankar for making "denigrating comments" against women police personnel in Coimbatore city. Following his arrest, a total of 17 first information reports were filed against Savukku Shankar, leading to his administrative detention under the Tamil Nadu Goondas Act. On 25 September the Supreme Court ordered his release.

On 14 May the Supreme Court granted bail to Gautam Navlakha, a journalist who had spent four years in pretrial detention. The charges against him, including under the draconian anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), related to his alleged involvement in the Bhima Koregaon violence. Sixteen human rights activists were arrested and eight continued to remain imprisoned without trial in this case.

On 14 June, Delhi's lieutenant governor sanctioned the prosecution of Arundhati Roy, an internationally celebrated writer, and Sheikh Showkat Hussain, a Kashmiri academic. They were charged under the UAPA.

On 6 July, Uttar Pradesh police filed a first information report against journalist Zakir Ali Tyagi and three others. They were accused of "promoting enmity between different groups" and "making statements conducive to public mischief" for posting messages on social media about the lynching of a Muslim man in Shamli district on 5 July.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Forced evictions

Forced evictions and punitive demolitions of properties were used by state authorities from 2020 as a form of collective and arbitrary punishment following episodes of communal violence and protests. Between 2020 and 2022, over 2,840 properties, including homes and places of worship, mostly belonging to Muslims, in various states across India were demolished.[1]

In November, in two landmark judgments, the Supreme Court ruled that arbitrary demolitions of properties, often instigated by the highest levels of government against Muslims in particular, were "high handed and arbitrary" and amounted to "collective punishment".[2] The court declared them unconstitutional and laid down a series of due process guidelines.

Discrimination

On 7 March, ahead of the general elections, the Assam state government suspended the granting of no-objection certificates for land sales between people belonging to different religions for a period of three months. This raised concerns about discrimination against Muslims as it effectively restricted them to living in religiously segregated areas.

On 24 September the Uttar Pradesh government directed that the names and addresses of operators, proprietors and managers must be displayed at all food centres. This directive was despite a Supreme Court ruling on 22 July that refused to enforce a similar directive in Uttar Pradesh state, holding that it perpetuates identity-based discrimination.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

There were numerous incidents of unlawful use of force against peaceful protesters by police officials.

Following peaceful large-scale farmers' protests in February in Punjab and Haryana states, Haryana police unlawfully used drones to fire rounds of tear gas to disperse protesters. On 21 February, 20-year-old farmer Shubhkaran Singh was shot dead during the protest.[3] On the order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, a committee was formed to investigate his death.

Over 1,500 workers from Samsung Electronics staged a peaceful protest in Chennai city, Tamil Nadu state. They demanded the recognition of their newly-formed union to ensure negotiation over better wages and work management. In response, the police detained over 300 protesters.

At least 51 people in seven states faced criminal cases for organizing pro-Palestine rallies and for posting pro-Palestine content on social media.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

On 9 August, a 31-year-old trainee doctor was raped and murdered at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, West Bengal state, sparking a wave of protests across the country. On 14 August, unidentified people attacked hospital staff members who were protesting.

The media reported 33 incidents of sexual and physical violence against Dalit women between January and September.

DISCRIMINATION

In a landmark judgment, a court in Karnataka state convicted 101 people in the 2014 Marakumbi caste atrocity case and sentenced 98 people to life imprisonment for torching the huts of Dalits.

In October a 19-year-old Dalit woman in Madhya Pradesh state was burned to death after filing a complaint that she had been sexually harassed. The woman was set on fire by the son of the man she had reported to police for harassment.

On 7 February, Uttarakhand state passed the Uniform Civil Code, without adequate legislative and public consultation. It replaced religion-specific civil laws on personal matters. The law was seen as targeting the customary rules followed by Muslims while not changing any customary rules for the Hindu community. On 11 March the authorities operationalized the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. The Act legitimized discrimination on the basis of religion by failing to recognize Muslims as asylum seekers and refugees.

On 30 July the Uttar Pradesh state legislative assembly amended the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act. The amendment effectively criminalized consensual inter-faith marriages and raised the maximum punishment to life imprisonment.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Khurram Parvez, a Kashmiri human rights defender, remained in detention under politically motivated charges of terrorism.

On 23 February, Nitasha Kaul, a British-Indian professor of Kashmiri origin, was denied entry to India while on her way to attend a conference in Bengaluru, Karnataka state.

On 10 May, Aasif Sultan, editor of online news portal Kashmir Wallah, was granted bail

and released from prison after being held for nearly six years.

Between 18 September and 1 October, and in compliance with the 2023 Supreme Court judgment, the Election Commission conducted the first legislative assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir since the elected government was dissolved in 2019.

In June and July, in the lead-up to the elections, four renowned Kashmiri lawyers and members of the Jammu and Kashmir Bar Association were arrested in Srinagar under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA).[4] On 12 July the lieutenant governor of Jammu and Kashmir – appointed by the central government – was given absolute control over state governance, including local administrative officials, prisons, prosecutions and law offices.

On 8 October, journalist Sajad Gul was released after being held for two years under the PSA.

MANIPUR

The state government failed to end continued ethnic violence between the dominant Meitei community and the minority Kuki and other tribal hill communities. At least 32 reported incidents of gender-based violence were committed against those belonging to ethnic tribal communities by members of armed vigilante groups Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Lippun. No vigilante group members faced prosecution.[5] Houses were burned and more than 20 people were killed in the state in November.

According to media organization The Wire, a 48-minute audio file was submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs allegedly containing discriminatory remarks made by the state's chief minister, N. Biren Singh, against the Kuki tribal community and evidence of his official complicity in the ongoing ethnic violence.

On 22 September, Meitei Lippun threatened human rights activist Babloo Loitongbam and his family for allegedly collaborating with the tribal Kuki community during the ethnic violence.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government lacked adequate disaster preparedness policies and failed to effectively respond to floods and air pollution exacerbated by climate change. In November the air pollution level in the capital, New Delhi, put residents' health at serious risk, according to data by the Central Pollution Control Board. Assam state remained vulnerable to intense floods, which killed at least 113 people in July and affected at least 3.3 million people.

The authorities failed to provide adequate support to marginalized communities affected by heatwaves, leaving at least 100 people dead and 40,000 affected. Analysis by Skymet, a weather services company, said climate change had altered weather patterns, including the absence of winter rain, which contributed to declining air quality over the Indo-Gangetic Plains, including Delhi. The Climate Action Tracker rated India's climate targets and policies as "highly insufficient", indicating that they are not consistent with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature limit.

1. *India: "If You Speak Up, Your House Will be Demolished": Bulldozer Injustice in India*, 7 February ↑
2. "India: Landmark Supreme Court judgement must serve as a turning point in hate campaigns against Muslims in India", 13 November ↑
3. "India: The price of protest must not be death", 22 February ↑
4. "India: Authorities must end repression of dissent in Jammu and Kashmir", 18 September ↑
5. "India: Authorities 'missing-in-action' amid ongoing violence and impunity in Manipur state – New testimonies", 16 July ↑

INDONESIA

Republic of Indonesia

Public protests were met with excessive and unnecessary force by police. Journalists were targeted. Freedom of expression continued to be repressed under problematic laws. Unlawful killings, torture and impunity continued in Papua.

Development projects affecting Indigenous Peoples lacked free, prior and informed consent. Concerns were raised about energy policy and the government's plan for zero net emissions. Research revealed that intrusive spyware and surveillance technology was imported and deployed by the government.

BACKGROUND

In February, Prabowo Subianto was elected as the new president. Prabowo Subianto had previously been accused of responsibility for human rights violations in the late 1990s, including the enforced disappearance of activists. There were widespread doubts about the independence of the election process, including criticism of former president Joko Widodo for campaigning on behalf of his son Gibran Rakabuming Raka, despite Gibran not meeting formal requirements for candidacy. The requirement was later reaffirmed in a Constitutional Court ruling.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Security forces employed excessive and unnecessary force against protesters.

On 20 May the People's Water Forum (PWF) – an event bringing together a worldwide network of people and organizations advocating for water as a human right – was violently disrupted by members of a local paramilitary group demanding the cancellation of the event. Video footage showed the group destroying event banners and billboards and physically attacking forum participants. They accused the PWF of distracting attention from the 10th World Water Forum, concurrently hosted by the government in Nusa Dua, Bali.[1] Not only did the authorities fail to prevent the attack, but by year's end the perpetrators remained unidentified.

Between 22 and 26 August, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in provinces across the country to protest attempts by the House of Representatives to change the election law, despite a Constitutional Court ruling. The amendment would have reintroduced higher thresholds for political parties to field local candidates. It would also have permitted the son of former president Joko Widodo – who did not meet the age requirement for candidacy – to run for regional office. Due to the backlash, parliament withdrew the bill.

Security forces responded to the demonstrations, known as the "#EmergencyWarning" *(#PeringatanDarurat)* protests, with excessive and unnecessary use of force and arbitrary arrests. At least 344 people were arrested, 152 physically injured and 17 suffered from the effects of tear gas. At least one person was subjected to short-term enforced disappearance, while 65 suffered multiple abuses, including arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention.[2] Most of those arrested were subsequently released. Fourteen people were charged under the Criminal Code for expressing hatred and for violence against property. In Bandung, West Java province, a video verified by Amnesty International showed police officers chasing unarmed protesters, striking them with batons and stamping on them. On 26 August, in Semarang, Central Java province, at least 15 university students were hospitalized after police used tear gas to disperse protesters. Children were also exposed to tear gas used in residential areas.[3]

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

At least 123 cases of physical assaults, digital attacks, threats and other forms of reprisals against 288 human rights defenders were reported during the year. Human rights defenders lacked adequate legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to threats and intimidation. Very few of those responsible for the attacks were brought to justice, with only a small number being convicted in court.

On 17 July, Yan Christian Warinussy, a senior lawyer and human rights activist in Papua, was shot and injured by an unidentified person in Manokwari, West Papua province. The attack occurred after he attended a corruption trial involving local state auditors at the Manokwari anti-corruption court. By year's end there was no known progress in a police inquiry.[4]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In January the Second Amendment to the Electronic Information and Transaction Law (EIT) entered into force and included several changes which were deemed insufficient by civil society. There were concerns that the Amendment retained criminal sanctions for defamation which had been consistently utilized to suppress rights defenders and opposition figures since the EIT was first issued in 2016.

On 8 January, human rights defenders Haris Azhar and Fatia Maulidiyanti were acquitted of criminal defamation charges by the East Jakarta District Court. They had been charged under the EIT law for "spreading false information" via a YouTube video which reported allegations that a minister and members of the military were involved in the mining industry in Papua province.

In March a ruling by the Constitutional Court declared three articles of the Criminal Code and criminal law regulation on defamation as unconstitutional.

Journalists

Journalists continued to encounter violence and intimidation. During the "#EmergencyWarning" protests, at least 11 journalists in the capital, Jakarta, were reportedly targeted by law enforcement. Incidents involved acts of intimidation and death threats, as well as psychological and physical violence, resulting in serious injuries. Three members of the Student Press Institute in Semarang, Central Java province, suffered breathing problems and lost consciousness due to exposure to tear gas fired by police to disperse a demonstration.

On 22 August, members of the security forces were suspected of beating and threatening to kill a journalist working for the news outlet Tempo, who was covering a demonstration at the Parliamentary Complex. Three police officers apparently hit and intimidated the journalist at a nearby police post and forced him to delete the video he had recorded.[5] Tempo submitted a formal complaint to the police. At the end of the year, there had been no reported progress on the case.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Amnesty International documented at least 40 cases of torture and other ill-treatment with at least 59 victims during the year. In January a police officer allegedly tortured four residents from Amasing village, North Maluku province. According to the victims, they were travelling to Labuha village when they were stopped by a police officer, who beat and stepped on them and directed others to join in the assault. The police denied involvement and refused to reveal the name of the accused perpetrator.[6]

In March a 16-second video circulated showing a Papuan man being tortured inside a barrel filled with water.[7] The incident was reportedly part of the torture of three Indigenous Papuan men the previous month. A credible source found that the incident took place in Puncak Regency, Central Papua province, and stated that the perpetrators were members of the Yonif 300 Raider Braja Wijaya Battalion from West Java province, who were sent to Papua for border patrol. After initially denying involvement, 13 officers were named as suspects by the West Java military, who claimed the victim in the video was among Papuan armed separatists who had tried to flee during arrest. He later died and the two other Papuan men were hospitalized. At year's end, the perpetrators had not been brought to court.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

In Papua, unlawful killings of civilians continued with impunity within the context of the conflict between the Indonesian military and armed separatist groups.

In May, in its concluding observations, the UN Human Rights Committee raised concerns about extrajudicial killings of Indigenous Papuans.

In August, officers from the Nabire Police Office in Papua arrested Yeremias Magai and Ken Boga on suspicion of murdering a security guard. During their interrogation both men were allegedly blindfolded and beaten with bare fists and heavy tools including a

hammer. Yermias Magai died from his injuries. Ken Boga and the family of the deceased maintained their innocence and claimed that the interrogation was an attempt to force a confession. The lawyers for the victims' families reported the case to the Indonesian Commission of Human Rights for investigation.

In August a New Zealand helicopter pilot, Glen Malcolm Conning, was killed by armed group members upon landing in Papua. He had been transporting health workers from a private company. Amnesty International called for a full investigation.[8] In September, another New Zealander, Philip Mark Mehrtens, a pilot of a small commercial plane, was released after being held for more than 19 months by the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB), a pro-independence group in the Papua region.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The implementation of National Strategic Projects – projects deemed to have an exceptional impact on economic growth in Indonesia – went ahead in the absence of sufficient prior consultation with affected communities. In many cases, they lacked the free, prior and informed consent of impacted Indigenous Peoples.

In March, residents of Sukaraja, Bukit Raya, Pemaluan and Bumi Harapan, largely Balik Indigenous Peoples, received a notice from the Nusantara Capital Authority demanding they demolish their properties within a week. The authority argued that the homes violated the spatial plan of the proposed new Indonesian capital and sent a consultation invitation to the affected communities only 24 hours before the meeting. The authority later revoked the demolition order following objections from residents, who were nevertheless required to relocate with insufficient compensation. At the end of the year residents continued to live under the threat of imminent eviction.

Residents affected by Rempang Eco City, a 17,000-hectare integrated industrial project in the Riau Islands, faced similar problems. In September, one year after security personnel violently confronted those protesting against the project, plain-clothed individuals continued to intimidate and assault residents guarding a road in Sungai Bulu village. Three people were injured when they were hit by a wooden plank and a helmet. Posters expressing opposition to the project were also damaged.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In September the government finalized two major policy documents: the Draft Government Regulation concerning the National Energy Policy (RPP KEN) and the New and Renewable Energy (EBET) Bill. The documents were deemed crucial for shaping the country's energy policy. While the Ministry of Mineral Energy and Resources and Commission VII of the parliament agreed on the Government Regulation on RPP KEN, parliamentary discussions on the EBET Bill were ongoing at year's end.

Civil society organizations raised concerns about the two bills, believing that they remained inadequate for a transition towards net zero emissions. In the RPP KEN, the government lowered the targets for the renewable energy mix, adjusting the 2025 goal from 23% to a range of 17-19%, and for 2030 from 26% to a new range of 19-21%. The EBET Bill still allowed the development of fossil fuels, as long as it was accompanied by carbon capture and storage technology. In addition, both documents lacked social impact considerations, leading to fears of further land-grabbing for energy projects and prolonging injustice for communities.

UNLAWFUL TARGETED SURVEILLANCE

In May, Amnesty International published a research report detailing the extensive sales and use of highly intrusive spyware and surveillance technologies from 2017 until at least 2023. There were numerous instances of spyware imports or deployments by companies and state agencies, including the National Police and the National Cyber and Crypto Agency. The equipment was sourced from Greece, Israel, Malaysia and Singapore.[9]

The Personal Data Protection Law, enacted in 2022, officially came into force on 17

October. However, the authorities had not fully formulated the implementing regulations, including establishing a dedicated data protection agency as mandated by the law.

1. "Indonesia: Shameful intimidation of participants at People's Water Forum in Bali", 22 May ↑
2. "Indonesia: Police must be held accountable for repeated unlawful use of force against peaceful protesters", 9 Dec ↑
3. "Indonesia: "Stop police brutality", 27 August (only available in Bahasa Indonesia) ↑
4. "Indonesia: Shooting of human rights defender shows increasing threats in Papua", 18 July ↑
5. "Indonesia: The Committee for the Safety of Journalists Condemns Police Violence Against Journalists During the Protest Against the 2024 Regional Election Bill", 24 August (only available in Bahasa Indonesia) ↑
6. "Indonesia: Investigate Brimob members involved in torturing South Halmahera residents", 12 February (only available in Bahasa Indonesia) ↑
7. "Indonesia: Thoroughly investigate torture in Puncak, evaluate TNI placement in Papua ", 3 March (only available in Bahasa Indonesia) ↑
8. "Indonesia: 'Unlawful killing' of New Zealand pilot in Papua must be investigated", 6 August ↑
9. *Indonesia: A Web of Surveillance: Unravelling a Murky Network of Spyware Exports to Indonesia*, 1 May ↑

IRAN

Islamic Republic of Iran

Authorities further suppressed the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Women and girls, LGBTI people, and ethnic and religious minorities experienced systemic discrimination and violence. Authorities intensified their crackdown on women who defied compulsory veiling laws, the Baha'i community, and Afghan refugees and migrants. Thousands were arbitrarily detained, interrogated, harassed and/or unjustly prosecuted for exercising their human rights. Trials remained systematically unfair. Enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment were widespread and systematic. Cruel and inhuman punishments, including flogging and amputation, were implemented. The death penalty was used arbitrarily, disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities and migrants. Systemic impunity prevailed for past and ongoing crimes against humanity relating to prison massacres in 1988 and other crimes under international law.

BACKGROUND

In April the UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran (FFMI). They and other independent UN experts and international human rights monitors were denied entry to Iran.

In May, President Ebrahim Raisi died in a helicopter crash. He was succeeded by Masoud Pezeshkian in July after a low-turnout election in which the Guardian Council approved only six out of 80 registered candidates.

Iran continued to support Hamas, other Palestinian armed groups and Hezbollah. In April, Iran launched more than 300 munitions at Israel in retaliation for a strike on Iran's consulate in Syria which killed seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. In October, Iran launched almost 200 ballistic missiles at Israel in response to the killings of Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas, and Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hezbollah. The attack killed a Palestinian civilian in the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the same month, Israel carried out air strikes on 20 targets inside Iran, killing one civilian and four military personnel.

Iran provided military support to the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria before his ousting on 8 December.

Iran provided drones and ballistic missiles to Russia, which were used against civilian infrastructure in Ukraine.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Authorities censored media, jammed satellite television channels, and continued to block or filter mobile apps and social media platforms.

Authorities continued to ban all independent political parties, civil society organizations and trade unions, and subjected workers – including nurses, teachers and labour rights activists – to reprisals for striking and peacefully gathering.

The Internet User Protection Bill, which, if enacted, would further violate people's right to privacy and erode access to the global internet, remained pending before parliament. In January, the Supreme Leader approved a decree prohibiting the use of virtual private networks (VPNs) and coercing users to rely on the domestic internet.

In June, criminal cases were filed against hundreds of people for publicly criticizing Ebrahim Raisi after his death. Hundreds of others received intimidating telephone calls, warnings or summons after authorities declared that "encouraging" presidential election boycotts online was a crime.

Authorities subjected families of victims unlawfully killed during the 2022 Woman Life Freedom uprising and the November 2019 protests to violations for seeking justice.

Authorities subjected protesters, women and girls defying compulsory veiling laws, journalists, artists, writers, academics, university students, LGBTI individuals, members of ethnic and religious minorities and human rights defenders to violations for exercising their human rights, including in advance of the two-year anniversary of the 2022 uprising in September.[1] Violations included interrogations; arbitrary detention; enforced disappearance; unjust prosecution leading to sentences of imprisonment, flogging or fines; and suspension or expulsion from education or employment.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Authorities routinely subjected detainees to enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention. Torture and other ill-treatment were widespread and systematic. State television aired torture-tainted "confessions".

Several individuals arbitrarily detained for political reasons in psychiatric facilities were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including through enforced administration of pharmaceuticals.

Prison officials and prosecution authorities routinely denied prisoners adequate healthcare, including for torture-related injuries.

Several individuals died in custody in suspicious circumstances, amid credible reports of torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings and denial of healthcare. Among them was Mohammad Mirmousavi, who died the day after his arrest in August. Authorities initially attributed his death to a heart attack, while state media implied that he died from injuries sustained during an altercation before arrest. Authorities only conceded responsibility after a video showing his wounded body led to public outrage. Five police officers were arrested but no information was announced regarding their prosecution.

Prisoners were subjected to cruel and inhuman detention conditions, including overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, poor ventilation, infestation with mice or insects, and poor or no access to bedding, toilets or washing facilities.

The Islamic Penal Code retained punishments amounting to torture, including flogging, blinding, amputation, crucifixion and stoning.

Courts issued at least 186 flogging sentences, according to the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran. Floggings and amputations were carried out.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Trials were systematically unfair, resulting in arbitrary detentions. Due process violations included denial of the right to a lawyer from the time of arrest, admission of torture-tainted "confessions" as evidence, and summary trials.

The judiciary, lacking independence, played a central role in entrenching impunity

for torture, enforced disappearances and other crimes under international law.

Impunity prevailed for the arbitrary detention of foreign and dual nationals held for leverage. In some cases, this practice constituted the crime of hostage-taking.

The arbitrary house arrest of dissidents Mehdi Karroubi, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Zahra Rahnavard entered its 14th year.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Authorities continued to treat women as second-class citizens, including in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody, employment, inheritance and political office.

The legal age of marriage for girls remained at 13, and fathers could obtain judicial permission to subject their daughters to forced marriage at a younger age.

Authorities used politically motivated charges carrying the death penalty against women human rights defenders. Sharifeh Mohammadi was sentenced to death in June,[2] and Pakhshan Azizi in July.[3]

From April onwards, the authorities implemented the Noor Plan to intensify their crackdown on women and girls who defied compulsory veiling, including through digital surveillance such as facial recognition technology, further violating women's social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights and restricting their freedom of movement. Increased security patrols subjected women and girls to harassment and violence in public spaces.[4] The crackdown included barring women university students from education; using dangerous car chases to stop women drivers on the road; mass confiscation of women's vehicles; forced "morality" classes; imprisonment and flogging.

In July, police agents seeking to confiscate a woman's car to enforce compulsory veiling laws fired lethal ammunition towards the vehicle, seriously injuring passenger Arezou Badri.

In August, authorities subjected human rights defender Narges Mohammadi and other women prisoners in Evin prison to torture and other ill-treatment, resulting in injuries, and denied them adequate medical care.

In September the Guardian Council approved the bill on the Law Supporting the Family Through the Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab, further entrenching discrimination and violence against women and girls. The Law was due to be signed by the president and come into force on 13 December, but its promulgation was temporarily paused.

In November, authorities announced plans to open a clinic in the capital, Tehran, "for quitting hijab removal" to provide "scientific and psychological treatment" for women and girls not complying with compulsory veiling.

Those defying compulsory veiling faced imprisonment, exorbitant fines and denial of access to education and public services.

The bill Preventing Harm to Women and Improving Their Security Against Misconduct remained pending before parliament. The draft failed to define domestic violence as an offence, criminalize marital rape or child marriage, or ensure that men who murder their female relatives face proportionate punishments.

DISCRIMINATION

Ethnic minorities

Ethnic minorities, including Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmen faced widespread human rights violations, including discrimination in access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office. Under-investment in regions populated by ethnic minorities continued, exacerbating their poverty and marginalization.

Persian remained the sole language of instruction in primary and secondary education, despite repeated calls for linguistic diversity.

Security forces unlawfully killed and injured with impunity scores of unarmed Kurdish cross-border couriers (*kulbars*) between the Kurdistan regions of Iran and Iraq, and Baluchi fuel porters (*soukhtbar*) in Sistan and Baluchestan province.

Religious minorities

Religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sunni Muslims and Yaresan suffered discrimination in law and practice, including in access to education, employment, child adoption, political office and places of worship. Authorities subjected members of religious minorities to arbitrary detention, unjust prosecution and torture and other ill-treatment for professing or practising their faith.

People born to parents classified as Muslim by the authorities risked arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment and the death penalty for "apostasy" if they adopted other religions or atheism.

Authorities raided house churches and arbitrarily detained Christian converts.

Members of the Baha'i faith were subjected to widespread and systematic violations, including arbitrary detention, raids on their homes, exclusion from higher education, expulsion from jobs, forcible closure of businesses, confiscation and destruction of properties, unjust prosecutions, and lengthy prison terms solely for practising their faith. Baha'i women were particularly targeted, with dozens subjected to interrogations and imprisonment.

In January, authorities seized agricultural land belonging to Baha'i families in Mazandaran province. In May, they bulldozed their rice paddies, destroying crops and irrigation berms.

Authorities prevented Baha'i burials in a cemetery used by Baha'is for decades. In March, authorities destroyed more than 30 Baha'i graves in the Khavaran mass grave site. In August, authorities failed to investigate after a Baha'i cemetery in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province, was vandalized.

LGBTI people

LGBTI people suffered systemic discrimination and violence. Consensual same-sex sexual relations remained criminalized with punishments ranging from flogging to the death penalty.

State-endorsed "conversion therapies" amounting to torture or other ill-treatment remained prevalent, including against children. Hormone therapy and surgical procedures, including sterilization, were mandatory for people changing their legal gender.

Gender non-conforming individuals suffered criminalization and denial of access to education and employment.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Afghan nationals faced widespread discrimination, including barriers to education, housing, employment, healthcare, banking services and freedom of movement. Officials dehumanized Afghan nationals, fuelling hate speech and violence against them.

Authorities violently carried out mass arrests and forced returns and boasted of deporting 850,000 "unauthorized nationals" – likely referring to Afghan nationals and people of Afghan origin – between March and November without due process.

In October, authorities denied reports that security forces used firearms against scores of Afghan nationals at the Iran-Pakistan border, causing deaths and injuries, and failed to carry out effective investigations.

DEATH PENALTY

Hundreds of people were arbitrarily executed.

The death penalty was imposed following grossly unfair trials, including for offences such as drug trafficking which do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" involving intentional killing.[5]

The death penalty was retained for acts protected by the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, religion or belief, including drinking alcohol and consensual same-sex sexual relationships. "Adultery" (sexual relationships outside marriage) remained punishable by stoning to death.

Authorities used the death penalty as a tool of political repression against protesters, dissidents and ethnic minorities.

Oppressed minorities, including Baluchis and Afghan nationals, made up a disproportionate number of those executed.

Two individuals, including a youth with a mental disability, were executed in relation to

the 2022 uprising, in January[6] and August[7], after convictions in unfair trials and based on torture-tainted "confessions". Several others were sentenced to death.

Authorities continued to sentence to death and execute individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime;[8] scores of them remained on death row.

IMPUNITY

Systemic impunity prevailed for officials involved in unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearance and other crimes under international law and grave human rights violations committed in 2024 and previous years.

A bill amending the law on the use of firearms was pending before parliament amid calls by high-level officials to expedite its passing. If approved, the bill would allow additional security and intelligence bodies to carry firearms and further entrench impunity for their unlawful use.

Security forces unlawfully fired at people in cars with impunity, causing deaths and injuries, disproportionately affecting the Baluchi minority.

In March, authorities responded to a December 2023 Amnesty International report by denying that any officials perpetrated sexual violence against protesters in the 2022 uprising. Separately, they responded to an FFMI report by denying its findings that authorities committed the crimes against humanity of murder, imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts during the uprising.

Also in March, the Special Committee for Examining the Unrest of 2022, established by the late president, Ebrahim Raisi, issued a report covering up violations and blaming unlawful killings on "rioters and terrorists". Apart from three officials prosecuted behind closed doors, no one was known to have been prosecuted for the unlawful killing and torture of protesters and bystanders during the 2022 uprising.

In January the Supreme Court quashed a death sentence issued by a military court against Jafar Javanmardi, the police commander of Bandar Anzali, Gilan province, for the killing of a protester and sent the case back to a lower court for retrial. In March, a military court in Qazvin province reinstated the death sentence. State media pressured the judiciary to release him, claiming that he had been protecting national security. State media subsequently reported that the judiciary would re-examine the case due to "multiple flaws".

Authorities continued to conceal the truth surrounding the January 2020 missile strike against Ukraine International Airlines flight 752, which killed 176 people. In August, the Supreme Court quashed the previous military court ruling sentencing 10 officials to prison terms, citing investigative flaws, and sent the case back to the lower court for re-examination.

In March and August, authorities prevented victims' families from accessing the Khavaran mass grave site, which is believed to contain the remains of some of the several thousand political dissidents forcibly disappeared and extrajudicially executed in 1988. Some of the officials involved in past and ongoing crimes against humanity arising from the 1988 prison massacres continued to hold high official positions.

In June a prisoner exchange deal between Iran and Sweden allowed former Iranian prison official Hamid Nouri, who was sentenced to life imprisonment by a Swedish court in relation to his role in the 1988 prison massacres, to return to Iran.[9] The deal contributed to ongoing impunity for the commission of hostage-taking and other crimes under international law by Iranian authorities.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Authorities failed to address Iran's environmental crisis, marked by loss of lakes, rivers and wetlands; groundwater depletion; deforestation; water pollution from discharge of wastewater into urban water sources; land subsidence; and air pollution caused, in part, by the industrial use of substandard fuels, which contributed to thousands of deaths, according to the health ministry, as well as

the closure of schools and businesses in December.

Iran maintained high levels of fossil fuel production and subsidies and failed to protect marginalized communities from the impacts of climate change.

The authorities' mismanagement of water resources led to water shortages, particularly in the provinces of Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchestan, home to the Ahwazi Arab and Baluchi minorities respectively. Poor water-delivery infrastructure in Sistan and Baluchestan province resulted in several Baluchi villagers, including children, drowning in dangerous pits used to access water.

1. "Iran: Two years after 'Woman Life Freedom' uprising, impunity for crimes reigns supreme", 11 September ↑
2. "Iran: Woman rights defender at risk of execution: Sharifeh Mohammadi", 9 September ↑
3. "Iran: Kurdish woman activist sentenced to death: Pakhshan Azizi", 30 September ↑
4. *Iran: Testimonies Provide a Frightening Glimpse Into the Daily Reality of Women and Girls*, 6 March ↑
5. "Iran: Drug-related executions surging in Iran", 4 April ↑
6. "Iran: Executions of protester with mental disability and Kurdish man mark plunge into new realms of cruelty", 24 January ↑
7. "Iran: Shocking secret execution of young man in relation to 'Woman Life Freedom' uprising", 6 August ↑
8. "Iran: Youth arrested at 17 at risk of imminent execution: Mohammad Reza Azizi", 24 October ↑
9. *Iran/Sweden: Staggering Blow to Justice for 1988 Prison Massacres in Iran Amid Long Overdue Release of Swedish Nationals*, 18 June ↑

IRAQ

Republic of Iraq

Impunity prevailed for violations committed in the context of military operations against the armed group Islamic State. The fate of thousands forcibly disappeared since 2014 remained undisclosed. Justice and adequate reparations were slow for enforced disappearances and unlawful killings committed by security forces and militias during and in the aftermath of the October 2019 protests. Authorities arrested and prosecuted people over "indecent content" and stifled civil society. Journalists were harassed, prosecuted and arrested for their media work in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Protests in central and southern Iraq were met with excessive and unnecessary force. A draft bill to amend the Personal Status Law threatened to further undermine women's rights and allow child marriage for girls as young as nine. Violence against women and girls often went unpunished, including in the Kurdistan Region. Internally displaced people struggled to access housing, water and medical care and remained at risk of arbitrary detention. The death penalty was imposed, often after unfair trials, and mass executions were carried out. Rampant overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in prisons continued. Iraqi authorities failed to address the country's worsening environmental crisis.

BACKGROUND

Throughout the year, Türkiye carried out air and drone strikes on what it said were positions held by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) and carried out drone attacks to assassinate individuals it claimed were PKK members.

In January, missiles which Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) claimed were targeting Israeli operations struck homes in Erbil in the KR-I, killing at least four civilians including one infant girl, and injuring at least six others, according to the Kurdistan Region Security Council. Throughout the year, other attacks were launched by the IRGC targeting anti-Iran Kurdish opposition groups inside the KR-I.

In March and May, Iraq and the KR-I experienced significant flooding across several governorates, primarily due to heavy rainfall, displacing hundreds of people. At least eight deaths and 11 injuries were reported across the KR-I.

On 20 October, parliamentary elections initially scheduled for 2022 were held in the KR-I.

Throughout the year the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of armed factions under the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), intensified its operations against Israel in a response to Israeli military campaigns in Gaza and Lebanon, firing missiles they said were targeted at military objectives in Israel and the occupied Golan Heights.

In August an unclaimed rocket attack on a US base in western Iraq injured at least five US personnel and two contractors. A similar attack was launched in October on another US base in the capital, Baghdad, with no casualties reported.

Throughout the year the armed group Islamic State carried out attacks targeting and killing members of the Iraqi Security Forces as well as civilians, primarily in the governorates of Anbar, Diyala and Salah Al-Din.

IMPUNITY

Authorities failed to take steps to reveal the fate of thousands of men and boys forcibly disappeared during and after military operations to retake control of territory from Islamic State, or to hold perpetrators accountable for these and other crimes committed during operations against Islamic State.

Five years after the lethal crackdown on the October 2019 ("Tishreen") protests, the authorities failed to deliver meaningful justice commensurate with the scale of serious human rights violations committed in the context of the protests, including crimes under international law. These included enforced disappearances and the excessive and unlawful use of lethal force by anti-riot police, counterterrorism forces and members of the PMU.[1]

Of the 2,700 criminal investigations opened into the crackdown, by August only 10 arrest warrants had been issued against suspected perpetrators, and only seven convictions handed down, according to Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council. Six high-profile cases examined by Amnesty International revealed serious flaws in the judicial system, political interference in the work of the judiciary, a lack of will to hold powerful members of the security forces and affiliated militias accountable, and a complete lack of transparency surrounding judicial proceedings.

People injured or disabled during the protests continued to face significant hurdles in accessing financial compensation and other forms of reparation.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities continued to crack down on freedom of expression, particularly speech that criticized the authorities, in the name of stability and "public morality".

The authorities continued to conduct arrests for what they called "indecent content", without defining the term and prosecuted individuals on the basis of an overly broad and vague Penal Code provision that criminalized publishing material that "violates public integrity or decency".

Criminal defamation provisions were also used to deter criticism of powerful political and religious figures. Women's rights workers and other NGO workers faced judicial harassment for their work, while some were instructed in a meeting with government officials not to contribute to the work of UN reporting mechanisms.

In the KR-I, security forces and individuals affiliated with powerful political parties continued to intimidate, harass and threaten journalists and activists for their work. Several journalists were arrested or summoned by security forces and at least one journalist in the KR-I was prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to a prison term for their media work.[2]

In February, Iraq's parliament held a first reading of a draft Right to Information Law which would impose excessive restrictions undermining access to information.

The Department of Non-Governmental Organizations (DNGO) – a government body – continuously interfered with local NGOs' programming and activities, as well as the naming of new NGOs. The DNGO imposed background checks on directors and dictated their participation in UN review mechanisms.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Security forces frequently used water cannon, tear gas and live ammunition to disperse largely peaceful protests or sit-ins in central and southern Iraq, which were driven by widespread frustration over lack of accountability, government corruption, economic hardship and poor public services.

In August and September, security forces in Baghdad dispersed peaceful demonstrators, primarily medical graduates, using water cannon, and in some instances violently dragged demonstrators away from government buildings.

In October, police used live bullets and tear gas to disperse largely peaceful protests in Nasiriyah, Thi Qar governorate, resulting in protesters blocking roads and throwing stones. The protests were prompted by arrests of local activists and the broader crackdown on dissent. Demonstrators gathered in Al-Haboubi Square to demand the release of detained activists and the resignation of the city's police chief. Authorities in Nasiriyah continued to conduct sporadic arrests and detention of activists in November, releasing them on bail after several days.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

In August, parliamentarians introduced a draft bill to amend the Personal Status Law. The amendments, if adopted, would grant Sunni and Shia religious councils in Iraq the authority to develop a "code of Sharia rulings on personal status matters", effectively threatening women's and girls' rights and their equality before the law. It would also potentially allow girls as young as nine to be married, legalize unregistered marriages, and remove penalties for men who enter into child marriages and clerics who conduct them. It would also remove divorced women's rights to remain in the marital home or receive financial support. Demonstrations to oppose the draft bill led by Coalition 188, a network of NGOs and activists, took place in Baghdad, Basra, Thi Qar, Babil, Kirkuk, Diwaniyah and Najaf.

On 2 December an amended version of the draft bill was made public. It included several improvements from the earlier draft, including retaining the current legal age of consent of 18 years, or 15 with a judge's permission, for marriage and directing the personal status courts to only register marriages that fall within the legal requirements; however, it retained provisions to develop sectarian codes. The vote on the bill was postponed to 2025.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Under Iraqi law, "honour" remained a mitigating factor in cases of murder and other serious crimes perpetrated against women, while corporal punishment of wives by their husbands and children by their parents remained permissible. In central Iraq, no steps were taken to criminalize marital rape or other forms of domestic violence nor to establish shelters for survivors or for women and girls at risk of gender-based violence.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

In the KR-I, despite some positive steps, authorities failed to ensure that perpetrators of domestic violence, including in cases of murder, rape, beatings and burning, were held to account. They also imposed arbitrary restrictions on the freedoms of survivors who sought protection in the underfunded and deprioritized shelter system.[3]

Laws criminalizing violent acts against women and girls in the KR-I remained wholly inadequate or were not implemented. In courts, slow processes, lack of judicial capacity and judges' discretionary powers led at best to punishments that were incommensurate with the gravity of the crimes.

The Kurdistan Regional Government failed to properly fund and support state-run reporting mechanisms established and recognized by the Domestic Violence Law of the KR-I, thus undermining their ability to effectively deliver protection services, including reporting, legal advice, family advice centres, counselling and psycho-social care, as well as safe spaces that enable survivors to make informed decisions about their safety and well-being.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In April, Iraq's parliament passed a law criminalizing same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults, punishable with prison sentences of between 10 and 15 years. The law also penalized "promoting" same-sex relations, transgender expression or acting "effeminate". The law was a further blow to LGBTI people, who have also faced persecution from militias operating with impunity.[4]

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Approximately 1.1 million Iraqis remained internally displaced and struggling to access their rights to housing, water and medical care. Among these, about 134,369 individuals were still living in formal camps, primarily in the KR-I. In January, Iraqi authorities set a deadline of 30 July for the KR-I to close the remaining camps for internally displaced people and to stop providing aid. However, the camps remained open at the end of the year.

Internally displaced people continued to face serious obstacles to obtaining civil status documentation, hindering their access to public services including health and education.

Iraqi security forces subjected internally displaced people in Al-Jed'ah Centre for Rehabilitation – the last operating camp outside the KR-I – to arbitrary arrests, torture and enforced disappearances. Security forces subjected those that were detained to beatings, electric shocks and waterboarding, and concealed their whereabouts from their families for periods lasting from days to months. Security forces frequently arrested individuals based on family connections or personal disputes, and detainees were denied fair trials, with many coerced into making "confessions" under duress.[5]

DEATH PENALTY

Iraq continued to sentence people to death and carry out executions of people convicted of terrorism, murder and drug offences. Courts frequently issued death sentences, particularly for those accused of "terrorism", following trials that did not meet fair trial standards.

The authorities carried out several mass executions, which were shrouded in secrecy.

Prison authorities failed to notify lawyers and relatives prior to carrying out executions and verbally demeaned families who came to collect their loved ones' bodies. On at least one occasion, militias prevented a family from holding a funeral, due to the executed person's perceived affiliation with Islamic State.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

Conditions in prisons remained dire, and prisoners were denied adequate healthcare. Prisoners were detained in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions amid reports of dirty drinking water and food infested with worms. No effective investigations were carried out into deaths in custody.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Iraqi authorities failed to address a worsening environmental crisis marked by severe water shortages, air and water pollution, and the destructive effects of climate change.

Poor governance and inadequate policies enabled mismanagement of water resources, exacerbated by unresolved disputes with neighbouring countries over water rights. Urban and industrial pollution, largely unchecked due to weak regulations – combined with environmental degradation from years of conflict – further endangered public health. Ineffective waste management and deforestation intensified dust storms and waterborne diseases, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations, particularly displaced people.

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1. *Iraq: "We Hold Them Responsible for the Blood of Our Youth": Five Years On, Impunity Prevails for Violations against Tishreen Protesters,* 30 September ↑
2. "Iraq: Authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq must immediately end their assault on press freedom", 2 May ↑
3. *Daunting and Dire: Impunity, Underfunded Institutions Undermine Protection of Women and Girls From Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,* 3 July ↑

4. "Iraq: Authorities must urgently repeal new law criminalizing same-sex relations", 29 April ↑
5. "Iraq: People held in Al-Jed'ah Centre subjected to torture and enforced disappearance after arrests – new investigation", 29 October ↑

IRELAND

Ireland

The government committed to banning trade from illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Plans to use facial recognition technology in policing raised concerns over mass and discriminatory surveillance. A government-appointed commission recommended radical action to address the worsening housing crisis.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

In October the government undertook to enact legislation banning trade in goods and services from illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This decision followed the International Court of Justice's July Advisory Opinion on the unlawfulness of Israel's occupation.

Also in October an Oireachtas (parliamentary) committee published a report on mental health and other harms caused to children by social media. It called for a legal requirement that online platforms' content recommendation systems be switched off by default for children under 16 years, and for stronger enforcement by Irish authorities.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In November the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland reported that, despite progress in the deployment of renewable energy, significant gaps remained in Ireland's efforts to meet its own legally binding carbon budgets, energy efficiency commitments, and renewable energy targets.

In July the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's assessment of Ireland's climate finance strategy acknowledged its focus on adaptation – as compared with the mitigation focus of most climate finance initiatives – and its channelling of funding to least developed countries and small island developing states.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Human rights experts expressed concerns at the proposed use of facial recognition technology in policing due to its chilling effect on the right to freedom of assembly and association. They feared that this technology would enable mass surveillance and discriminatory targeted surveillance, posing a disproportionate risk to racialized people.

Also of concern was a lack of publicly available policies and guidelines on the policing of protests, in a context where unlawful use of force against peaceful protesters had been reported.

The ongoing impact of the Electoral Act on the advocacy work of a wide range of civil society organizations remained worrying due to its restrictions on access to funding.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In October, legislation came into force prohibiting conduct amounting to attempted "influence or intimidation" of people arriving at abortion care clinics. The Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services) (Safe Access Zones) Act 2024 aimed to ensure the integrity and rights of people accessing abortion services.

The government failed to address gaps identified in its 2023 review of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018. As a result, the risk of delay or denial of care to those needing abortions continued.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Despite a statutory requirement, the government again failed to publish a review of the 2017 law criminalizing the purchase of sex, which also retained the "brothel-keeping" offence criminalizing sex workers working together, even if for their own safety. Sex workers and civil society organizations expressed concern that the law remained in force despite evidence that it exposed sex

workers to a higher risk of violence and other abuse.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

The crisis of housing availability and affordability continued, with record numbers experiencing homelessness, including children. In March, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights criticized the continued lack of culturally appropriate housing for Travellers and Roma.

In May, the government-appointed Housing Commission's review of housing policy found "ineffective decision-making" and high public expenditure relative to other European states. It recommended a "radical strategic reset of housing policy". It also proposed wording for the constitutional referendum on housing promised by the government but not held by year's end.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The government failed to revise its plan for phasing out the inadequate "direct provision" asylum accommodation system. Due to lack of availability, and as a lower priority group, thousands of single male asylum seekers were left without accommodation; many were forced to sleep rough. In August, the High Court ruled that the state failed in its duty to provide for their basic needs.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

In September, civil society organization Transgender Equality Network Ireland published research into transgender and non-binary people's experiences of general and gender-affirming healthcare services. It found long waiting lists for, and negative mental health effects from, the specialist National Gender Service. It also found frequent pathologization and lack of knowledge among general healthcare providers.

DISCRIMINATION

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern at persistent discrimination and racism against the Traveller and Roma communities.

The Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act came into force in December, increasing sentences for certain crimes proven to be motivated by hatred.

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

State of Israel

Israel committed genocide in Gaza, including by causing some of the highest known death tolls among children, journalists, and health and humanitarian workers of any recent conflict in the world, and deliberately inflicting on Palestinians conditions calculated to bring about their physical destruction. Armed conflict with Lebanon caused civilian deaths and mass displacement. Israel committed the crime of apartheid, including through the forcible transfer and displacement of Palestinians both in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. State-backed violent settlers enjoyed impunity while conscientious objectors were imprisoned. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed in militarized arrest raids in the occupied West Bank. Thousands of Palestinians were subjected to arbitrary detention and to ill-treatment, amounting to torture in many cases. The International Court of Justice's instructions to avert genocide and end illegal occupation were ignored. Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly came under attack.

BACKGROUND

Israel entrenched its military occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank through the expansion and fortification of military zones, and of settlements in the West Bank. In

November, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the then defence minister, Yoav Gallant, citing disagreements over indefinite direct Israeli military control of Gaza and recruitment of *Haredi* (ultra-orthodox) Jews to the army.

The conflict between Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based armed group, and Israel escalated significantly. On 23 September the Israeli military launched Operation Northern Arrows. On 1 October, Israel began a ground invasion into southern Lebanon. On 27 November, an Israel/Lebanon ceasefire deal was signed.

In April and October, Israeli attacks on Iranian targets killed senior military officers, and Iranian forces launched missiles towards Israel, which killed one Palestinian man in Jericho, a city in the eastern part of the West Bank.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Armed conflict in Gaza

Israel perpetrated the crime of genocide in Gaza by killing Palestinian civilians, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about Palestinians' physical destruction by causing mass forced displacement, obstructing or denying life-saving aid, and by damaging or destroying life-sustaining infrastructure.[1]

Israeli attacks during the year caused at least 23,000 immediate fatalities, according to the Health Cluster and WHO in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Some 60% of those killed were women, children and older people. The high civilian death toll was a result of direct, disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks. On 16 April, 15 civilians on Market Street in Al-Maghazi refugee camp, central Gaza, were killed deliberately in an Israeli air strike. They included 10 children playing around a football table. One of the children had previously fled Gaza City with his family to avoid starvation.[2]

OCHA reported that 52,214 Palestinians suffered conflict-related injuries during the year. Based on reports from doctors treating traumatic injuries to the lower limbs, head and spine, the WHO calculated in July that around 25% of those injured in Gaza would have acute and ongoing rehabilitation needs for years.

Some 90% of Gaza's population were displaced, most of them multiple times. On 6 May, Israel began a large-scale military operation in eastern Rafah that extended to the whole governorate, despite warnings of catastrophic humanitarian consequences and a legally binding order from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to refrain from doing so. The operation displaced 1.2 million Palestinians living there, the vast majority of whom were already internally displaced. It also closed and destroyed much of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

Following repeated mass "evacuation" orders, on 6 October Israeli forces ordered the displacement of the remaining 300,000 Palestinians from North Gaza governorate. More than 1 million people, half of whom were children, were living in tents during winter, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council. Five newborn babies died of hypothermia between 24 and 29 December, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Israeli forces attacked hospitals, medical staff and humanitarian workers, killing scores in drone and artillery attacks and air strikes. Of Gaza's 36 hospitals, only 17 were still partly functional at the end of the year, due to Israeli attacks. An Israeli raid on Kamal Adwan hospital on 27 December put the last major health facility in North Gaza out of service, while its director, Hussam Abu Safiya, was arbitrarily detained along with 240 other personnel and patients.

All humanitarian organizations reported excessive Israeli restrictions and delays on approvals of aid transfers. For example, Médecins Sans Frontières said in December that negotiating the import of essential refrigeration for medical items took five months, and that sterilization equipment was blocked at the border. As a result of the Israeli military siege, 96% of Gaza's 1 million

children were malnourished, and some 60,000 children under the age of five suffered acute malnutrition by the end of the year. Nearly 2 million people faced critical to catastrophic food insecurity, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). At least 34 people died of starvation between April and June, according to UN reports.

On 28 October the Knesset passed a law prohibiting contact between Israeli officials, such as those managing aid transfer approvals, and UNRWA, the main agency providing aid, education and health services. The law prohibited UNRWA from operating in East Jerusalem and Israel and closed the organization's headquarters.[3]

Israeli soldiers carried out wanton destruction without imperative military necessity.[4] Areas particularly affected included the eastern perimeter, amounting to 16% of Gaza and particularly its productive agricultural land, and the towns of Khuza'a in the south and Shuja'iya in the north.

The conflict reduced Gaza's water supply to less than 5 litres a day per person throughout the year. Oxfam reported in July that severe water shortages were caused by systematic destruction of Gaza's water and sanitation infrastructure. All sewage treatment facilities had been destroyed by the end of June and heavy machinery was broken at southern Gaza's main landfill site. The WHO reported that 727,909 people, particularly children, had been affected by water- and sanitation-related diseases such as hepatitis A by 28 May.

All of Gaza's universities and colleges, along with hundreds of mosques and three churches, were damaged or destroyed. Most schools were transformed into shelters for displaced people and in November UNICEF reported that 95% of school buildings had sustained damage.

Armed conflict with Hezbollah

Throughout the year, Hezbollah repeatedly fired unguided rockets into populated civilian areas of Israel, killing and wounding civilians and damaging and destroying civilian homes.[5] Hezbollah attacks killed more than 100 people and displaced an estimated 63,000 residents of northern Israel. In October, after Israel's ground invasion of southern Lebanon, Amnesty International documented three Hezbollah rocket attacks that killed eight civilians, injured at least 16, and which may constitute war crimes.

APARTHEID

Forcible transfer

OCHA reported that in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli authorities demolished 1,763 buildings, permanently displacing some 4,500 Palestinians, the highest figure in one year since 2009.

Israel continued its campaign of destroying Palestinian villages in the West Bank. According to the NGO B'Tselem, the Israeli military administration subjected the populations of six Palestinian villages in the West Bank to forcible transfer by demolishing their homes, and threatened at least 40 more communities, each with several hundred inhabitants, with the same fate. Israeli forces allowed or encouraged settlers to terrorize the inhabitants with impunity and sometimes participated in the violence.

Israel established 43 new settlements in the West Bank in addition to around 330 established in previous years, according to Peace Now, an Israeli anti-occupation organization. Some 2,400 hectares of land in the West Bank were declared Israeli state land, the largest confiscation of territory in the OPT since 1992.

Within Israel, the Ministry of National Security announced in November that there had been a 400% increase in demolitions of Bedouin homes in the Negev/Naqab region in southern Israel since the start of the year, compared to the number of demolitions in 2022. On 8 May, 300 Palestinian Bedouin citizens of Israel were made homeless when the authorities demolished their village, Wadi al-Khalil, without proper consultation.[6] On 3 June, 500 Bedouin of Ras Jrabah village were ordered by a district court to demolish their own homes and move to a government-approved unfinished township under a separate, Bedouin-only authority. On 14

November, all remaining infrastructure and the mosque in Umm al-Hiran were demolished by militarized police units. The Israeli authorities said that the demolitions were necessary to make way for new or expanding Jewish communities.

The Deportation of Families of Terrorists Law, passed on 7 November, allowed the removal of Israeli citizenship or Jerusalem residency from family members of detainees alleged to have "supported terrorism" or people who have been convicted of security offences: a form of collective punishment. The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order), nearly continuously renewed since 2003, continued to put certain categories of Palestinians at risk of statelessness.

Freedom of movement

Some 3,500 children from Gaza with chronic illnesses, who had been scheduled to receive treatment in the West Bank after 7 October 2023, had their permits cancelled. Twenty-two patients from Gaza, including five newborn babies, who had been in Israeli or East Jerusalem hospitals in 2023, were sent back to Gaza following an order issued on 19 June without receiving the medical care for which they had been referred.

OCHA counted 793 roadblocks and checkpoints in the West Bank, obstructing Palestinians' movement between Palestinian villages and towns, and delaying access by emergency services. Military permission, previously granted twice yearly for accessing privately owned agricultural land, was cancelled entirely, affecting farmers in 105 locations in the West Bank. The Israeli army sealed off large towns and refugee camps in the northern West Bank and placed them under curfew for days during raids. The WHO recorded twice as many incidents of obstruction of medical responders in the West Bank compared to the previous year.

Some 100,000 Palestinian workers in the West Bank had their permits to work in Israel cancelled. New permits were rarely issued.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, which investigated cases where journalists were killed in connection with their work, Israeli attacks killed 74 Palestinian journalists in the OPT.

According to OCHA, some 487 Palestinians, including 90 children, were killed during militarized arrest raids in the towns of Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus and Tubas in the northern West Bank. Israeli authorities did not investigate the apparently unlawful killings.[7]

Settlers killed six Palestinians and injured 356, according to OCHA, mostly in rural localities such as the hills south of Nablus, the South Hebron Hills, and in areas of East Jerusalem and Hebron. State-backed settler violence contributed to the forcible transfer of the Palestinian population.[8]

ARBITRARY DETENTION

Israeli forces arrested more than 10,000 Palestinians and subjected Palestinians from Gaza to enforced disappearance or incommunicado detention.[9] According to the NGO Hamoked, some 5,262 Palestinians were held without charge or trial at the end of the year: 3,376 under administrative detention orders and 1,886 under the Unlawful Combatants Law.

In November the defence minister announced that Israel would no longer issue administrative detention orders against Jewish settlers.

At least 10 of 156 Palestinian citizens of Israel arrested in 2023 on vague and overreaching charges of "persistent consumption of terrorist materials" – based on allegations that they had viewed footage from Gaza on social media – remained in pretrial detention in February, according to the NGO Mossawa Centre.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Released detainees and prison staff speaking as whistle-blowers testified to the routine use of severe physical violence, including sexual assault and rape, against Palestinian detainees in all detention facilities. The denial of sufficient food, water, sleep, daylight and

medical treatment was systematic. At least 54 Palestinian detainees died in custody, according to the Palestinian Prisoners Society. Adnan Al-Bursh, a leading orthopaedic surgeon in Gaza, died in Ofer Prison in the West Bank in mid-April without being charged with a criminal offence. Eyewitnesses said he had been severely beaten.

The Military Advocate General opened 44 criminal investigations into deaths in detention and eight into allegations of torture, leading to just one indictment.

The Israeli authorities suspended visits from the ICRC and detainees' families to Palestinians in Israeli detention, contributing to lack of accountability around the treatment of detainees.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Israeli authorities failed to independently, effectively and transparently investigate violations of international law committed by Israeli forces, including possible war crimes and genocide in Gaza, and unlawful killings in the West Bank. No independent investigators were allowed into Gaza.

On 26 January, 28 March and 24 May, the ICJ ordered Israel to implement provisional measures to prevent genocide in Gaza. Israeli authorities repeatedly ignored such orders.

On 19 July the ICJ found that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory was illegal under international law.

On 21 November the ICC issued arrest warrants against the prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the then defence minister, Yoav Gallant, and one Hamas leader for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to be barred from entering Israel and the OPT. It received no response from the Israeli government to 15 requests for information and reported that the Israeli government had told Israeli doctors not to cooperate with its investigation into Palestinian fighters' war crimes in southern Israel.

Sanctions imposed on individual armed Jewish supremacist settlers and specific settler organizations by France, the UK and the USA at the start of the year did not appear to have deterred further acts of state-backed settler violence or the complicity of Israeli soldiers in the settlers' attacks.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Pregnant and breastfeeding women were disproportionately affected by the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. According to the IPC, 16,500 pregnant and breastfeeding women in Gaza were acutely malnourished. Women and girls faced diseases due to the destruction of sanitary infrastructure and the majority of health facilities including maternity and neonatal wards.

Domestic and gender-based violence increased both in Israel and in Gaza in the context of mass displacement and armed conflict.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Palestinian citizens of Israel faced arrest and discrimination when they expressed their opposition to the Israeli forces' attacks on Gaza. Human rights lawyer Ahmad Khalefa was released to house arrest in February after spending 110 days in pretrial detention for organizing anti-war protests in October 2023. The charges against him of "incitement to terrorism" and "identifying with a terrorist organization" were unsubstantiated, according to the NGO Human Rights Defenders Fund.

The Mossawa Centre said in June that it had received some 400 requests for assistance from workers who were dismissed by their Israeli employers, especially the Clalit health provider, for social media posts opposing Israeli attacks on Gaza.

Thousands of Jewish Israelis held demonstrations against the government. They were met with police water cannon, and dozens were arrested. On 2 September the finance minister applied a court injunction to block the Histadrut, Israel's largest trade union, from calling a one-day general strike in support of the protesters. On 22

September, Israeli forces raided and shut Al Jazeera's offices in Ramallah, having closed the broadcaster's offices in Jerusalem months earlier. Israeli authorities continued to ban foreign journalists from entering Gaza, and the Israeli Supreme Court turned down petitions by the Foreign Press Association requesting access.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' RIGHTS

Nine Jewish and two Palestinian citizens of Israel were jailed for refusing to serve in the army based on their objections to military occupation, apartheid and genocide against Palestinians. Two of them, teenagers Tal Mitnick and Itamar Greenberg, were imprisoned for six months.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In June the UN Environment Programme noted that debris from mass destruction of infrastructure, white phosphorus ordnance and industrial and medical waste was releasing extremely high levels of hazardous substances in Gaza. It estimated that, were bombing to cease immediately, it would take 45 years to clear and recycle the debris and waste.

1. *Israel/OPT: "You Feel Like You Are Subhuman": Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza*, 5 December ↑
2. "Israel/OPT: Israeli air strikes that killed 44 civilians further evidence of war crimes – new investigation", 27 May ↑
3. "Israel/OPT: Law to ban UNRWA amounts to criminalization of humanitarian aid", 29 October ↑
4. "Israel/OPT: Israeli military must be investigated for war crime of wanton destruction in Gaza – new investigation", 5 September ↑
5. "Israel: Hezbollah's use of inherently inaccurate weapons to launch unlawful attacks violates international law", 20 December ↑
6. " Israel/OPT: Over 300 Palestinian Bedouin face forced evictions following mass home demolitions in Negev/Naqab", 9 May ↑
7. "Israel/OPT: Palestinians face drastic escalation in unlawful killings, displacement as Israel launches West Bank military operation", 28 August ↑
8. "State-backed deadly rampage by Israeli settlers underscores urgent need to dismantle apartheid", 22 April ↑
9. "Israel must end mass incommunicado detention and torture of Palestinians from Gaza", 18 July ↑

ITALY

Republic of Italy

There were new reports of torture by prison officers. Violence against women continued at an alarmingly high level. Racialized and LGBTI people continued to experience racism and discrimination, including by state officials. Italy attempted to send asylum seekers rescued at sea to Albania, to have their claim examined outside of the country. Police used excessive and unnecessary force against protesters on multiple occasions and limited people's right to freedom of peaceful assembly. About 10% of the population lived in absolute poverty. Barriers to abortion persisted. Human-induced climate change caused an extreme heatwave in July.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Thousands of detainees endured substandard conditions in overcrowded and dilapidated cells. There was concern that such conditions contributed to the rising number of suicides among detainees, numbering 83 as of 20 December.

Conditions in migrant repatriation centres also failed to meet international standards, with people held in bare cages with concrete furniture, inadequate hygiene facilities and lacking meaningful activities.

In April, prosecutors revealed that 13 prison officers had been arrested and eight suspended on allegations of torture and other violations against children in Milan juvenile prison. Two former prison directors were also being investigated for failure to prevent and report the abuses, which spanned years.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

There were 95 killings of women in domestic violence incidents, with 59 killed by their partners or former partners.

In February, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern at the "high prevalence of gender-based violence against women" and

its under-reporting. It also noted that the definition of rape was not consent based.

DISCRIMINATION

Two international bodies, the UN International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the Context of Law Enforcement, and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), published reports in September and October respectively, describing how Roma, Africans and people of African descent, migrants and LGBTI people continued to be subjected to racism and discrimination, including by state officials.

Both bodies lamented the systemic practice of racial profiling by law enforcement officials, with the UN mechanism noting that law enforcement was tainted by a "pervasive presumption of criminality" towards Africans and persons of African descent. ECRI was concerned about xenophobic, homophobic and transphobic speech, including from politicians and public officials.

In May, the European Committee of Social Rights found that Italy had violated the European Social Charter with respect to the right to housing of Roma, who continued to experience discrimination in accessing adequate housing, faced forced evictions and lived in segregated and substandard conditions.[1]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Some 1,700 people died at sea along the central Mediterranean route, while trying to reach Europe. Most had departed from Libya and Tunisia.

In July, prosecutors indicted six customs police and coastguard officers for failing to prevent a shipwreck near Steccato di Cutro, Calabria, in February 2023, when at least 94 people, including 34 children, drowned in Italian territorial waters. The inquiry indicated that a decision by the Ministry of the Interior in 2019 to deploy rescue assets less promptly to boats of refugees and migrants approaching Italian coasts might have contributed to the preventable loss of life.

In April, Amnesty International visited the repatriation centres in Ponte Galeria in the capital, Rome, and Pian del Lago in Caltanissetta, and found that some asylum seekers and migrants were subjected to unlawful administrative detention, leading to concerns that similar violations might occur in other centres.[2]

The accelerated border procedures introduced in 2023 to examine asylum applications from people coming from countries regarded by Italy as "safe" continued to be challenged in the courts.

Cooperation with Albania, Libya and Tunisia

In October, Italy started to implement the 2023 protocol with Albania, aimed at processing asylum claims by people from countries deemed "safe" in extraterritorial detention centres in Albania. Twenty-four men rescued at sea by the Italian navy were taken to Albania, where they had their asylum claims rejected in under 48 hours. However, a court in Rome declined to validate the detention orders, arguing that the asylum seekers' countries of origin could not be regarded as "safe" and requiring Italy to allow the men into Italian territory and release them. An EU Court of Justice ruling on the matter was pending at year's end. The government tried to discredit the judges who did not validate the detention orders, undermining their independence.[3]

Italy continued to support Libya to contain people in that country, despite evidence of serious human rights violations against refugees and migrants there. Italy's assistance to Tunisia to establish its search and rescue region raised concerns that it would lead to further interceptions and disembarkations in Tunisia of people at risk of persecution there.

In June, the Civil Tribunal of Rome ordered Italy to pay reparations of EUR 15,000 each, and grant the right to enter Italy, to the survivors of an unlawful return by boat to Libya in 2018.

Criminalization of solidarity

In April, the Trapani Tribunal acquitted all defendants and dismissed the case against the crews of the *Iuventa* and other NGO rescue ships for facilitating irregular

migration. The court stressed that the *Iuventa* crew acted to save lives under the direction of Italian authorities.

In May, three UN special procedures raised concern about Italy's restrictions on the activities of human rights defenders rescuing lives at sea. Nevertheless, Italy continued to obstruct their life-saving work. In September, the authorities instructed the Médicins Sans Frontières rescue ship *Geo Barents* to disembark people in Genoa rather than in the closest safe port. They also halted the ship's operations for 60 days for, in their view, not cooperating with Libyan authorities and alleged technical breaches.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In January, parliament criminalized the defacing or damaging of heritage buildings and artefacts during demonstrations. There was concern the law would lead to excessive restrictions on the right to peaceful protest.

A security bill including draconian provisions restricting the right to peaceful assembly was debated by parliament. In December, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights called on parliament to substantially amend the bill to ensure compliance with human rights standards.

Police used excessive and unnecessary force against protesters on numerous occasions. In February, police unlawfully used batons against students protesting in Pisa in solidarity with Palestinians, injuring 15 people, 11 of them children. An investigation into the actions of 10 police officers was ongoing.

The authorities banned a protest in solidarity with Palestinians on 5 October in Rome. The ban was partially lifted on the day, but other restrictions on freedom of movement were applied. [4]

In February, the Milan Tribunal acquitted eight climate activists accused of obstructing traffic and defacing public property during a protest in 2021, highlighting the protesters' motives, which were to ensure that governments act on climate change.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

In October, the National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) revealed that in 2023 nearly 10% of the population (2.2 million families or 5.7 million individuals) was living in absolute poverty. Families comprising at least one foreign national were disproportionately affected, representing over 30% of those in absolute poverty.

Insufficient investment in the national health service led to growing inequalities in the enjoyment of the right to health. Data published in April by ISTAT showed that in 2023 economic reasons and the length of waiting lists were among barriers leading 4.5 million people to decline medical appointments, undermining accessibility and affordability of healthcare. In February, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern about regional disparities and inequalities in access to basic health services due to social and economic status, gender and geographical location.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Barriers persisted to access to abortion, including the high number of doctors and other healthcare providers refusing to provide abortion care.

In April, in an amendment to an unrelated law, parliament allowed anti-abortion groups to operate inside family health centres providing abortion care.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In July, Italy reviewed its National Energy and Climate Plan retrogressively, delaying coal phase-out from 2025 to 2030.

Also in July, Italy experienced an extreme heatwave, which scientists attributed to human-induced climate change. The extreme drought conditions in Sardinia and Sicily, which lasted for months and culminated in May, were also rendered significantly more severe by climate change. According to a study by World Weather Attribution, people's livelihoods in Sicily were severely affected by the catastrophic economic impact of the drought.

1. "Italy: Ruling on scandal of discriminatory housing policies against Roma must finally spur authorities into action", 13 May ↑
2. "Italy: Liberty and dignity: Amnesty International's observations on the administrative detention of migrant and asylum-seeking people in Italy", 4 July ↑
3. "Italy: The Italy-Albania agreement on migration: Pushing boundaries, threatening rights", 19 January ↑
4. "Italy: Statement expressing concern about law enforcement officials violating human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and to peaceful assembly, on 5 October in Rome preceding and during the "National Demonstration for Palestine", 28 November ↑

JAPAN

Japan

A man who had been under sentence of death for over 50 years was acquitted in a retrial. Two positive court rulings brought the legalization of same-sex marriage closer. A court ruled that a law under which thousands of people, including persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses, were forcibly sterilized was unconstitutional and that victims should be compensated. Japan's support for liquefied natural gas projects undermined global efforts to phase out fossil fuels.

DEATH PENALTY

On 26 September, in a retrial, the Shizuoka District Court acquitted Iwao Hakamada, who was sentenced to death for murder in 1968. The presiding judge found that the investigating authorities had fabricated evidence in his original trial. Prior to his interim release in 2014, the 88-year-old had spent over 45 years on death row, much of it in solitary confinement. The acquittal of Iwao Hakamada reinforced calls for the abolition of the death penalty.[1]

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In March, in the first-ever high court decision on same-sex marriage, the Sapporo High Court ruled that provisions under the Civil Code and the Family Register Act that do not recognize same-sex marriage were unconstitutional.[2] In October, the Tokyo High Court ruled that the ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional because it violated Articles 14(1) and 24(2) of the constitution relating to discrimination and the right to choose one's spouse.[3]

In July, the Hiroshima High Court granted permission to a plaintiff to legally change her gender without undergoing surgery. This followed a Supreme Court ruling in 2023 that a law requiring transgender people to undergo sterilization as a requirement for changing their gender in the family registry was unconstitutional.

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In July, the Supreme Court ruled that the former Eugenics Protection Law, which provided for forced sterilization of persons with disabilities or chronic illness, was unconstitutional. The ruling said that damages should be awarded to victims of forced sterilization. The government subsequently issued an apology and agreed to provide compensation of up to JPY 15 million (USD 101,311) for victims and their spouses. The government also committed to compensate other victims who had yet to come forward, many of whom were older people.

The government acknowledged that 16,500 people were forcibly sterilized under the law before it was abolished in 1996.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Government-supported overseas liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects were estimated to be responsible for a quarter of the world's shipments of LNG, resulting in huge profits for Japan but undermining global efforts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

The Japan Bank for International Cooperation, which is wholly owned by the Government of Japan, initiated an internal investigation in February into whether it had violated its own environmental guidelines relating to the funding of LNG projects in the Philippines. In April, demonstrations took place in at least seven countries, and 95 international NGOs signed a petition calling for an end to Japan's financial support for

overseas fossil fuel projects and resulting harms to the environment and affected communities.

The Climate Action Tracker rated Japan's finance contributions to tackling climate change as "highly insufficient" due to the low amount of contributions compared to Japan's fair share.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

In March, new allegations emerged of sexual abuse by employees of the talent agency Johnny and Associates Entertainment. In 2023, the company apologized for sexual exploitation and abuse of young talents by its deceased founder and set up a compensation scheme. In May, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights published a final report on its visit to Japan in 2023 which, while welcoming the company's actions, said that they were inadequate to meet victims' needs, including to mental healthcare. As of December, of the 1,011 victims that had applied only 538 had reached compensation settlements.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Draconian immigration laws allowing for the indefinite and arbitrary detention of asylum seekers and other migrants remained in place. The family of Wishma Sandamali, a Sri Lankan national who died in a Nagoya immigration detention centre in 2021, continued to seek information about, and remedy for, her death. A civil case brought by her family in 2022, claiming JPY 156 million (USD 1.04 million) in damages from the government on the grounds that she was denied medical care in detention, remained unresolved at year's end.[4]

1. "Japan: Acquittal of man who spent 45 years on death row pivotal moment for justice", 26 September ↑
2. "Japan: Groundbreaking same-sex marriage rulings a long-awaited victory for LGBTI rights", 14 March ↑
3. "Japan: Momentum for marriage equality grows with Tokyo High Court ruling", 30 October ↑
4. "Japan must reform its refugee and immigration system to avoid further tragedies", 6 March ↑

JORDAN

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Jordan escalated its crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, detaining and prosecuting thousands of individuals for criticizing the authorities, expressing pro-Palestine sentiments or participating in peaceful protests. Hundreds were held in administrative detention without charge or access to due process guarantees. Political parties were dissolved. Women and girls continued to face discrimination in law and practice. Refugees and asylum seekers faced deteriorating conditions, including due to funding cuts. Jordan remained vulnerable to climate change, which threatened its water resources.

BACKGROUND

Jordan underwent its fourth UPR in January. The government only noted recommendations to remove legal provisions that criminalize forms of expression protected under international law. It rejected recommendations to repeal or amend the Crime Prevention Law of 1954, which governors continued to use to administratively detain individuals without charge or trial. It did not commit to amending the Nationality Law which would grant women the right to pass on their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men. It rejected recommendations to abolish the death penalty and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

Parliamentary elections were held in September for the first time under a 2022 electoral law. Opposition parties won around a fifth of the seats. Tribal and pro-government factions continued to dominate the assembly.

Jordan continued to host around 2 million Palestinian refugees and more than 750,000 refugees from other countries, including Syria.

The unemployment rate remained high, especially among women and youth.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities charged hundreds of individuals under the repressive 2023 Cybercrimes Law for social media posts that criticized the authorities, including the government's peace deal with Israel, expressed pro-Palestine sentiments, or called for peaceful protests and public strikes.[1]

In June a criminal court convicted journalist Hiba Abu Taha and sentenced her to one year in prison for using social media platforms to "spread false news, or insult or defame a governmental authority or official body", and for "inciting strife or sedition or threatening societal peace or inciting hatred or violence". The charges stemmed from an article she wrote and which was shared on social media platforms, in which she criticized Jordan's interception of Iranian missiles aimed at Israel in April. According to Hiba Abu Taha's lawyer, the appeals court confirmed the conviction and sentence on the same day without holding a public hearing, which he said indicated that the judge's decision had already been made. The one-year prison term was the longest sentence documented by Amnesty International to date under the 2023 Cybercrimes Law.

In July a criminal court convicted lawyer and activist Moutaz Awwad of "provoking sedition or strife" under Article 17 of the 2023 Cybercrimes Law and fined him JOD 5,000 (around USD 7,000) for posts on X, formerly Twitter, in which he criticized the policies of Arab countries towards Israel and expressed pro-Palestine sentiment.

Also in July, security forces arrested prominent journalist Ahmad Hassan al-Zoubi, enacting a ruling by a court that had sentenced him to one year in prison in July 2023 for "provoking strife" under the previous 2015 Cybercrimes Law for a Facebook post criticizing the authorities' response to transportation strikes.[2]

The authorities routinely violated the fair trial rights of detainees arrested for exercising their right to freedom of expression, including by failing to present an arrest warrant, failing to inform them of the reasons for their summons or the charges against them, questioning them without a lawyer, and using psychological coercion and intimidatory tactics during their interrogation and/or trial.

In February a prosecutor at the State Security Court, a military court, charged political activist Ayman Sanduka with "incitement to oppose the political regime" under Article 149 of the Penal Code. The charge related to an open letter to the king that Ayman Sanduka had posted on Facebook in October 2023 in which he criticized Jordan's diplomatic relations with Israel. He remained on trial before the State Security Court at the end of the year.[3]

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Between October 2023 and October 2024, the authorities arrested thousands of protesters and bystanders following protests in support of Palestinian people in Gaza outside the Israeli embassy in the capital, Amman. Many remained in detention at the end of the year.[4]

In March, Jordanian security forces violently dispersed peaceful demonstrations outside the Israeli Embassy using tear gas, batons and beatings. Pro-Palestine protesters reported restrictions on banners with certain slogans and the participation of children under 18 years of age. The authorities also prohibited the continuation of protests after midnight.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The authorities dissolved 19 political parties for "failure to comply with registration conditions". Under the 2022 Political Parties Law, such conditions included having a minimum of 1,000 founding members who have never been convicted of crimes that violate "honour, morals and security".

In April the Supreme Administrative Court upheld a decision to dissolve the Partnership and Salvation Party for "failing to hold a general conference that meets the conditions stipulated in the Jordanian Political Parties Law". A lawyer who was a member of the party told Amnesty International that the party faced harassment and intimidation from the authorities.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

Local governors continued to use the Crime Prevention Law of 1954 to administratively detain anyone considered to be "a danger to the people" without charge or the ability to challenge the lawfulness of their detention before a competent judicial body. This included activists as well as women at risk of being victims of "honour crimes", who were often detained under the pretext of protecting them from potential violence or reprisals.

Scores of individuals were held in administrative detention in relation to pro-Palestine protests or expression, on orders of the governor of Amman, including in cases where the prosecutor had ordered their release.

For example, in March, activist Majd al-Farraj was arrested during a protest and held in administrative detention for 40 days. Similarly, in April, security officers arrested online activist Samer al-Qassem over a TikTok video about Palestinian refugees. While the prosecution authorities released Samer al-Qassem on bail in May, the governor of Amman requested his administrative detention for a further month. In June a criminal court sentenced him to three months' imprisonment and a fine under the 2023 Cybercrimes Law for "using social media platforms to provoke sedition and threaten societal peace".

Thousands of individuals faced debt imprisonment under the Execution Law, the primary legislative instrument which, in breach of international law, allows for the imprisonment of individuals who fail to repay debts.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women and girls continued to face discrimination in law and practice, especially in personal status laws and the lack of protection from domestic violence. Women under the age of 40 needed the consent of a male guardian, typically their father or another male relative, to marry. Women remained legally unable to pass their nationality to their spouse and children on an equal basis with men.

Women were 40% more likely than men to be unemployed due to cultural and societal norms that limited their access to the workforce, as well as barriers such as long working hours and restricted access to childcare. According to the World Economic Forum's annual Global Gender Gap Report, the share of women in local government diminished by 6.9% compared to 2023.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, a shortage in international aid among other reasons left refugees and asylum seekers facing deteriorating conditions, including severe limitations in access to their economic and social rights – among others, the rights to food, water, healthcare, shelter, education and work. Poverty rates among registered refugees living in camps increased significantly, with 67% classified as poor, an increase from 45% in 2021. According to UNHCR, approximately 40% of refugees in camps faced severe levels of climate vulnerability, being particularly susceptible to leaks and flooding due to the inadequate quality of shelters.

In April the Jordanian authorities arrested Syrian refugees Atiya Mohammad Abu Salem and Wael al-Ashi during a sweeping crackdown on pro-Palestine protests. The Ministry of the Interior subsequently issued deportation orders for them.[5] The men were not referred to a judicial body, nor charged with any crime.[6] In May the authorities released Atiya Mohammad Abu Salem and reportedly deported Wael al-Ashi to the United Arab Emirates, where his family resided.

Non-Syrian refugees and asylum seekers remained excluded from work unless they renounced their international protection and/or asylum applications with UNHCR and opted for migrant worker status.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Jordan continued to be one of the most water-scarce countries globally, with supply meeting around two-thirds of the population's water needs. A notable decline in rainfall,

exacerbated by climate change, further reduced Jordan's water resources.

Jordan failed to update its 2021 NDC under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

1. "Jordan: New Cybercrimes Law stifling freedom of expression one year on", 13 August ↑
2. "Jordan: Authorities must release journalist Ahmad Hassan al-Zoubi imprisoned over social media post", 5 July ↑
3. "Jordan: Political activist facing trial before military court for Facebook post: Ayman Sanduka", 22 March ↑
4. "Jordan: Stop cracking down on pro-Gaza protests and release those charged for exercising their freedoms of assembly and expression", 11 April ↑
5. "Jordan: Syrian refugee at risk of deportation: Atiya Mohammad Abu Salem", 18 April ↑
6. "Jordan: Authorities must stop forcible deportation of two detained refugees to Syria", 17 May ↑

KAZAKHSTAN

Republic of Kazakhstan

The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association continued to be unduly restricted. Civil society activists, opposition supporters, human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers critical of the authorities faced intimidation, harassment, arrest and prosecution on politically motivated charges. There was still no accountability for the majority of serious human rights violations committed during the January 2022 protests. Violence against women and girls remained widespread, despite legislation re-establishing criminal sanctions for domestic violence. Authorities continued to discriminate against LGBTI people. Activists from Uzbekistan were at risk of forcible return. Climate action policies fell short of national commitments.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The human rights community in Kazakhstan recorded at least 24 people imprisoned on politically motivated charges during the year, including human rights defenders, activists, bloggers and journalists.

Authorities restricted media access to areas affected by flooding in April and prosecuted journalists and bloggers for reporting critically on the government's handling of the disaster. Uralsk-based journalist Raul Uporov was fined for "petty hooliganism" after harshly criticizing the restrictions on media coverage of the flooding.

In May, a court fined journalist Jamilya Maricheva from the ProTenge project on charges of "spreading false information". She had posted a comment on her Telegram channel in support of Radio Azzattyk journalists who had been denied accreditation from the authorities.

A media law approved in June featured new provisions on compulsory state registration for online media.

Grounds for denying accreditation to foreign media outlets and their journalists under new regulations published in August were broadly worded, stating that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may reject requests for accreditation "in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan". Foreign journalists were not allowed to work without accreditation.

In October a group of journalists challenged in court new rules for the compulsory accreditation of domestic media with government institutions. The regulations restricted journalists to publishing or quoting only information from the media outlet they were accredited to. The case was ongoing at the end of the year.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Participation in organizations designated "extremist" remained punishable by up to six years' imprisonment.

Dozens of individuals were prosecuted and convicted for being supporters of unregistered peaceful opposition political parties or movements allegedly linked to the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK) movement, arbitrarily designated "extremist" by a court in the capital, Astana, in 2018.

Some activists convicted on extremism-related charges were added to the government's "list of organizations and people associated with financing terrorism and extremism", causing their bank cards and access to their bank accounts to be blocked.

In August, journalist and political activist Duman Mukhamedkarim was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on charges of financing and participating in a banned "extremist" organization. The charges concerned his alleged support for the DVK movement. In November, an appeal court upheld the verdict and in addition banned him from attending public events and giving interviews for three years. His lawyer planned to challenge the decision.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Legislation unduly restricted peaceful assemblies, requiring prior permission, limiting locations and imposing fines or jail time for subsequent "violations". The 12-month statute of limitations for such "offences" allowed the authorities to jail protesters long after the event, often to prevent them from participating in future protests.

Local authorities in the city of Almaty arbitrarily banned a feminist march planned for 8 March.

In October, police arrested 12 activists who had been planning a peaceful protest rally against a nuclear power plant construction project, and charged them with preparing riots.

IMPUNITY

The authorities failed to conduct full and prompt investigations into allegations of the unlawful use of force, torture and other serious human rights violations committed by security forces during protests in January 2022, or to bring those responsible to justice.

Of the hundreds of criminal cases for torture and ill-treatment opened following the January 2022 events, official figures as of January indicated that only 34 individuals had been convicted while proceedings were ongoing against almost 50 other officials. Many cases had been dropped.

In some cases, however, a heavier sentence was imposed on appeal. In March, a contract soldier previously acquitted by the Almaty Garrison Military Court in November 2023 had his sentence overturned on appeal and was sentenced to imprisonment. He had initially been charged with abuse of authority for shooting and killing a four-year-old girl while she and her siblings were travelling by car to shop for groceries during the January 2022 events.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In April, parliament re-established criminal sanctions for domestic violence and enhanced protections for domestic violence victims. Nevertheless, comprehensive measures to prevent and eradicate domestic violence were lacking, and violence against women and girls remained widespread.

During the year, 32 men were convicted of the rape and/or murder of women and children. In 2023 the Prosecutor General's Office had estimated that around 80 women a year died from domestic violence.

The conviction of former minister of economy Kuandyk Bishimbayev in May to 24 years' imprisonment for beating his wife to death raised public awareness of the high rates of domestic violence in the country.

In May, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders and other UN experts expressed serious concern over the criminal prosecution of exiled women's rights activist Dina Smailova, which "appear[ed] to be in retaliation against her work as a woman human rights defender and exercising her rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association".

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI people faced harassment and discrimination from the authorities, as well as pro-government supporters and other groups, often under the guise of preserving "traditional values".

A petition calling for legislation to criminalize "LGBTI propaganda" caused a domestic and international outcry and

hearings on the proposed law were postponed until 2025. UN experts noted that "[t]he petition itself is based on prejudice, and any legislation arising from it would inevitably and unlawfully trample on human rights."

In February, the government blocked a website aimed at informing young people about LGBTI issues, citing the protection of national traditions and children's rights as justification.

On 9 October, a member of the ruling Amanat party asked the Prosecutor General's Office to designate Feminita, a leading LGBTI NGO, as an "extremist" organization. On the same day, members of the Union of Parents tried to disrupt a meeting of Feminita, attempting to break into the premises, shouting insults at the participants and filming them. Police officers called to the event photographed the identity documents of those participating in the meeting but took no action against the protesters. Feminita lodged a complaint with the police, but the status of the investigation was unknown at year's end.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Activists from Uzbekistan's autonomous Karakalpakstan Republic residing in Kazakhstan faced the threat of forcible return to Uzbekistan. There they risked torture and long prison terms on politically-motivated charges for campaigning against human rights violations in Karakalpakstan. Three activists, Akylbek Muratbai, Rasul Zhumaniyazov and Rinat Utambetov, were arrested between February and April and remanded in custody following extradition requests from Uzbekistan on spurious charges of disseminating information that presented a threat to public order. Akylbek Muratbai, who had lived legally in Kazakhstan for 10 years, applied for refugee status, but the Refugee Commission turned down his request. An appeal against this decision was pending at year's end.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The Climate Change Performance Index ranked Kazakhstan as a "very low performer", criticizing its lack of a transparent accounting system for greenhouse gas emissions and its failure to produce action plans for coal phase-out, climate adaptation and a green transition. Kazakhstan remained among the top 30 greenhouse gas emitters globally.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan suffered environmental disasters exacerbated by climate change, including the worst flooding in decades in April, which prompted a state of emergency to be declared in 10 of the country's 17 regions. Tens of thousands of people were evacuated from their homes and several died. The flooding exacerbated pre-existing water supply issues, in particular inequality in access to clean drinking water which especially affected rural areas. Floodwater also washed away cattle and anthrax burial grounds, further raising the risk that limited water supplies for drinking and irrigation could be contaminated and jeopardizing food security.

KENYA

Republic of Kenya

Sixty people were killed and hundreds injured when police used excessive and unnecessary force against people protesting a proposed finance bill. Draft legislation threatened to impose further restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. More than 600 protesters were arbitrarily arrested and detained, and dozens were forcibly disappeared. Extrajudicial executions continued to be reported. The government forcibly evicted thousands of people from the Mathare and Mukuru Kwa Njenga settlements, amid heavy rainfall and flooding. At least 97 women were killed between August and October, most as a result of gender-based violence, according to official statistics. Implementation problems with the new Social Health Fund affected some people's access to healthcare. The government's digital

identification project threatened to undermine the right to privacy.

BACKGROUND

Thousands of demonstrators protested against the Finance Bill 2024, corruption and poor governance. They argued that the bill would impose unaffordable tax rises, including on bread and other basic commodities, without providing sufficient social protection measures, and would exacerbate the debt crisis. Young people, known as the Gen-Zs, led protests using social media to call for political and social justice. On 25 June, President William Ruto said the protests had been "infiltrated by people funded to cause havoc and… civil strife". He backed a cabinet-level decision to deploy the army to "assist" in policing the protests, although constitutional provisions allow this only in cases of emergency and disaster, or to restore peace in areas affected by unrest or instability, following parliamentary approval. On 26 June, the day after parliament passed the Finance Bill, he declined to assent to it.

On 8 October the National Assembly voted overwhelmingly to impeach the then deputy president, Rigathi Gachagua, for alleged gross misconduct, tribalism and corruption. On 18 October the Senate impeached him on five of 11 charges, including inciting ethnic divisions.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), 60 people died and hundreds more were injured between June and July when police used excessive and unnecessary force during protests against the Finance Bill. The youngest victim was 12-year-old Kennedy Onyango, who died from gunshot wounds sustained on 27 June in Kajiado county. The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) opened investigations into some incidents but no information on the progress of IPOA's investigations was made publicly available.

Thousands of protesters gathered nationwide on 25 June as the bill was about to pass through parliament. In the capital, Nairobi, hundreds of peaceful protesters entered the areas in and around parliament. Police, many wearing balaclavas and masks, dispersed them using live bullets and tear gas – prohibited under various court orders – and beat them with batons. At least six protesters were killed, apparently by gunshot. Hundreds sustained gunshot wounds, as well as soft tissue injuries caused by batons and tear gas canisters, according to KNCHR. At least one protester lost three fingers when a tear gas canister hit him.

Around 9pm on the same day the cabinet secretary for defence directed the military to protect "critical infrastructure", following which the military was deployed to support the National Police Service in controlling the protests. On 27 June the High Court of Kenya approved the deployment but directed the government to define and publish a timescale for the duration of the operation, which it failed to do.

The Law Society of Kenya described the deployment as an intimidatory tactic. On 28 June the High Court in Malindi issued temporary orders preventing security forces from using lethal and less-lethal ammunition (including water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets) against peaceful protesters.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

The government supported draft laws to counter dissent which, if passed, would threaten the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. They included the Assembly and Demonstrations Bill, 2024, introduced by the MP for Mbeere North constituency. If enacted, it would expand police powers to restrict, disperse and limit protests; and change notification provisions – as provided in the Public Order Act – to require police permission for a protest to proceed. The bill prescribed a one-year prison term for organizers of "unlawful" protests without defining what constitutes an unlawful assembly.

During the violent repression of anti-Finance Bill protests (see above), human rights observers documented the unlawful

dispersal by police of peaceful gatherings, as well as arbitrary arrests and ill-treatment of protesters. Journalists covering the protests were beaten, arrested and had their cameras confiscated, and people were arrested for, or otherwise prevented from, photographing or filming the events.

According to research by the Nation Media Group, a media outlet, authorities carried out extensive digital surveillance that targeted various online activists, and disrupted access to the internet.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Between June and August, more than 600 protesters were arrested for participating in peaceful protests, according to KNCHR. Some were held beyond the legal limit of 24 hours; others were presented to court on trumped-up charges. Security forces arrested some medical personnel who responded to injured protesters. Detainees' lawyers were frequently denied access to their clients and some were arrested or intimidated to pressure them into dropping cases.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

According to the Law Society of Kenya, at least 72 people, including human rights defenders and activists, were forcibly disappeared in connection with their involvement in protests against the Finance Bill. The whereabouts and fate of some of them remained unknown at the end of the year. On 30 August, President Ruto publicly denied any knowledge of the disappearances.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

At least 104 cases of extrajudicial executions were recorded during the year. The Missing Voices Coalition – a national coalition of human rights organizations – and other groups called on the government to take measures to end such killings.

Denzel Omondi, a student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, was found dead in a swamp in Juja, Kiambu county, on 6 July after taking part in protests against the Finance Bill. An IPOA investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death was ongoing at the end of the year.

The case against former police officer Ahmed Rashid, who was accused of at least two extrajudicial executions, continued at the Kibera Law Courts. Immediate family members of Ahmed Rashid's alleged victims were among the witnesses presented by the prosecution.

FORCED EVICTIONS

Between March and April, the government forcibly evicted at least 6,000 households and demolished their homes in the Mathare and Mukuru Kwa Njenga settlements of Nairobi. The evictions were carried out amid heavy rainfall and flooding. The government claimed the residents built their homes on riparian land which was therefore prone to flooding. However, residents' consent prior to eviction was not obtained, nor did the authorities engage them on the provision of an adequate notice period or provide a clear and appropriate relocation plan. The residents were left homeless, in dire need of food and other essential commodities, and at risk of contracting diseases. In November the High Court in Nairobi directed that representatives of the government and residents should jointly determine the amount of losses incurred by April 2025, following which the government should compensate the evicted residents.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, at least 97 women were killed between August and October, most as a result of gender-based violence. The government failed to introduce measures to protect women and girls from widespread gender-based violence committed by intimate partners, family members and others, particularly men known to their victims. The killings of Rita Waeni and Starlet Wahu sparked nationwide marches during which hundreds of women demanded that the government strengthen safeguards against gender-based violence, expedite investigations and prosecute alleged perpetrators.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

On 1 October the government replaced the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) with the Social Health Insurance Fund (SHIF). The new system required Kenyans to contribute 2.75% of their gross monthly income, leading to an increased contribution from most of those in employment. Those not in employment were also expected to contribute KES 300 (about USD 2.32) per month to access healthcare. Although presented as aiming to provide health coverage for all Kenyans, delays in implementing the system meant most hospitals did not receive sufficient income from the government to treat patients on the SHIF scheme. This meant that some patients, especially those with long-term health conditions, had more difficulty accessing healthcare.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Civil society groups expressed their concerns about and dissatisfaction with the government's digital identification project, which intended to integrate people's personal data across all digital platforms to facilitate access to public services. The groups claimed that the government's attempt at public consultation on the project was not meaningful as most Kenyans did not understand the effect this would have on the security of their data.

KOSOVO

Republic of Kosovo

New sentences were issued to former military officers for war crimes committed during the 1998-99 conflict. The implementation of a cooperation agreement with Serbia to locate 1,600 people still missing since that conflict remained stalled. Parliament failed to pass a law providing access to In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) treatment in public hospitals. No progress was made on allowing same-sex couples to form civil partnerships.

BACKGROUND

Kosovo's bid to become a member of the Council of Europe was stalled, depriving its citizens of access to the European Court of Human Rights. The Committee of Ministers delayed its vote on Kosovo's membership after Kosovo refused a last-minute request by some member countries that it should first establish an association of Serb-majority communities, as set out in the Brussels agreement of 2013 between Kosovo and Serbia.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATIONS

In February and April, the Basic Court of Pristina sentenced three former members of Serbian police and military forces for war crimes committed in 1999 in the Pristina and Istog regions. Dushko Arsiq, Ekrem Bajroviq and Çaslav Joliq received sentences of 13, 12 and eight years' imprisonment respectively.

In July, Kosovo Specialist Chambers in the Hague sentenced former Kosovo Liberation Army member Pjetër Shala to 18 years' imprisonment for the war crimes of arbitrary detention, torture and murder committed in 1999. In September, the Appeals Panel changed the sentence given to Salih Mustafa, a Kosovo Liberation Army unit commander charged with arbitrary detention, cruel treatment, torture and murder, from 22 to 15 years' imprisonment.

Enforced disappearances

Over 1,600 persons were still missing from the 1998-99 conflict in Kosovo, with persistent impunity for perpetrators linked to their disappearance. A 2023 agreement between Kosovo and Serbia to cooperate in locating people who went missing between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2000 was not implemented due to strained relations between the two countries.

Wartime sexual violence

The Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims demanded that the government remove a 2025 deadline with respect to applications for the status of "victim of

wartime sexual violence", involving reparations of EUR 230 per month. As of October, a government commission established in 2018 had granted this status to 1,688 of 2,018 applicants.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Access to IVF treatment continued to be available only in private clinics, after another failed attempt by the parliament to pass a law on reproductive health allowing IVF treatment in public hospitals. The debate was followed by disinformation and hate speech against single women by some MPs.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The government failed to propose a new vote on reforms to the Civil Code, rejected by parliament in 2022, which would have paved the way for registering same-sex civil partnerships. LGBTI survivors of domestic violence had no access to specialized shelters, despite commitments made by the authorities.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In July, parliament passed a new Law on the Independent Media Commission despite criticism by civil society organizations and international bodies that the measure would introduce state licensing and control of online media without providing safeguards. The Constitutional Court was reviewing its legality at year's end, with a final decision pending.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In May, parliament approved an agreement with Denmark to rent out 300 of its prison cells for foreign nationals convicted of crimes in Denmark and due to be deported at the end of their sentence. Over 10 years, the fees would allow Kosovo to invest EUR 210 million in renewable energy. The Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims raised concerns about limited public consultation over the project and inadequate space in the prison complex.

KUWAIT

State of Kuwait

The government continued to use "state security" laws to prosecute and imprison its critics, including members of Kuwait's parliament – the National Assembly – thereby suppressing the right to freedom of expression. Authorities ceased issuing travel documents to Kuwait's native stateless population, the Bidun, outside of exceptional circumstances. Migrant workers remained at risk of abuse. Executions were carried out for the third consecutive year.

BACKGROUND

On 15 February the emir dissolved the National Assembly, elected in June 2023, because of its "persistence in using offensive, undisciplined language that did not comport with the respect due to his Royal Highness", after MP AbdulKarim al-Kandari responded to the emir's criticism of the legislature. Parliamentary elections were held on 4 April, but the emir dissolved the newly elected National Assembly on 10 May before it convened and suspended parliamentary government and elections for four years.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Authorities significantly increased attacks on freedom of expression, arresting critics of the government, especially critics of the emir,[1] using existing legislation including the national security section of the 1970 Penal Code and the Print and Publishing Law of 2006.

On 25 January a trial court sentenced Anwar Hayati to four years' imprisonment in his absence for social media posts that criticized Kuwait's system of governance and royal family members. Anwar Hayati had been living in exile in Europe since he received a summons for interrogation from the Office of the Public Prosecution in September 2023.

On 31 January a court of appeal sentenced Bidun activist Mohamed al-

Bargash to three years in prison for social media posts criticizing Kuwait's policies towards the Bidun. His imprisonment had a chilling effect on other activists; he had been the most prominent activist to publicly raise concerns about the treatment of the Bidun over the previous two years.

On 19 February a trial court sentenced activist Abdullah Fairouz and online media manager Fuhaid al-Ajami to prison terms for having an online discussion in which Abdullah Fairouz alleged that the government had business dealings with Israel, contrary to Kuwaiti law. In June, an appellate court reversed Fuhaid al-Ajami's conviction, and he was freed. It upheld Abdullah Fairouz's three-year prison sentence.

On 22 May a trial court sentenced parliamentary candidate Mesaed al-Quraifah to four years' imprisonment for criticizing the royal family's involvement in politics in a campaign speech. The appeal trial was ongoing at the end of the year. On 2 June, authorities began the prosecution of parliamentarian Mohammad al-Mutair on a similar charge. On 20 June, authorities sentenced former parliamentarian and current candidate Hamad al-'Ulyan to two years' imprisonment on similar charges. On 24 June a court sentenced former parliamentarian Waleed al-Tabtaba'i to four years' imprisonment for a social media post that criticized the emir's suspension of constitutional parliamentary government; an appellate court upheld the conviction on 19 September but reduced the sentence to two years. On 29 July a trial court sentenced parliamentarian Anwar al-Fikr to three years' imprisonment on the charge of challenging the emir's authority on social media. Mohammad al-Mutair, Hamad al-'Ulyan and Anwar al-Fikr were released on bail on 2 June, 8 July and 8 September respectively, pending the outcome of their trials or appeals. Anwar al-Fikr faced a second, ongoing prosecution on the charge of undermining the emir's authority during an electoral speech.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

In September the Ministries of Defence and the Interior jointly announced the withdrawal of government housing "for non-Kuwaiti beneficiaries at the end of [their] military service". This amounted to a discriminatory housing policy because it meant that many Bidun, large numbers of whom serve in the Kuwaiti military, would lose their housing, while Kuwaiti nationals retired from military service retained this benefit.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

In July the minister for the interior and defence, Fahd Yusuf al-Sabah, announced that all travel documents issued to Bidun were annulled. Bidun people remained ineligible for regular Kuwaiti passports due to the state's refusal to recognize them as Kuwaiti nationals. Under Article 17 of the Passports Law, they were able to apply for a special travel document (an "Article 17 passport"), although standards for issuance were arbitrary and subject to abuse, including bribery. The minister's action in July effectively eliminated the Bidun's right to travel. The government announced that issuance of Article 17 passports was frozen "with the exception of humanitarian cases (medical treatment and education)", for which Bidun could apply (or re-apply) subject to a case-by-case review. On 28 November a new residency law (Amiri Decree 114/2024) was approved for foreign nationals in Kuwait, introducing clarifications and extending some periods of stay. It did not apply to Bidun people.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Unusually extreme heat continued, with record temperatures recorded in late May being 4°C to 5°C above past averages. The meteorologist for state television, Isa Ramadan, acknowledged that this was partly due to human-induced climate change. Nevertheless, in March the state-owned Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's chief executive announced that Kuwait intended to increase oil production capacity from 3 to 4 million barrels per day by 2035, and Kuwait announced further increases when it

discovered new reserves in the Al-Nokhatha oil field in July.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

As in previous years, outdoor processions for the Shia holy period of Ashura were banned.

For the second consecutive year there were no public protests of significant size, following the prosecution of rare demonstrations by Bidun Kuwaitis in 2022.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Migrant workers lacked legal protections and remained at risk of abuse because of the *kafala* sponsorship system.

On 12 June at least 49 Indian migrant workers were killed and 50 others injured when a fire broke out in an overcrowded residence, raising concerns about living conditions and health and safety issues faced by migrant workers in Kuwait.

On 1 July the minister for the interior and defence announced that security forces had launched a nationwide campaign to find "violators" of the Residency Law, in order to detain and deport them. Security authorities warned that anyone sheltering someone who had overstayed their visa could also be subject to prosecution. The government-controlled domestic press reported that more than 700 migrants were arrested within the first 24 hours of the campaign, as security forces closed off entrances and exits to neighbourhoods and moved through the streets stopping migrants to check their documents. Deportations were conducted without any guarantee of the right to challenge their legality, even though almost all migrant workers were entirely dependent on their employers to apply for their visa renewals. Scores of migrants were detained for months awaiting deportation with no legal recourse.

DEATH PENALTY

Kuwait continued to impose new death sentences, including for drug-related offences which do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" under international law. The authorities carried out executions for the third consecutive year.

1. *Kuwait: Year to Date Marked by Escalating Repression*, 27 June ↑

KYRGYZSTAN

The Kyrgyz Republic

The authorities escalated their crackdown on peaceful dissent. Activists and independent journalists were detained and prosecuted on spurious charges. New legislation on "foreign representatives" severely restricted civil society's rights to freedom of association and expression. Twenty-two defendants were acquitted of politically motivated charges. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, remained widespread and under-reported. Three out of four households could not afford an adequate diet. Authorities failed to consult the public about policies and decisions affecting the environment.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities intensified restrictions on media freedom and peaceful dissent through politically motivated prosecutions and legislative proposals that could be used to silence critical voices.

According to human rights NGO Kylym Shamy, prosecutors filed in courts at least 71 criminal cases against journalists, activists and bloggers and social media commentators between January and October. The charges ranged from inciting ethnic or religious hatred to calling for mass disturbances and the overthrow of the constitutional order, and aimed to punish critical reporting on politically sensitive issues, allegations of corruption and human rights violations.

In January, police arrested 11 current and former media workers associated with the Ayt Ayt Dese and Temirov Live investigative journalism projects on baseless charges of "calling for mass unrest". On 10 October, after a trial held behind closed doors, a court sentenced Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy, head of Temirov Live, and Azamat Ishenbekov to six and five years' imprisonment respectively.

Two defendants were sentenced to three years' probation and seven were acquitted.[1] On 18 December an appeal court upheld the verdicts. This decision was in turn appealed to the Supreme Court at the end of December.

In July, police arrested Zhoomart Karabaev, an employee of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), after he claimed that the State Committee for National Security had pressured NAS members to fabricate their reports to support the prosecution of government critics. Zhoomart Karabaev was charged with inciting mass disturbances for his social media posts and public statements. His trial started in October and was ongoing at the end of December.

In July the Supreme Court upheld an order to close the investigative media outlet Kloop Media Public Foundation. The ruling stemmed from a lawsuit by the Bishkek City Prosecutor's Office alleging, among other things, that Kloop had failed to register as a mass media outlet, had engaged in media activity not listed in its charter and was encouraging readers to join anti-government protests.[2]

In August the government proposed legislation to make slander and insult online or in mass media administrative offences. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission had previously reviewed the draft law and concluded that it needed significant changes to meet international human rights standards. Nevertheless, in December parliament approved the bill.

In September the government submitted for public consultation further draft legislation to reinstate criminal liability for possession of vaguely defined "extremist" materials. The draft also proposed a new offence of using the internet or mass media to publicly incite "extremist" activities or the "violent seizure of power", raising fears that it could be used to crack down on critical voices.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In April, President Sadyr Japarov signed a restrictive law requiring all NGOs receiving foreign funding and engaging in vaguely defined "political activity" to register as "foreign representatives". Under this legislation, the authorities could suspend the activities of an NGO without a court decision or deregister the organization if it failed to register as a "foreign representative". In October the Venice Commission concluded that the law contradicted Kyrgyzstan's constitution and international treaties and that its implementation posed a "real risk of stigmatizing, silencing and eventually eliminating" NGOs that received foreign funding.

By the end of December few organizations had registered as foreign representatives, but many had either reduced their activities or ceased to operate as an NGO.

UNFAIR TRIALS

On 14 June, a court acquitted all 22 defendants in the so-called Kempir Abad case of politically motivated charges of plotting mass riots and, in some cases, of attempting to violently seize power. In a case marred by inconsistencies and procedural violations, the defendants had been detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights, including expressing concerns about ceding control of the Kempir Abad (Andijan) freshwater reservoir in 2022. The prosecution, which had requested 20 years' imprisonment for all 22 defendants, appealed and proceedings were pending at the end of December.[3]

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The work of LGBTI NGOs was negatively impacted by a 2023 law banning LGBTI "propaganda". Many NGOs had to curtail public awareness raising and education activities, and restrict their support for those at risk of human rights abuses.

In January the new Law on the Protection of the Health of Citizens introduced discriminatory restrictions on the right to health and bodily autonomy of transgender persons by raising the age at which gender-affirming care could be accessed to 25 years. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) urged the government to revise the new law to guarantee non-discriminatory access to

sexual and reproductive health services and gender-affirming medical care for transgender persons. It also expressed concern about delays in the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and recommended repealing all legislation discriminating against LGBTI persons, in particular the law on propaganda of "non-traditional sexual relations".

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Domestic violence and violence against women and girls continued to be widespread and under-reported, and impunity for perpetrators prevailed. The police recorded 14,293 cases of domestic violence between January and October, an increase of 37% on 2023.

In August the president signed a law that removed the option of reconciliation in cases of rape and sexual assault. However, domestic violence, including marital rape, remained an administrative offence, punishable only by fines or administrative detention of up to seven days.

In October the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities noted that women and girls with disabilities who were victims of sexual and gender-based violence faced specific and almost unsurmountable barriers to seeking help and protection.

RIGHT TO FOOD

In October the CESCR expressed concern that almost half the population, especially those living in poverty, could not meet daily nutritional requirements, and that three out of four households could not afford an adequate diet. Approximately one in three people in Kyrgyzstan lived in poverty. Children, people with disabilities, migrant workers, families and rural communities were disproportionately affected.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Kyrgyzstan failed to adopt a regulatory framework with legal obligations to exercise human rights due diligence, despite what the CESCR called "the detrimental impact of extractive activities and development projects on the environment and livelihoods of local communities".

In June the president repealed a 2019 law that prohibited the development of rare mineral deposits without an effective consultation with the affected communities.

In September the government started mining thorium in the Kyzyl-Ompol area without conducting prior human rights due diligence and a comprehensive environmental assessment.

1. "Kyrgyzstan: Drop baseless charges against Temirov LIVE and Ayt Ayt Dese journalists", 2 October ↑
2. "Kyrgyzstan: Overturn decision to liquidate Kloop Media", 6 September ↑
3. "Kyrgyzstan: Acquittal in 'Kempir-Abad case' is a victory for justice and human rights", 14 June ↑

LAOS

Lao People's Democratic Republic

The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly were restricted. Christians faced persecution for practising their religion. State spending on social services continued to decline. Myanmar nationals were arrested and handed over to the Myanmar army, placing them at risk of serious human rights violations. Government responses to human trafficking remained inadequate.

BACKGROUND

Amid the ongoing economic crisis, the gross debt remained high at 108.3% of GDP and inflation peaked at 26.15% in June.

In June the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted a one-day visit to Laos. He raised concerns about the negative impact of the lack of "vibrant civic space" on social, environmental and human rights issues.

An estimated 204,500 people required humanitarian assistance in the wake of severe flooding and landslides caused by

Typhoon Yagi which hit the north and centre of the country in September.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Individuals participating in peaceful protests faced arbitrary arrest and detention. On 23 January, police arrested four residents of Xang village in Xieng Khouang province. The four were participating in a peaceful protest over the registration of legal ownership of land by a wood processing company. The villagers disputed this as they were also seeking recognition of communal ownership of the land. The police subsequently arrested two women who were visiting the detainees.

On 28 August, police detained two graphic artists for posting a satirical video on Facebook about the state of the roads in their home town in Bokeo province. One was released the same day without charge. The second was required to attend a "re-education" class and publicly apologize before being released five days later.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Unregistered Christian groups continued to face persecution, despite the legal guarantee of the right to freedom of religion under the constitution. On 4 February, local authorities in Kaleum Vangke village in Savannakhet province destroyed a house church and burnt religious texts. Prior to the attack, the village authorities had reportedly summoned Christian families and told them to stop holding religious services.

On 2 July, Thongkham Philavanh, an ethnic Khmu Christian pastor, was shot dead by two unidentified men in Xai district, Oudomxay province. The police said they were investigating the killing but there was no information on their progress by year's end.

RIGHT TO SOCIAL SECURITY

During his visit to the country, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights raised concerns about declining public spending on social protection, health, education and other social services. According to the Asian Development Bank, expenditure on social protection amounted to just 0.7% of GDP. Worker protections, including unemployment benefits and insurance for work-related accidents and occupational diseases, were not available to people working in the informal sector, which constitutes 86.4% of the workforce.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

On 13 April, police arrested 17 Myanmar nationals in Ton Pheung district, Bokeo province, before transferring them on 3 May to Myanmar where they were at risk of torture and other human rights violations. According to media reports, the arrests were carried out on the request of the Myanmar military who alleged that the 17 were supporters of the armed opposition, the People's Defence Forces. Other sources said the detainees were collecting funds for people displaced by the conflict in Myanmar.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In October the CEDAW Committee raised concerns that Laos was "becoming a country of transit and destination for sexual exploitation and human trafficking". Human trafficking, related to cyber-scamming operations run by transnational organized crime syndicates, remained rampant in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GTSEZ) in north-western Laos. Lao and Chinese police were involved in operations to arrest and deport hundreds of Chinese nationals suspected of being involved in scamming operations. No prosecutions of individuals responsible for human trafficking were known to have taken place.

Credible reports pointed to the persistent online recruitment and trafficking for sexual exploitation of young women, particularly to China and to entertainment areas in the GTSEZ.

LEBANON

Republic of Lebanon

The armed conflict between Israel and the armed group Hezbollah claimed thousands of lives and had a devastating impact on

civilians in Lebanon. Israeli forces carried out violations of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects. Hezbollah also repeatedly launched unguided rockets into northern Israel in violation of international humanitarian law. The Lebanese government failed to fully guarantee the right to social security, despite some positive reforms. Many buildings failed to meet minimum safety standards and people were killed when residential buildings collapsed. Journalists and government critics were harassed and intimidated by public officials using criminal defamation laws. A declaration accepting the ICC's jurisdiction in Lebanon was swiftly withdrawn by the government, and an investigation into the Beirut Port explosion in 2020 remained suspended. The authorities increased pressure on Syrian refugees to leave the country. Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice.

BACKGROUND

Parliament failed to elect a president during the year, and the government continued to function in a caretaker capacity.

The conflict between Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based armed group, and Israel escalated significantly. On 23 September the Israeli military launched Operation Northern Arrows, striking thousands of sites across Lebanon and killing more than 500 people during the first 24 hours. On 27 September, Israeli air strikes in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, killed Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah. On 1 October, Israel began a ground invasion into southern Lebanon. Between 8 October 2023 and 28 November 2024, more than 4,047 people were killed, including at least 240 children, and at least 16,638 injured – the vast majority since September 2024. More than 1.2 million people were displaced by the conflict. In Israel, more than 100 people were killed by Hezbollah rocket attacks, and 63,000 people were displaced. A further 12 civilians were killed in the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

Within days of an Israel/Lebanon ceasefire deal on 27 November, numerous ceasefire violations were recorded. According to the World Bank in October, the cost of physical damage and economic loss in Lebanon due to the conflict with Israel was estimated to be USD 8.5 billion.

According to the Central Administration of Statistics, the annual average inflation rate of the consumer price index reached 45.24% in 2024, nearly 80 points below that of 2023, marking the return of the inflation to a double-digits rate after three years of fluctuation between 100% and 300%. The decrease was predominantly attributed to the stability of the exchange rate as of August 2023.

Israeli attacks destroyed tens of thousands of olive trees and damaged agricultural land across Lebanon. Between 8 October 2023 and November 2024, 2,000 hectares had been damaged and 340,000 head of livestock killed, and about 75% of farmers had lost their primary source of income, according to the Lebanese government.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Israeli forces committed violations of international humanitarian law in Lebanon, including direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, indiscriminate attacks and disproportionate attacks, which likely constituted war crimes.

The Israeli military issued inadequate, and in some cases misleading, evacuation warnings to residents of the southern suburbs of Beirut and south Lebanon, in violation of its obligations under international law to take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians.

The Israeli military intentionally left a trail of destruction as it moved through Lebanon, at times razing entire villages. Many villages in southern Lebanon were left uninhabitable when Israeli forces destroyed civilian structures. Amnesty International identified 21 villages that were significantly damaged or destroyed by Israeli ground forces between 1 October and 7 November. In each of the 21 villages, civilian buildings were destroyed

after Israeli soldiers manually laid out explosive charges or razed them with excavators. Among the civilian buildings destroyed were at least 16 religious sites, including a 2,100-year-old shrine and two cemeteries.

Amnesty International found that Israeli forces unlawfully attacked residential buildings in the villages of al-Ain in northern Bekaa on 29 September and Aitou in northern Lebanon on 14 October, as well as in the city of Baalbeck on 21 October. Israeli forces also unlawfully attacked the municipal headquarters in Nabatieh, in southern Lebanon, on 16 October. The Israeli military did not issue warnings before these strikes, which killed at least 49 civilians including entire families and which likely constituted war crimes.[1]

According to the WHO, between 8 October 2023 and 22 November 2024, 226 health workers and patients were killed in Lebanon in 137 Israeli attacks on health facilities and ambulances.

Amnesty International investigated four Israeli attacks on healthcare facilities and medical vehicles in Beirut and southern Lebanon between 3 and 9 October, in which 27 healthcare workers and three other individuals were killed. Prior to these attacks, the Israeli military had repeatedly accused Hezbollah of using ambulances to transport fighters and weapons, and of using medical centres affiliated with the Islamic Health Association as a "cover for terrorist activities". However, Amnesty International did not find evidence of these facilities being used for military purposes at the time of the attacks and instead found that the strikes likely amounted to direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects.

Between October and November, Israel targeted branches of Qard al-Hassan, a non-profit financial institution affiliated with Hezbollah, across Lebanon. In the absence of evidence that these branches had become military objectives, the strikes constituted unlawful direct attacks on civilian objects.[2]

On 17 September, Israel detonated explosive devices hidden within thousands of pagers across Lebanon, killing at least 12 people including two children and two medics, and injuring at least 2,323 people. The following day, Israel detonated similar explosive devices inside scores of hand-held walkie-talkies, killing at least 25 people and injuring at least 608.[3] The attacks were indiscriminate and may constitute war crimes.

RIGHT TO SOCIAL SECURITY

Despite the government making limited reforms and taking other measures during the year, Lebanon remained far from having a universal social protection system that guaranteed the right to social security for all.

The government failed to ensure access to even minimal social protection during the economic crisis for which it was largely responsible. Lebanon's social protection system, which was already fragmented, limited and inequitable before the 2019 economic crisis, collapsed. This left many people without access to key forms of social security, including affordable health insurance and basic income security for families with children, older people and those unable to work.[4]

In February, after several years of discussion and delay, the government adopted its National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS). The NSPS included key reforms, such as an inclusive pension scheme for private sector workers, income security for older people, and improved medical coverage for persons with disabilities.

In November the Ministry of Social Affairs announced a one-time cash transfer of USD 100 to people with valid Personal Disability Cards, supported by the ILO, UNICEF, the EU and the Netherlands. The transfer was a continuation of the National Disability Allowance (NDA) programme, launched in April 2023 to provide income support to people with disabilities. The ministry announced the renewal of the NDA until September 2025 with a monthly sum of USD 40 transferred to eligible individuals with disabilities who were born between 1994 and 2009.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

Many buildings in Lebanon failed to meet minimum safety standards.

One year after the February 2023 earthquakes, people in the city of Tripoli and elsewhere continued to live in homes that were severely damaged because they could not afford repairs or alternative housing. Tripoli had the highest concentration of unsafe buildings in the country. Of the 162 buildings listed as being at risk of collapse in Lebanon, 63 were in Tripoli, along with 51 historical or heritage buildings in dire need of renovation, many of which were inhabited.[5] The government's response was inadequate and limited to serving eviction notices, and in some cases fines, to people living in unsafe structures.

In February, two residential buildings collapsed in the Choueifat region, southern Beirut. On 11 February the residents evacuated the first building minutes before it collapsed, when they noticed cracks appearing. The second building collapsed after midnight on 19 February, killing at least four people, including a baby.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities continued to use criminal defamation laws to harass, intimidate and attack journalists and critics.

The General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces disclosed that the Cybercrimes Bureau investigated 1,684 insult and defamation cases between January 2019 and March 2024, including 18 defamation cases between January and March 2024.

At least four individuals, including three journalists, were summoned for questioning by high-ranking officials in relation to their work. The criminal complaints against them appeared to be retaliatory, targeting speech protected under international human rights law, rather than addressing actual harm caused. In three instances, the summoned parties were not informed of the allegations prior to the questioning, violating their fair trial rights. At the end of the year, two of the individuals remained uncertain whether the charges against them had been dropped.[6]

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 26 April, Lebanon's caretaker cabinet voted to instruct the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants to file a declaration with the ICC, accepting the court's jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute crimes on Lebanese territory since 7 October 2023. On 28 May the government reversed this decision leading to concerns about impunity for international crimes.

The investigation into the Beirut Port explosion on 4 August 2020, which killed at least 236 people and left more than 7,000 injured, remained suspended since December 2021.

On 16 January the Court of Cassation suspended an arrest warrant against former public works minister Youssef Fenianos, who was charged in September 2021 with homicide and criminal negligence by the lead investigator in the Beirut Port explosion case.[7]

On 1 July, families of victims of the Beirut Port explosion joined Lebanese and international human rights organizations in addressing an open letter to the UN Human Rights Council, calling for the establishment of an international, independent and impartial fact-finding mission into human rights violations related to the explosion.

Perpetrators continued to commit torture and other ill-treatment with impunity. Lebanon's military court missed an opportunity to hold accountable security officials who were accused of torturing to death Syrian refugee Bashar Abd Saud. On 1 November, all the defendants in his case were sentenced to time in prison already served after the court reduced the nature of their crime from felony to misdemeanour, dropped the charges under the anti-torture law and replaced them with charges under Article 166 of the Code of Military Justice, which prohibits violating regulations, orders and general instructions.[8]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Lebanon continued to host the largest number of refugees per capita, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. Prior to the

escalation of hostilities with Israel, the government estimated that there were 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

In April the authorities stepped up the use of hateful rhetoric towards refugees from Syria and introduced additional restrictive measures intended to pressure them to leave Lebanon, even though no part of Syria was safe for refugee returns. Starting in May, the security services carried out dozens of raids and forcibly deported scores of Syrian refugees. On 2 May the European Commission announced a EUR 1 billion aid package to Lebanon, in part to bolster the ability of Lebanese security services to curb irregular migration through the Mediterranean from Lebanon to Europe. Human rights groups raised serious concerns about the deal, which was followed by numerous discriminatory policies targeting Syrian refugees, more than 83% of whom did not have access to legal residency in Lebanon.[9]

On 26 September Lebanese General Security announced new measures aimed at returning to Syria those Syrians who overstayed their residency or entered Lebanon irregularly, despite the well-documented risks that they would face on return, including torture, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. UNHCR expressed concerns over the Lebanese General Security issuing re-entry bans for some of those individuals.

The effect of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah on infrastructure and humanitarian access and operations left many refugees without access to shelter, healthcare, food, cash assistance or protection services.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice.

Women's rights groups continued to advocate for a unified personal status law and political rights, including the right to equal custody of their children, to full protection from domestic violence, and to pass on their nationality to their foreign spouses and children.

1. "Lebanon: Israeli air strikes that killed at least 49 civilians further evidence of war crimes", 12 December ↑
2. "Israel/Lebanon: Branches of Hezbollah-affiliated financial institution not military targets", 22 October ↑
3. "Lebanon: Establish international investigation into deadly attacks using exploding portable devices", 20 September ↑
4. *Lebanon: "The Country Is Dissolving and No One Cares": Surging Need and Crashing Support for Social Security During Lebanon's Economic Crisis*, 2 December ↑
5. "Lebanon: Thousands in Tripoli living in unsafe housing a year on from devastating earthquakes", 20 February ↑
6. "Lebanon: End use of defamation laws to target journalists and critics", 3 May ↑
7. "Lebanon: Suspension of arrest warrant for former minister another travesty of justice in Beirut blast investigation", 18 January ↑
8. "Lebanon: Missed opportunity for justice in landmark case over torture and death in custody of Syrian refugee", 5 November ↑
9. "Lebanon: World leaders must commit to protecting Syrian refugees as Lebanon steps up crackdown ahead of Brussels conference", 27 May ↑

LESOTHO

Kingdom of Lesotho

An Office of the Ombudsperson investigation found that detainees were tortured by correctional services officers. Journalists were intimidated and harassed, leading them to self-censor. The right to a fair trial was restricted. Survivors of gender-based violence faced barriers to justice. A UN expert raised concerns about discrimination against persons with albinism. The Polihali Dam project restricted local communities' access to water and caused significant environmental disruption.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

There were multiple allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees, particularly against the Lesotho Correctional Services (LCS). At least 300 detainees at Maseru Correctional Centre Institution were subjected to such treatment by LCS correctional officers, according to the Office of the

Ombudsperson's findings, released in March. The government established an inquiry into the claims, but no further information on its progress was available at the end of the year.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Computer Crimes and Cyber Security Bill 2024, which included provisions that criminalize and carry harsh fines for certain online expression, remained pending before the National Assembly. The bill raised fears among the media that it could allow for increased government surveillance and intimidation.

The killing in May 2023 of outspoken journalist Ralikonelo Joki by unidentified gunmen led many journalists to self-censor. In April 2024, Lesotho Tribune newspaper journalists were repeatedly threatened and harassed by unidentified individuals in an apparent attempt to stifle their views and discourage their investigative journalism. Other media workers faced similar treatment.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

Judges and lawyers were increasingly subjected to intimidation, including threats and other forms of pressure, particularly by the military and other state actors. Reports indicated that harassment was used to influence judicial outcomes that were favourable to the government's or military's interests.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to the Millennium Challenge Corporation, more than 86% of women and girls experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime. However, many survivors did not report incidents for fear of social retribution or from a sense of futility. Legislation contained provisions to protect against such violence, but enforcement was weak and authorities often failed to hold perpetrators accountable. Survivors faced considerable obstacles in accessing justice, including prolonged legal proceedings and insufficient support services.

DISCRIMINATION

In April, after visiting Lesotho, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism stated that this minority experienced discrimination, including lack of access to healthcare and education.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

According to the World Bank's *Macro Poverty Outlook* report, nearly 50% of the population lived below the poverty line. This rose to 61% in rural areas. The Polihali Dam construction project in the Mokhotlong district (see below) led to the diversion of local communities' water supplies, primarily to South Africa. This drove local communities into increasingly high levels of poverty and undermined their right to livelihoods.

According to UNICEF, educational infrastructure was under-resourced. For example, only 93 of more than 1,700 mapped schools had an internet connection.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The Polihali Dam project caused significant environmental disruption and harmed ecosystems. In July the Seinoli Legal Centre raised concerns about the lack of will from the government to implement the project in a way that would ensure affected communities received fair compensation and that their socio-economic rights were respected.

LIBYA

State of Libya

Security forces, militias and armed groups across Libya carried out arbitrary arrests targeting hundreds of activists, protesters, journalists, women social media users and others. Thousands remained arbitrarily detained solely for their political or tribal affiliation, following grossly unfair trials or without legal basis. Torture and other ill-treatment remained widespread and systematic. "Confessions" extracted under torture were published online. Civil society

was stifled amid efforts by rival authorities to control the registration, funding and activities of NGOs. Sporadic clashes between militias and armed groups using explosive wide-area impact weapons led to civilian casualties and destruction of civilian objects. Women, girls and members of religious minorities faced entrenched discrimination. LGBTI individuals were subjected to arbitrary arrests, prosecutions and death threats. Militias and armed groups carried out forced evictions and house demolitions. EU-backed Libyan coastguards in western Libya, and armed groups in eastern Libya, intercepted thousands of refugees and migrants at sea and forcibly returned them to detention in Libya. Detained refugees and migrants were subjected to torture, sexual violence and forced labour. Thousands were forcibly expelled to neighbouring countries without due process or the possibility to claim asylum. Courts handed down death sentences following unfair trials; no executions took place.

BACKGROUND

Libya's political deadlock deepened as rival factions failed to agree a new unity government and a unified budget or set dates for long-delayed presidential and parliamentary elections.

On 30 September, rival governments agreed on a new governor for the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), ending the banking crisis that had affected trading, oil revenues and access to foreign currency since the ousting of CBL governor Sadik al-Kebir on 20 August.

The Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), the de facto authorities in eastern and parts of southern Libya, paused oil production in relation to the crisis over CBL's leadership and the reported arrest warrant issued by Spain in August against Saddam Haftar, the de facto leader of the Tarik Ben Zeyad (TBZ) armed group and son of LAAF General Commander Khalifa Haftar.

Violations of the UN arms embargo on Libya persisted with Russian shipments delivered openly in eastern Libyan ports.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Security forces, militias and armed groups arbitrarily arrested hundreds of activists, tribal leaders, journalists, government officials and others for their actual or suspected affiliations or opinions or for financial gain. Thousands continued to be detained solely for their tribal or political affiliations, following grossly unfair trials or without legal basis.

In February, around 20 armed men from the Support Service of Security Directorates in the Eastern Region arrested Sufi Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju from his home in Benghazi. He remained arbitrarily detained without charge or trial at the end of year and was denied access to his family and lawyers.

In July, unidentified armed men in plain clothes abducted political activists Al-Moatassim Al-Areebi and Mohamed Shtewi from a street in Misrata. They arbitrarily detained the two men for two days in connection to leaked recordings implicating officials in corruption.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained systematic in prisons and detention facilities nationwide. Reported methods included beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence and stress positions. "Confessions" extracted under torture continued to be published online by militias and armed groups.

Authorities failed to promptly and effectively investigate the causes and circumstances of suspicious deaths in custody. In July, Ahmed Abdel Moneim Al-Zawi died while detained by the Internal Security Agency (ISA), in Ajdabiya. The ISA claimed that he had hanged himself, but witnesses reported seeing a bruise on the back of his head which appeared to come from a heavy blow. A prosecutor in Benghazi closed the case without any investigation.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Armed actors aligned to rival authorities continued to crack down on civil society, including by targeting activists through abductions, arbitrary detention, summons for

coercive interrogations, threats and demands for information.

In October the ISA armed group in Sabha raided a civil society event on mental health, briefly arresting and interrogating several attendees.

The Commission of Civil Society, an official body, introduced a bill on NGOs that would grant the government undue powers over NGOs' registration, funding and activities. The draft bill, as well as counter-proposals submitted by Libyan civil society, remained pending before parliament.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Armed groups and militias arbitrarily arrested and detained hundreds of activists, protesters, journalists and online content creators simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

In January the ISA armed group in Sabha arbitrarily arrested blogger Maryam Mansour al-Warfalli over social media posts critical of LAAF. The ISA detained her without charge or trial until October.

On 11 July the ISA militia in the capital, Tripoli, arrested journalist Ahmed Al-Sanousi after he published a story about allegations of corruption in the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU). He was released three days later following a public outcry, and subsequently fled Libya after receiving threats.

A peaceful protest by residents of the western city of Yefren was violently dispersed on 24 October by soldiers affiliated with the Western Mountain Military Region of the armed forces of the GNU. The residents were protesting against deteriorating living conditions and the presence of Tripoli militias. Witnesses reported that two protesters sustained injuries. In the aftermath of the protest, the Central Mountain Security Directorate arrested at least 14 individuals suspected of organizing or participating in the protests. One remained in detention at the end of the year.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS

While a nationwide ceasefire reached in 2020 largely held, sporadic small-scale armed clashes took place in Tripoli, as well as in al-Zawiya and al-Jameel in western Libya and Sabha in southern Libya, between militias and armed groups vying for control of resources or political influence. Indiscriminate attacks and the reckless use of firearms and explosive weapons with wide-area effects in residential areas led to casualties among civilians and damage to or destruction of civilian objects. In May a 10-year-old girl was killed in Tripoli during clashes between local militias.

In August, clashes between two militias in Tajoura, an eastern suburb of Tripoli, in which explosive wide-area impact weapons were used, led to at least nine deaths and further injuries, according to the Ambulance and Emergency Service, as well as the temporary displacement of dozens of families.

IMPUNITY

Officials and commanders of powerful militias and armed groups enjoyed near total impunity for crimes under international law committed in 2024 and previous years.

In May the GNU prime minister established a new agency to combat financial crimes and terrorism, without any human rights vetting of its commander and members.

In July the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution renewing its technical assistance and capacity building in Libya, which fell far short of the investigative and monitoring mechanism advocated by NGOs and risked further entrenching impunity.

In July, 12 low- and middle-level officials were sentenced to prison terms for their responsibility in the deadly collapse of dams near Derna in September 2023. However, authorities failed to promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially and effectively investigate whether powerful military and political figures had failed to protect people's human rights, particularly the rights to life and health.[1]

In September, Abdelrahman Milad, known as "Bija", who was under UN sanctions for his alleged involvement in the trafficking and abuse of migrants, was shot dead in Tripoli without facing justice.

In October the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced warrants for the arrests of six leaders, senior members and affiliates of the al-Kaniat armed group for the war crimes of murder, torture, enforced disappearances and other inhumane acts in the north-eastern town of Tarhouna, which the group controlled until June 2020. Five of the suspects remained at large, while Libyan authorities failed to hand over to the ICC Abdelbari Al Shaqaqi, who was reportedly detained by the Deterrence Apparatus to Combat Terrorism and Organized Crime (DACTO).[2]

Despite its record of committing torture and other crimes, DACTO continued to be involved in the interrogation and detention of individuals accused of crimes under international law, including a commander of the Islamic State armed group accused of responsibility in the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians in Libya in 2015.

DISCRIMINATION

Women and girls

Women faced discrimination in law and practice, including in matters related to marriage, child custody, access to political office and employment.

Militias and armed groups targeted women social media influencers and content creators for forms of expression and dress that did not conform with dominant societal norms grounded in discrimination against women and girls. In March, DACTO released a woman who had been detained on "morality" grounds since November 2022 and whose release the state prosecution had ordered in April 2023.

In September the ISA armed group arrested two women social media influencers at Benghazi airport on accusations that their behaviour had violated societal norms. No information had been provided about their fate and whereabouts by the end of the year.

In June the Presidential Council created the Public Morality Protection Authority under its mandate. In October the GNU established a new Morality Protection Department within the Ministry of the Interior. In November the GNU's minister of the interior announced plans to introduce compulsory veiling for women and enforce it through the deployment of "morality police". He also threatened to introduce stricter measures to prevent women from travelling abroad without a male guardian's permission.

LGBTI people

Consensual same-sex sexual relations between adults remained criminalized. The ISA in Tripoli and other militias and armed groups arrested tens of individuals on the basis of their actual or perceived gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

LGBTI individuals and activists faced death threats for their social media posts, prompting several to flee Libya.

In March the Tripoli-based Office of the Public Prosecutor referred 19 individuals on charges of "homosexuality" and "atheism" to the Indictment Chamber of the South Tripoli First Instance Court. All were released on bail pending trial and were required to report weekly to the Public Prosecutor's office.

In July, Tripoli's Emergency Police arrested a vendor for selling rainbow-coloured kites in Martyrs' Square.

Ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples

In January, parliament adopted a new law criminalizing "witchcraft" and "sorcery". The law jeopardized the rights to freedom of conscience and religion of religious and ethnic minorities, including Sufis and Amazigh adherents of the Ibadi faith.

Members of the Tabu and Tuareg communities, who lacked national identity cards owing to discriminatory laws and regulations governing Libyan citizenship, faced barriers in accessing education and health services.

FORCED EVICTIONS

Militias and armed groups in Tripoli and Benghazi carried out forced evictions and

house demolitions, arresting and intimidating those who protested.

In March, some 350 families were forcibly evicted from their homes in the Abu Salim neighbourhood of Tripoli without being provided with alternative housing, according to the UN.

In October the ISA armed group in Benghazi arrested journalist Mohamed Al-Sarit Qarqar after he criticized online the seizure of private property by the Libya Reconstruction Fund. LAAF-affiliated armed groups had forcibly evicted and demolished his uncles' homes in Benghazi's Jaliana area without adequate compensation or consultation with the community. Mohamed Al-Sarit Qarqar was released after 19 days on medical grounds.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Security forces, militias, armed groups and other non-state actors across Libya continued to commit widespread and systematic human rights violations and abuses against refugees and migrants with impunity.

According to the International Organization for Migration, between January and September, 1,749 people died or went missing at sea in the central Mediterranean. At least two mass graves were uncovered in Libya in March and July, containing 65 and 12 bodies of suspected refugees and migrants, respectively. During the year, 21,762 refugees and migrants were intercepted at sea and forcibly returned to Libya by EU-backed coastguards in western Libya, and by the LAAF-affiliated Libyan Special Naval Forces and the TBZ in eastern Libya.

Widespread arrests based solely on migration status intensified in southern Libya and continued across the country following interceptions at sea as well as raids by militias and armed groups on makeshift migrant encampments or dens of traffickers or smugglers. As of December, more than 5,470 foreign nationals remained arbitrarily detained in centres run by the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM), while thousands more were held by other militias and armed groups. They were detained in cruel and inhuman conditions and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence, extortion, forced labour and denial of adequate medical care.

Throughout the year, Tunisian authorities forcibly expelled thousands of refugees and migrants to Libya. Those returned were detained in cruel and inhuman conditions and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in detention centres run by the Libyan Border Guards, the DCIM or armed groups (see Tunisia entry.)

Armed groups affiliated to LAAF forcibly expelled thousands of refugees and migrants to Chad, Egypt, Niger and Sudan without giving them the opportunity to challenge their deportation or seek international protection. Some, including those rescued from prolonged captivity after being held by traffickers, were expelled for "carrying diseases".

DEATH PENALTY

Libya retained the death penalty for a wide range of offences, including those not meeting the threshold of the most serious crime of "intentional killing" under international law. Civilian and military courts continued to hand down death sentences for murder following grossly unfair trails. No executions took place.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Limited early warning systems and inadequate crisis responses worsened Libya's increasing vulnerability to extreme weather events. In August, heavy rains, floods and thunderstorms affected the cities of Kufra and Ghat as well as other areas in southern Libya, leading to extensive damage and loss of life. Libya had yet to ratify the Paris Agreement or submit any formal plans for climate mitigation and adaptation.

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1. *Libya: "In Seconds Everything Changed": Justice and Redress Elusive for Derna Flood Survivors*, 11 March ↑
2. *Libya: "Every Day We Die a Thousand Times": Impunity for Crimes against Humanity in Tarhouna*, 26 November ↑

MADAGASCAR

Republic of Madagascar

The authorities' continued failure to address the root cause of prison overcrowding resulted in inhumane conditions. Surgical castration was introduced as a punishment for child rape. Civic space was heavily restricted, especially during legislative elections, with crackdowns on the rights to freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly. Authorities used Predator spyware to monitor political opposition members. Extreme weather events and drought led to widespread internal displacement, disproportionately affecting women. High rates of sexual violence against girls persisted, with limited support for survivors. Persons with albinism were subjected to abduction and murder.

BACKGROUND

In March, Cyclone Gamane caused flooding and heavy rains, particularly in the northern Sava region, including in Vohemar city. The cyclone resulted in 18 deaths, displaced 20,737 people and damaged vital infrastructure including roads and bridges connecting the area to other regions of the country. Funding from the international community following the government's calls for international support remained inadequate.

Legislative and municipal elections took place in May and December, respectively.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Detainees continued to suffer overcrowded conditions, with cells often holding more than double their intended capacity, including at the Maison Centrale d'Antanimora prison where a unit built for 30 held at least 60 detainees.

The government failed to reform the practice of harsh custodial sentencing, which disproportionately affected the most vulnerable members of society, including people accused of stealing basic necessities like food or a toothbrush, thereby exacerbating the overcrowding crisis. Between 1 January and 29 November, the Tribunal of Mahajanga – one of 22 main tribunals – found 639 people guilty of petty theft, an offence that could result in a maximum prison sentence of five years. In July the Ministry of Justice's chief of staff justified the practice as a measure to "protect" accused people from mob justice.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In February the government amended the Penal Code to allow surgical castration as punishment for the rape of a child, a practice that violates the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

The rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly remained heavily restricted. In Mananjary district, during legislative election campaigning in April, the chief of staff of the Ministry of National Education threatened to transfer a civil servant to another duty station for supporting an opposition party.

Authorities continued to use Order 60-082 of 13 August 1960, which violated regional and international human rights standards by unduly limiting the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, particularly against protesters. For example, on 3 September, four people were each given a six-month suspended prison term for participating in unauthorized demonstrations after they attended protests demanding the release of the MP for Vangaindrano district, Sylvestre Mahavitara.

On 27 August, security forces violently repressed a peaceful protest by local communities opposing the Base Toliara mining project in Toliara II district.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The right to freedom of expression continued to be severely restricted, particularly for journalists and opposition party members and supporters. Authorities used Predator

spyware to monitor the phones of political opposition members.

On 31 May, MP Marie Jeanne d'Arc Masy Goulamaly was arbitrarily detained for several days for questioning the fairness of legislative elections in her district.

Authorities continued to use the 2016 Communication Code against journalists. For example, Mickaelys Kamy Ndiamahazo was imprisoned after being convicted in September for reporting on local government influence over legislative election outcomes in Toamasina, and for posting a call for civic action on Facebook.

On 17 September, journalist and blogger Patrick Raharimanana was sentenced under the 2016 Communication Code to five years in prison and fined for "interception of computer data" and "publishing documents compromising national security" after he posted the president's travel itinerary on social media during the legislative election period.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The government failed to guarantee the rights of hundreds of people internally displaced from southern Madagascar by severe drought. Despite worsening living conditions, the government did not provide protection or support for displaced people, many of whom continued to suffer violations of their rights to freedom of movement and residence, and to adequate housing. Instead, authorities forcibly evicted displaced people who had settled in protected areas of Ankarafantsika National Park in the Boeny region in northern Madagascar and failed to provide them with adequate alternative housing. No genuine consultation to identify feasible alternatives was conducted, and they were not compensated for losses and damages. The government failed to detail how it would address the needs and interests of those internally displaced by the drought or assess the loss and damage they faced prior to, during, and after displacement.

Boeny's governor reported in July that around 100 people were arriving in the region each week, often after arduous journeys of around 1,500km. Some travelled on foot and/or by bus, without support from the government or international community.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Parliament continued to reject a bill drafted in 2021 that sought to decriminalize abortion, which remained illegal under all circumstances, despite the alarmingly high incidence of rape against girls, including instances involving incest. The government failed to adopt a survivor-centered approach for those affected by sexual violence, implement measures to allow survivors to report rape safely without fear of stigma or retaliation, ensure perpetrators were held accountable, or to provide survivors with prompt access to justice and reparation.

Gender-based discrimination remained pervasive and disproportionately affected women, particularly those displaced by drought, for whom crucial protections were not available. Preconceived ideas rooted in social and cultural norms led to inequalities that reduced the ability of women living in regions including Androy in the south to seek better living conditions. For example, compared to men, women were far less free to sell their resources, including cattle and land, to aid their departure to areas unaffected by the worsening drought. As a result, women and children were increasingly vulnerable to the adverse living conditions.

DISCRIMINATION

There were 23 cases of abductions of persons with albinism. Nine of those abducted were later found dead. Abductions and murders of persons with albinism are driven by dangerous superstitious misconceptions about the condition.

MALAWI

Republic of Malawi

Floods and drought threatened the right to food. Marginalized groups faced discrimination and violence. The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful

assembly were violated. Detainees were tortured and otherwise ill-treated.

BACKGROUND

In March, President Lazarus Chakwera declared a national state of disaster in 23 of 28 districts affected by El Niño conditions.

In October the World Bank reported that 71% of the population were living in extreme poverty.

RIGHT TO FOOD

In October, the World Food Programme said that 5.7 million people were acutely food insecure and in need of food assistance as a result of floods, drought brought on by El Niño, poor harvests, currency devaluation and inflation. Prices of staple foods, including maize, nearly doubled in one year and tripled against the five-year average.

Earlier, in March, President Chakwera said that a preliminary government report found that 749,113 hectares of maize fields – nearly half the national crop area – was damaged by insufficient rain, floods and prolonged dry spells, leading to sharp rises in prices and food insecurity. The government invested in the irrigation sector and provided emergency food assistance in cooperation with partners.

DISCRIMINATION

International NGO Standing Voice recorded four attempted attacks on persons with albinism between January and August. In July, four men were each sentenced to 40 years' imprisonment, and a fifth to life plus 50 years in prison, for killing a three-year-old girl with albinism in Kasungu in 2022.

In June the Constitutional Court ruled to uphold the ban on consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Journalists faced intimidation and prosecution. In January, Gregory Gondwe was forced to flee Malawi after publishing an article on the Platform for Investigative Journalism website, alleging corruption in the military.[2] In April, Macmillan Mhone was arrested in Blantyre and charged with "publishing false news" in connection with a 2023 article alleging that the government conducted business with a man facing corruption and fraud charges. His case did not go to trial.

In May, police failed to protect opposition Alliance for Democracy members from attacks by suspected members of the Malawi Congress Party ahead of the former's rally in Mponela, Dowa district, or to arrest their attackers.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

The Malawi Human Rights Commission recorded the use by police of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees, prolonged detention without charge and the unnecessary transfer of detainees across districts.

In January, a 13-year-old boy was reportedly held for around four days in Misanjo Police Unit, Mulanje district, during which time his hands were bound with rubber bands. This caused circulation problems which necessitated the amputation of one hand and two fingers from the other hand. Two officers went on trial for grievous bodily harm in August.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In January, civil society organization Inua Advocacy recorded at least six cases of xenophobic attacks by members of the public against refugees working as motorcycle taxi drivers. Inua Advocacy also recorded incidents of corruption within the resettlement programme, and of bribery and extortion allegedly by government officials and non-state actors, in Dzaleka refugee camp.

1. "Malawi: Decision to uphold ban on consensual same-sex conduct is a bitter setback for human rights", 28 June ↑
2. "Malawi: Journalist threatened and harassed: Gregory Gondwe", 14 February ↑

MALAYSIA

The government continued to use existing laws to silence dissent and introduced legal amendments further restricting freedom of expression. Refugees and migrants were held in indefinite detention. Death sentences decreased after the death penalty was made discretionary but continued for drug-related offences. Allegations of torture and other ill-treatment persisted in immigration detention centres, along with reports of custodial deaths.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The government expanded laws unreasonably restricting freedom of expression, announcing that it would not amend the Printing Presses and Publications Act, nor amend or repeal the Sedition Act. In December the government rushed through amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) which increased restrictions on freedom of expression, rather than removing them. Previously, the government had promised in its 2022 general election campaign that all these laws would be revised. The authorities continued to use repressive laws, including the CMA and the Sedition Act, to silence dissenting voices.[1]

In January, both the director and producer of the banned film *Mentega Terbang* were charged under the Penal Code for allegedly "wounding religious feelings". Their judicial review against the government's banning of the film was still pending at year's end.

In June, human rights defender Mukmin Nantang was arrested for sedition after raising concerns about the eviction of the Bajau Laut community. He remained under investigation despite his release.[2]

In December, artist Fahmi Reza was arrested for sedition and remanded for one day over a caricature of Sabah's newly appointed governor, Musa Aman, who previously faced corruption charges.

The government continued to restrict social media content by issuing "takedown requests" to social media platforms. Authorities passed new measures, introducing an Online Safety Bill, in part to address cyberbullying, but these changes raised concerns regarding future censorship.[3] In December, rights groups condemned the government for fast-tracking amendments to the CMA that expanded powers to regulate content arbitrarily. [4]

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Authorities continued to use the Peaceful Assembly Act (PAA), the Penal Code and the Minor Offences Act to restrict peaceful protests. Organizers and participants were subjected to unnecessary investigations, detention and use of force.

Despite the government's supportive stance towards the rights of Palestinian people, police investigated pro-Palestinian protesters and organizers under the PAA. In October, police detained seven pro-Palestinian protesters near the US embassy. Civil society condemned this as a troubling misuse of the PAA that undermined the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.[5]

In March, four Women's March Malaysia organizers and participants were questioned by police following a protest organized for International Women's Day. They were investigated under both the PAA and Minor Offences Act, despite submitting advance notice of the rally to the police.

In June the Sabah government arrested eight stateless Bajau Laut Indigenous students, including at least three children. They were detained for seven days under the Immigration Act following a peaceful protest outside the Chief Minister's office.[6]

In July, police used excessive force to intercept peaceful protesters from local human rights organization Teoh Beng Hock Association for Democratic Advancement during their march calling for justice for victims of custodial deaths. The group subsequently filed a complaint with the Independent Police Conduct Commission (IPCC).

DEATH PENALTY

According to official figures, between 1 January and 14 October, the Federal Court commuted 814 mandatory death sentences to 30- to 40-year prison terms and whippings. In the first year after the death penalty was made discretionary by the Abolition of Mandatory Death Penalty Act 2023, there was a significant decrease in death sentences imposed or confirmed on appeal, reducing death row numbers by over two thirds.[7] However, the courts continued to impose the death penalty for drug-related offences, in violation of international law and standards.

In March the government confirmed in Parliament that the moratorium on executions would continue to be observed. In December the government voted in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution calling for a moratorium on executions pending the full abolition of the death penalty.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In January, civil society groups, including Amnesty International, urged that the IPCC be given more authority and independence to effectively address police misconduct.[8]

Government reports disclosed 24 custodial deaths recorded between 2022 and 25 May 2024, all officially attributed to medical reasons. There were also 20 deaths in immigration detention centres between January and June.

In September the Prime Minister announced that the police and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (*Suhakam*) would conduct investigations into injuries to and deaths of detainees in police custody.

In October a detainee in Pokok Sena prison died from a bacterial infection following a whipping sentence imposed and carried out after his death sentence was commuted.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Refugees and migrants faced indefinite detention under harsh conditions. In March, the government denied reports of torture in immigration detention facilities. Also in March the government opened detention centres for undocumented children and families. This led to concerns about the indefinite detention of around 170 children, with no plans for their release. In December, authorities reported that 17,326 people were in detention across 25 centres. UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, had had no access to detention centres in the country since 2019.

In February, 131 detainees escaped from the Bidor Immigration Detention Centre, resulting in two deaths. In October, a report by the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission confirmed severe abuse at Bidor.[9]

Deportations of immigration detainees continued, some of whom may have been at risk of human rights violations upon return. The High Court intervened to halt deportations of a Bangladeshi opposition leader and an Egyptian human rights defender. However, in October, a domestic worker was deported to Cambodia after they criticized Cambodian government leaders.

Indiscriminate immigration raids targeting undocumented migrants remained widespread.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Indigenous Peoples' lands and livelihoods remained under threat from palm oil plantations, logging and dam construction. In July, seven Temoq Indigenous people in Pahang sued an oil palm plantation for encroaching on their customary land. In September, a court halted hydropower company operations on Semai Indigenous land in Perak due to lack of proper consent.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In June, the government announced a plan to reduce use of coal to at most 50% of total energy production by 2035 and to phase out coal completely by 2044. However, this would mean moving towards being more dependent on natural gas as a transitionary fuel, potentially prolonging fossil fuel dependence.

1. "Malaysia: Oral statement Item 6: Consideration of UPR reports: HRC 56th session", 5 July ↑
2. "Malaysia: Arrest of Bajau Laut human rights defender under the Sedition Act is a shameful attempt at suppressing peaceful dissent", 27 June ↑
3. Malaysia: Passage of the Online Safety Bill a grave blow to freedom of expression, 12 December. ↑
4. Malaysia: End Expansion of Repressive Laws Undermining Freedom of Expression and Civic Space, 17 December. ↑
5. "Malaysia: Drop investigations into seven pro-Palestine protesters detained near the US Embassy", 1 October ↑
6. "Malaysia: Stop crackdown on Bajau Laut people", 22 June ↑
7. "Malaysia: One year since repeal of mandatory death penalty, violations of international Law and standards continue despite overall decrease in death sentences", 4 July ↑
8. "Joint Statement: Empower IPCC to remedy the public trust deficit in PDRM", 22 January ↑
9. "Malaysia: Urgent action needed to address EAIC's findings of abuse in Bidor Temporary Immigration Detention Centre", 16 October ↑

MALDIVES

Republic of Maldives

Maldives remained one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, yet it continued to rely heavily on fossil fuels. Marginalized communities faced disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis. Restrictions on press freedom and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly continued.

BACKGROUND

The People's National Congress won the Parliamentary elections in April.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Evidence Act, which allows judges to compel journalists to reveal their sources in matters relating to "terrorism" and "national security", remained. In May, Maldives fell six places in the Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index, ranking 106 out of 180 countries.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Unlawful restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly increased. In February, the Police Commissioner announced bans on any protests in areas surrounding governmental institutions, such as the Parliament building, the President's Office and the Supreme Court.

In February, the High Court ruled that Aishath Rasheed, an employee of the Maldives Police Services, had been wrongfully dismissed from her job. Aishath Rasheed's dismissal in August 2017 followed her participation in a demonstration held to mark three years since the forced disappearance of Minivan News journalist Ahmed Rilwan. The court ordered she be reinstated and compensated.

In August, media reported that two women – Shazra Ibrahim and Aishath Shadhiya – were unlawfully arrested and detained for protesting near embassies, the UN Offices and the residences of ambassadors. The protesters, who were calling for boycotts of Israeli products, were initially remanded in custody before being released on conditional bail on 5 September.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women continued to be underrepresented in public affairs. Only three out of 93 MPs elected in April were women. Gender-based violence persisted, with low rates of investigation, prosecution and trials for cases related to violence against women and girls. In July, the UN Human Rights Committee raised concerns about the failure to make female genital mutilation and domestic violence specific criminal offences.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Adult consensual same-sex, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual acts remained criminalized.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

In July, the UN Human Rights Committee called for reform of the constitutional supremacy of sharia law in line with international human rights commitments. Some religious and political groups continued

to use religious arguments to call for restrictions on human rights and the work of civil society organizations. The Maldivian Democracy Network remained unable to function since it was shut down in 2019 due to lobbying by religious groups.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The International Monetary Fund highlighted the high cost of living, high import costs and high-cost energy in the country. In March, the UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order visited and noted that access to housing and clean water is a challenge for those in remote islands. In July, the UN Human Rights Committee raised concerns about the high prevalence of unsafe abortions, the stigma surrounding reproductive care and geographical barriers to health services.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances was dissolved in May without publishing findings of its investigations or sharing information with families of people who had been forcibly disappeared.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment visited the Maldives and reported on delays to the clean energy transition and heavy reliance on state-subsidized fossil fuels. He highlighted the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on marginalized communities, who have limited access to adaptation measures. The UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order reported on how rapid urbanization and unsustainable development practices continued to exacerbate environmental degradation.

MALI

Republic of Mali

The authorities increased their use of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances to repress the right to freedom of expression. The right to freedom of association was routinely violated. Government and armed forces killed hundreds of civilians. Impunity for crimes under international law was widespread. More than 1,600 schools remained closed due to the armed conflict. New legislation violated LGBTI people's rights.

BACKGROUND

Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso left ECOWAS in January and formed a confederation in July. In March, the military government extended the political transition period which had followed the 2020 military coup.

The 2015 peace agreement between the government and northern separatist groups collapsed and fighting continued in the north. Islamist armed groups continued to attack military positions and local communities, while Russian foreign military personnel fought alongside government forces. Nearly 331,000 people had been internally displaced by 31 July according to UN figures. OCHA said that 32% of the population needed humanitarian assistance.

The Interministerial Committee on Crisis and Disaster Management said 264,646 people were affected by floods which caused at least 177 deaths by October.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTION

Those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly were frequently arbitrarily arrested and detained.

In March, Alpha Yaya Sangaré, a lieutenant colonel in the National Gendarmerie, was arrested following the publication of a book that contained allegations the army committed human rights violations against civilians. The accusations

against him were not disclosed. Also in March, economist Etienne Fakaba Sissoko was arrested in relation to his book denouncing government use of "propaganda".[1] In May, he was convicted of defamation, damaging the state's reputation and distributing fake news, sentenced to three years' imprisonment (one suspended) and fined. In November he lost his appeal against conviction.

On 27 May, 80-year-old Boubacar Karamoko Traoré was arrested at the Office of the Prime Minister and charged with "slighting the integrity of the state, contempt of court and dissemination of misleading statements likely to disturb the public order". Karamoko Traoré was interim president of the strategic committee of the June 5th Movement–Rally of Patriotic Forces, which played a key role in the 2020 post-electoral protests. He had signed a memorandum condemning the military's heavy-handed leadership tactics since 2020, and the decision to delay elections. He was sentenced to one year in prison, which was reduced to three months on appeal in September.

On 20 June, the gendarmerie arrested 11 politicians who were holding a meeting in Bamako, the capital, at the residence of the vice president of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali–African Party for Solidarity and Justice. On 24 June, after being presented to an investigating judge for a summary hearing, 10 of them were remanded in custody. On 5 July, Mohamed Aly Bathily was also arrested in connection with the meeting. He, along with the 10 others, was charged with "disturbing public order and plotting against the state". On 9 September, the investigating judge ordered their provisional release. This was appealed by the prosecutor and they remained in Dioila prison until their release in December.

On 12 July, Youssouf Daba Diawara, former coordinator of the now-dissolved Coordination of Movements, Friends and Sympathizers of Imam Mahmoud Dicko (CMAS) was taken by unidentified armed men from his car to the gendarmerie's Criminal Investigations Brigade. On 15 July, a judge charged him with "opposing legitimate authority" for participating in an unauthorized protest in June. He was provisionally released on 3 October.[2]

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

The fate and whereabouts of several people arrested by the National Agency for State Security (intelligence services) remained unknown for prolonged periods.

In March, Hamadoun Dicko, member of civil society group Tabital Pulaaku Mali, was released after three months' detention in an unknown location. Also in March, around 20 leaders of the now dissolved Malian Association of Students and Pupils (AEEM) were detained without charge in an unknown location until late June. Web activist Yeri Bocoum was forcibly disappeared for almost one month in June, after covering protests organized by the Synergy of Actions for Mali. In August, former MP Idrissa Sankaré was abducted and detained for 24 days.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The government dissolved several civil society associations, including the Observatory for Elections and Good Governance, Kaoural Renouveau, CMAS, AEEM and the Synergy of Actions for Mali. Between 10 April and 10 July, the government suspended all activities by political parties. Also in April, the authorities banned media coverage of activities by political parties and "political associations".

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

Parties to the conflict killed hundreds of civilians unlawfully; some killings may have amounted to crimes under international law.

Armed groups

On 3 January, 24 villagers of Boura, in the Sikasso region, were abducted by Dozo hunters. Days later, the bodies of 17 of them were discovered, according to local organization Tabital Pulaaku. On 6 January, Dozo hunters killed 13 people in Kalala-Peul village, in south-central Mali, near Ségou.

In May, suspected members of the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM)

killed nine youths on the road between Goundam and Diré villages, in Timbuktu region, while they were participating in an army recruitment programme. In the same month, alleged GSIM members killed 19 internally displaced people on their farms in Diallassagou town, in the Mopti region, according to local and media sources. According to government sources, in July, they killed around 23 people in the villages of Djiguibombo and Sokorokanda in the Mopti region, destroying property, including a health centre. They also attacked Dembo village, also in Mopti, killing 20 smallholders.

Government forces

On 17 March, two army drone strikes caused at least 13 civilian deaths, including seven children, and injured more than 12 others in Amasrakad, Gao region.[3] One week later, another drone strike hit a compound in Douna village, in the Mopti region, killing 14 people, including 11 children, and wounding nine others.

On 21 October, drone strikes killed eight civilians, including six children in Inadiatafane, Timbuktu region.[4]

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 26 June, the ICC convicted al Hassan ag Abdoul Aziz of crimes against humanity and war crimes. He was, however, acquitted of the war crimes and crimes against humanity of rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage, and the war crime of attacking protected objects.[5] In November, the ICC sentenced him to 10 years' imprisonment.

There was no progress in the investigations by national jurisdictions of war crimes committed in the Mopti region in the villages of Moura, in 2022, Ogossagou, in 2019 and 2020, and Sobane-Da, in 2019, among others.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In January, the Global Education Cluster, a group of humanitarian NGOs, revealed that 1,657 schools were closed during 2023, and remained so, due to insecurity or humanitarian crisis, affecting 497,100 pupils and 9,942 teachers.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In December, a new Criminal Code was adopted into law under which consensual same-sex sexual conduct was criminalized, and punishable by two years' imprisonment and a fine.

1. "Mali: Arbitrarily detained author must be released: Etienne Fakaba Sissoko", 31 May ↑
2. "Mali: Arbitrarily detained opposition leaders must be immediately released", 19 July ↑
3. "Mali: Drone strikes killed 13 civilians including seven children in Amasrakad", 27 March ↑
4. "Mali: Authorities must investigate deaths of at least eight civilians, including six children, after drone strikes in Inadiatafane", 5 November ↑
5. Mali: ICC conviction of Al Hassan for war crimes and crimes against humanity provides a measure of justice for victims, 27 June ↑

MALTA

Republic of Malta

Abortion remained illegal in most circumstances. Concerns persisted about Malta's failures to respond to distress calls from refugees and migrants in peril at sea. The authorities continued to misuse migration detention. The UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern about restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly in the decades-old legislation.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Abortion remained illegal in most circumstances, except where the pregnant person's life was at immediate risk and before "fetal viability".

In August, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) expressed concern about the "continued criminalization of abortions of pregnancies that may cause substantial physical or psychological pain and suffering,

including pregnancies resulting from rape or incest".

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

At year's end, 238 people had arrived in Malta by sea. Concern persisted about Malta's failure to, or delay in, responding to distress calls from refugees and migrants at sea. In March, at least 60 people were reported to have died on a boat that had departed from Libya. They had been adrift for days despite all relevant maritime authorities, including those in Malta, having been informed by both the EU Border and Coastguard Agency (Frontex) and NGOs of a boat in distress in a specified area. Eventually, the NGO rescue ship *Ocean Viking* reached the boat and rescued 25 survivors.

Malta continued to cooperate with the Libyan authorities to intercept people in the Maltese search and rescue region and take them back to Libya, which was not a safe country for the disembarkation of people rescued at sea. Cases in February and April involved more than 200 people in total. In August, the UN HRC expressed concern at Malta's failures in responding to distress signals, at investigating "possible unlawful deprivations of life" at sea, and at the lack of human rights safeguards in the memorandum of understanding signed with Libya in May 2020 to combat irregular migration.

Malta continued to automatically detain people arriving irregularly by sea on public health grounds. In some cases, children were detained with adults, in violation of international law. In August, the UN HRC recommended that all detention orders based on public health grounds comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality and be subjected to independent oversight. It also recommended that effective remedies be provided to people found to have been arbitrarily detained. In October, the European Court of Human Rights found that Malta had unlawfully detained a group of children, in conditions amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment and without an effective remedy.

In June, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance expressed concern at the government's decision in 2020 to discontinue regularizing the stay of unsuccessful asylum seekers who could not be returned to their countries of origin and had remained in Malta for many years.

In March, the criminal court of Valletta started hearing the case of two asylum seekers, who – together with a third one – had opposed attempts to unlawfully return them to Libya in 2019 when two of them were still children. They were indicted on charges including acts of terrorism and faced life imprisonment. The third man involved in the case was missing and the legal proceedings against him were suspended.

In March, the Constitutional Court dismissed on procedural grounds a case brought by asylum seekers who were unlawfully returned to Libya in 2020 by a commercial ship contracted and instructed by the government, in what became known as the "Easter Monday push back".

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In August, the UN HRC expressed concern at the disproportionate requirements and criminal penalties contained in the Public Meetings Ordinance of 1931, including that of prior written notice, which could be imposed on individuals exercising their right to peaceful assembly. The UN HRC was also concerned at the lack of legal safeguards for demonstrators against the use of excessive force by the police.

The UN HRC in addition expressed concern at the "mass" prosecution of migrants who protested against the conditions in which they were held in the Hal Far detention centre in 2019.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATIONS

The trial of a businessman accused of commissioning the 2017 killing of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia had yet to start.

MEXICO

United Mexican States

Human rights defenders, journalists and protesters remained at risk of criminalization, excessive use of force, violence and death. Human rights violations by the military and National Guard continued, including possible extrajudicial executions; impunity persisted. Disappearances were a huge concern, but there were concerns that the government minimized the scale of the issue. Those searching for disappeared people were at serious risk. Arbitrary detention continued unabated and judicial independence was threatened by constitutional amendments. The rate of gender-based violence, femicides and transgender femicides was high. Access to abortion improved, but some states had yet to decriminalize it. Asylum seekers experienced delays in the processing of their applications and were denied their basic rights. Conditions at the border were increasingly dangerous for migrants to the USA waiting for immigration appointments. Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants were constitutionally recognized. The government continued promoting the production and use of fossil fuels. The "Mayan Train" railway and Tulum International Airport remained in operation despite environmental concerns.

BACKGROUND

In June, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo was elected as Mexico's first female president. The election was the most violent ever, with at least 41 candidates murdered, according to Electoral Laboratory think tank.

Seventeen years since the military's major involvement in public security operations started, the number of disappearances and murders in Mexico continued to increase. In September, Congress approved a constitutional amendment to place the National Guard under the control of the military (Secretary of National Defence, SEDENA), militarizing public safety.[1]

In June, controversial changes to the laws on amnesty and *amparo* (judicial protection for constitutional rights) were enacted, allowing the president to grant amnesty, without restrictions, to anyone providing information for investigations, and banning certain temporary injunctions, even if they could be used to prevent human rights violations.

In September, a constitutional amendment was enacted allowing voters to elect judges at all levels and enabling the creation of anonymous or "faceless judges" for organized crime cases, undermining judicial independence, and the rights to justice and fair trial. In November, the Supreme Court dismissed a project to partially invalidate the judicial amendment. Seven out of 11 judges voted for limiting the scope, but a special majority of eight was required.

On 31 October, a constitutional amendment was approved that made future constitutional amendments impossible to challenge, even by the Supreme Court.

In November, the head of the National Commission on Human Rights was re-elected despite criticism of her administration by civil society.

Also in November, a constitutional amendment was approved to abolish various constitutionally autonomous agencies, including the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information and Personal Data Protection.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

During the year, at least nine human rights defenders were murdered, according to OHCHR, the UN human rights office. A report published in 2024 by NGO Global Witness stated that 15 land defenders and environmental activists were killed in 2023, making Mexico one of the most dangerous countries in the world for territory, land and environment defenders. The criminalization of human rights defenders continued and the outgoing president Andrés Manuel López Obrador stigmatized activists and civil society organizations. There was no progress in the

investigation into the unlawful surveillance of lawyer Ana Lorena Delgadillo, journalist Marcela Turati and forensic expert Mercedes Doretti, who collaborated on the inquiry into the massacre of migrants in 2010 and 2011 in the city of San Fernando, Tamaulipas state. On 3 July, the Prosecutor's Office agreed a Non-Execution of Criminal Action against these three.

Journalists also continued to be at significant risk.[2] At least four journalists were killed in possible connection to their work, according to the organization Article 19. In January, personal information on more than 324 journalists was leaked and posted on a website. In his morning conference, then-president Andrés Manuel López Obrador disclosed the personal data of New York Times journalist Natalie Kitroeff, stating that his authority was more valuable than journalists' privacy.

Threats continued against journalist Alberto Amaro. On 4 June, police officers from Tlaxcala state followed and pointed a gun at him. The Oaxaca state government offered a public apology to the family of journalist Gustavo Sánchez Cabrera, murdered on 17 June 2021.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The authorities continued using the judicial system to criminalize territory, land and environment defenders and students who participated in protests.

On 7 February, a judge from Salina Cruz region convicted the territory, land, and environmental defender David Hernández Salazar for attacks on communication routes and fire damage in the municipality of San Blas Atempa, Oaxaca state. On 14 May, however, the Sixth Collegiate Criminal Chamber of Oaxaca's High Court of Justice revoked his sentence. In July, after public pressure, the Altos District Prosecutor's Office of the municipality of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas state, determined not to prosecute six territory, land and environmental defenders from the Colonia Maya neighbourhood and the case was closed.

On 2 August, the Mexico City General Attorney's Office notified territory, land and environmental defender Hortensia Telésforo Jiménez about an investigation against her for her participation in reclaiming a community library. On 5 September, people protesting in Mexico City about her criminalization suffered verbal attacks by local government officials from the Mexico City borough of Xochimilco and excessive use of force by police officers. Five protesters were detained and prosecuted. In February, the General Attorney's Office of Guanajuato notified seven students that they were being investigated for damaging public buildings at the University of Guanajuato during protests in 2023. On 13 March, the university dropped the charges.

The use of excessive force by the authorities during protests continued. On 20 June, the police attacked people protesting against a pig farm in the municipality of Perote, Veracruz state, causing the deaths of brothers Jorge and Alberto Cortina Vázquez. In March activists and media reported that police used tear gas in Colima, Chihuahua, Mexico City, State of Mexico, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla and Zacatecas; carried out attacks against feminist protesters in the state of Michoacán; ill-treated and arrested five protesters in the state of Nuevo León; and ill-treated and arrested at least 12 women protesting peacefully and two female journalists in the state of Zacatecas.

In August, the reparation process concluded for Libertad Reyes, África Torres, Sofía Ramírez, Enya Mota and Patricia Luna, who had been victims of excessive use of force and illegal and arbitrary detention by the police in the city of León, Guanajuato state, while protesting against gender-related violence on 22 August 2020.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

Military forces continued to commit alleged human rights violations, potentially amounting to extrajudicial executions. Impunity persisted for these crimes.

According to the media and human rights defenders, on 26 April members of SEDENA attacked two young people travelling by car in

Nuevo Laredo city, Tamaulipas state, causing the death of one of them. Witnesses and video surveillance cameras showed members of the National Guard entering a house on 9 June where two infants and four women were murdered in the city of León, Guanajuato state, according to media sources.

On 13 July, two members of the National Guard attacked four people travelling by car in Villa Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí state, causing the death of a child and injuries to an adolescent. On 1 October, six migrants were killed when military members fired at the vehicle in which they were travelling on the Villa Comaltitlán-Huixtla road, Chiapas state. SEDENA issued a public statement reporting that the two members who had opened fire were under investigation.

On 7 October members of SEDENA attacked a man driving a car and threatened to kill him, according to media sources.

According to human rights defenders, on 11 October members of SEDENA killed a woman after shooting at suspected cartel vehicles in Nuevo Laredo city, Tamaulipas state. On 12 October, members of the National Guard killed an eight-year-old girl and a woman in in the same city.

On 5 December, a court confirmed the sentence against five military personnel involved in the extrajudicial execution of Jorge Antonio Mercado Alonso and Javier Francisco Arredondo Verdugo.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

The number of missing and disappeared people remained of grave concern. In 2024, the National Search Commission registered 13,588 new cases of missing and disappeared people, of whom 9,621 were men, 3,960 were women, and seven were unidentified. According to official figures, a total of 120,740 people had been registered as missing and disappeared between 1962 and the end of 2024.

The "census" of disappeared people – a government strategy supposedly to verify whether a person is genuinely missing or disappeared – continued, despite concerns by civil society organizations that the government was trying to deny the crisis and downplay the official number of missing and disappeared people. In March, the Ministry of the Interior reported that around 20,000 people had allegedly been found and almost 100,000 people were still disappeared or missing.

Relatives searching for disappeared people continued to face serious risks. The risks disproportionately affected women, who represented the majority of the searchers. During the year, at least one woman searching for her disappeared relative was killed and another was disappeared. In January, Lorenza Cano Flores was disappeared in Salamanca city, Guanajuato state. In February, Angelita Meraz León was killed in Tecate city in Baja California state. In February, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights held a public hearing about the protection of women searching for disappeared people, highlighting the serious risks they face, including enforced disappearance, killing, repression and threats.

The government refused to provide 800 military documents relating to the enforced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero state, to their relatives. The former president stigmatized NGOs working on the case, including Centro Prodh, Tlachinollan and the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification presented two reports addressing grave human rights violations between 1965 and 1990. The August report recognized state responsibility for systematic human rights violations, identifying 8,594 victims of 11 types of grave human rights violations. The October report focused on grave human rights violations committed against political dissidents, identifying 1,103 victims of enforced disappearances.

In September, the Ministry of the Interior presented a report by the Commission for Access to Truth, Historical Clarification and the Promotion of Justice for Grave Human Rights Violations, eliminating the inclusion of

nine groups of victims, including LGBTI people, sex workers, journalists and opponents of large-scale developments.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

In July, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention expressed concern about the systematic use of arbitrary detention in Mexico; the use of *arraigo* (precautionary detention without charge) and automatic pretrial detention; the militarization of public security; and the excessive use of force during detention, among others.

A constitutional amendment was approved in December to expand automatic pretrial detention for crimes such as extortion, smuggling and activities relating to false invoices, as well as certain drug-related crimes.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Sexual violence and femicide remained prevalent and proper investigations into these crimes were lacking. Approximately 3,427 women were murdered in 2024, according to the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, and approximately 829 of these were considered feminicides.

The authorities published decrees to promote women's and girls' rights. On 18 January, the decree to reform the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence came into force, aiming to prevent and punish violence against women.

On 15 November, a constitutional amendment to promote gender equality was published. Specifically, it established substantive equality in access to rights; highlighted that the state has stronger duties of protection towards women, adolescents, girls and boys; established the gender perspective in public security and justice; promoted gender parity in the federal, state and municipal government; and required Congress to reduce the gender pay gap.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The states of Chiapas, Estado de México, Jalisco, Michoacán, Puebla, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas adopted legislation decriminalizing abortion. Judicial decisions in the states of Yucatán and Nayarit ordered local congresses to adopt legislation decriminalizing abortion, but implementation remained pending. By the end of the year, abortion was legal in 19 out of 32 states and decriminalization was in progress in two states.

In August, however, the Aguascalientes state congress reduced the number of weeks of pregnancy in which abortion could be accessed from 12 to six, contrary to a Supreme Court ruling.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In April, amendments to the Criminal Code and the General Law on Health were approved, banning so-called "conversion therapy".

The year was one of the most dangerous for transgender women, with at least 59 transgender femicides reported by the media and civil society organizations. According to data published in 2024 by the organization Transgender Europe, in 2023 Mexico was the second most dangerous country in the world for transgender people after Brazil.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) received 78,975 asylum applications during the year. The largest number of applications came from nationals of Honduras, followed by Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador, Venezuela and Guatemala. Lack of accommodation forced many asylum seekers to live on the streets near COMAR's offices in Mexico City. After neighbours protested, the authorities decided to move offices, suspending the processing of asylum claims for approximately two months and increasing the backlog of asylum applications.

Civil society organizations expressed concern over the failure of the National Institute of Migration to expedite visitors' cards for humanitarian reasons to asylum seekers, preventing them from accessing their rights to health, education and work.

The authorities continued to collaborate with the USA in implementing policies that undermined the right to asylum and the

principle of non-refoulement. Mexico's northern borders became increasingly dangerous for people waiting for an appointment to request asylum in the USA. People waiting at the border were often victims of extortion, abducted and experienced discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence by both state and non-state actors.[3]

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

A constitutional amendment was enacted on 30 September recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Mexican communities to self-determination and free, prior and informed consultation. Civil society organizations expressed concern over the omission of certain rights, such as to territory, which added to structural inequalities and could make the reform difficult to implement.

Civil society organizations reported internal displacement of Indigenous People caused by violence in the states of Michoacán (at least 110 Indigenous People), Chihuahua (251 Indigenous People) and Chiapas (at least 8,190 people displaced, most of whom were Indigenous). Approximately 600 people from Chiapas crossed the border to Guatemala to seek safety.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government continued promoting the production of fossil fuels to reduce gas imports. It reported in August that the processing of crude oil would reach 340,000 barrels per day at the Dos Bocas oil refinery in Tabasco state.

The "Mayan Train" intercity railway across the Yucatán Peninsula, inaugurated in December 2023, continued to operate despite concerns about contamination of water and soil, the impact on animals' migration routes and habitats, the negative effects on the biodiversity of the region and Indigenous Peoples' access to food. Tulum International Airport – also opened in December 2023 – continued to operate despite concerns around the effects of pollution and noise on wildlife habitats and the right to a healthy environment.

On 15 February, the congress of the state of Tabasco approved an amendment of a decree to relocate members of the El Bosque community. The community was evacuated in 2023 due to sea level rises attributed to climate change. At the end of the year, 51 families had received new homes.

1. *Mexico: National Guard. Analysis of the National Guard Reform Initiative,* 19 September (Spanish only) ↑
2. "'No one guarantees my safety': the killing of Rubén Pat", 6 March ↑
3. *USA: CBP One: A blessing or a trap?,* 8 Ma y ↑

MOLDOVA

Republic of Moldova

The right to freedom of expression was eroded. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment remained unaddressed, and impunity for past violations prevailed. A reduction in state accommodation centres forced some refugees to return to Ukraine. Discrimination against LGBTI people remained commonplace. In the breakaway Transnistria region, the rights to freedom of expression and religion were violated.

BACKGROUND

The year was marked by growing economic hardships, although Moldova successfully re-oriented its energy supplies away from Russia, prior to Ukraine ending the transit of Russian gas. In Russian-occupied Transnistria, this ended the Russian-subsidized energy supply resulting in a significant increase in the cost of living. EU accession negotiations formally began in January, and in October a referendum on amending the constitution to include Moldova's EU aspirations was passed by a narrow margin. The government's repeated accusations of Russia's clandestine interference with the referendum, and the simultaneous presidential election, were supported by independent media investigations and confirmed by top EU

diplomats. Maya Sandu was re-elected as president.

According to the UN Development Programme, Moldova was "highly vulnerable to climate change and related disasters" and experienced recurring droughts and floods.

The Transnistria region continued to be governed by de facto authorities of the so-called "Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic".

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Council for the Promotion of Investment Projects of National Importance used its controversial powers (introduced in December 2023) to suspend extrajudicially the broadcasting licences of 25 TV and radio stations.[1] In doing so, it relied on undisclosed evidence from the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS), which alleged that the financing of the media companies was suspicious and not transparent.

Seven news websites broadcasting Russian news and presenting Russia's official narrative on its aggression against Ukraine were blocked following an order issued by the SIS, for allegedly posing national security risks to Moldova.

Authorities in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia passed legislation enabling them to restrict the editorial freedom of the region's public broadcaster, Gagauziya Radio Television.

On 10 June, amendments to the criminal code came into force that extended the scope of the crime of treason to cover actions in peacetime as well as wartime and removed the requirement that such actions cause direct harm to the state.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In October, ahead of a farmers' demonstration against insufficient central government support, some protesters reported being contacted by police and asked whether they intended to participate; some were recommended not to take part. On the day of the demonstration, traffic police arbitrarily prevented farmers driving their agricultural vehicles from reaching the protest location.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

The structural issues behind torture and other ill-treatment in detention remained unaddressed. According to data from the Prosecutor General's Office published in February, four allegations of torture and 373 allegations of other ill-treatment were recorded in 2023. Detainees in adult and juvenile penitentiary institutions continued to suffer overcrowding, unsanitary and otherwise inadequate detention conditions and poor health provision.

IMPUNITY

Impunity for past human rights violations by members of law enforcement agencies prevailed.

There were no further prosecutions following the abduction and forcible return of seven Turkish teachers to Türkiye by Moldovan security services in 2018, beyond the 2020 conviction of the former director of the SIS who was fined for a related economic offence.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

As of 8 September, Moldova was hosting 123,183 refugees from Ukraine. Of these only 2% were living in state-provided temporary accommodation centres. In December only 26 such centres remained operational, out of 136 that were opened at the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine; a further eight faced closure. Refugees not rehoused in the remaining centres had to rent accommodation privately or return to Ukraine.

In February the General Inspectorate for Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs rejected asylum claims from five LGBTI persons from Russia, stating that they faced no risk of human rights violations if returned.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

In May the CERD Committee noted with concern that members of Roma communities continued to experience discrimination in accessing healthcare, housing, education and employment.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In June, a Pride march with some 800 participants took place without incident in the capital, Chișinău. However, LGBTI people routinely faced discriminatory attitudes and homophobic statements by religious activists and some officials.

In October, two LGBTI events, the Coming Out Day Fest and the LGBT+ Film Festival, were jeopardized by two hoax bomb threats. Participants were also twice denied access to the rooms reserved for the events.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In April, the Moldovan Parliament passed a climate action law, committing the country to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 by expanding the use of renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency and investing in sustainable infrastructure.

TRANSNISTRIA REGION

Freedom of expression

Independent journalists were not allowed to travel or work in the breakaway region of Transnistria. A freelance journalist, who entered the region without disclosing her intention to cover the January protests against legislative changes in Moldova related to the Transnistria region, was detained by police for hours and interrogated. All her video recordings were deleted.

Freedom of religion and belief

Two local religious communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the towns of Tiraspol and Rybnitsa were repeatedly denied re-registration under Transnistria's 2016 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. Eight publications of Jehovah's Witnesses were declared "extremist" by the de facto authorities.

1. "Moldova: Statement on the new legal mechanism for suspending the licences of audiovisual media service providers", 27 March (Romanian only) ↑

MONGOLIA

Mongolia

Mongolia failed to uphold its obligations under the Rome Statute of the ICC. Freedom of expression was suppressed. Environmental degradation due to mining operations continued to have a negative impact on herders' rights. Pension system reform failed to protect the right to social security. A new traffic and housing law violated the right to housing.

BACKGROUND

The governing Mongolian People's Party retained a majority in parliamentary elections but the opposition made large gains.

IMPUNITY

In September, Russian president Vladimir Putin made an official visit at the invitation of President Khurelsukh Ukhnaa. Despite an arrest warrant issued by the ICC in March 2023, the authorities failed to fulfil Mongolia's obligation as a party to the Rome Statute to arrest President Putin, and instead formally welcomed him.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Article 13.14 of the Criminal Code was used to file investigations and claims against journalists and citizens who criticized authorities. The National Police Agency confirmed that as of 25 December, the police had received a total of 697 complaints based on "spreading of false information" under Article 13.14. Sixteen of these were related to journalists; four cases were forwarded to the prosecutor to initiate a criminal case.

Repeated police investigations of journalists, especially during an election year, undermined press freedom. Unurtsetseg Naran, editor-in-chief of the news site Zarig, was sentenced to almost five years' imprisonment on multiple charges, including spreading false information, during a closed-door trial.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

In May, Amnesty International submitted an *amicus curiae* brief to the Constitutional Court of Mongolia on the international human rights law applicable to police detention, with a focus on the right to liberty and security of person.[2] The brief discussed the constitutionality of Article 26.2 of the Law on Police Service, which concerns the limits for temporary detention. In June, the Constitutional Court ruled Article 26.2 unconstitutional.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Mining operations continued to negatively affect water sources, land rights and livelihoods of herders. In July, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples expressed concern over the effect of mining activities on water sources and grasslands where livestock graze. He also noted that mining dust was deteriorating cashmere wool quality, affecting the livelihood of herders. Another concern raised was the decline in traditional practices of herders.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Right to social security

While the government had regularly increased retirement pensions since 2005, pension rates did not keep pace with inflation. They remained insufficient to cover living expenses, driving older people into poverty. Regulations attempting to adjust benefits based on inflation affected older people, leading to reductions in their benefits and resulting in lower payments than they would otherwise receive.

Right to housing

After the Law on Reduction of Traffic and Housing for Ger District in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, was rushed through in December 2023, almost 2,000 households on 158 hectares of land were forcibly evicted and more remained at risk of eviction. The evictions were violations of the right to housing as residents were not ensured the rights to information, free, prior and informed consent and access to remedy.

1. "Mongolia: Putin must be arrested and surrendered to the International Criminal Court", 2 September †
2. *Mongolia: Amicus curiae brief filed with the Constitutional Court of Mongolia (Tsets) on unlawful detention*, 12 June †

MONTENEGRO

Montenegro

Montenegro took steps towards protecting the environment. Little progress was made in providing justice to victims of the Yugoslav conflicts. Women were not adequately protected from discrimination and violence. The government took steps to introduce facial recognition in its surveillance technology but was temporarily prevented from doing so.

BACKGROUND

In June, Montenegro became the first of the current EU accession countries to receive the Interim Benchmark Assessment Report. This was a major milestone in the accession process, confirming that Montenegro had fulfilled the EU's legal requirements on judicial and fundamental rights and on justice, freedom and security.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In May, in response to environmental and health concerns raised by the local community, the government terminated a contract with a foreign company. The company had failed to address these concerns in relation to its Brskovo zinc mining project in the municipality of Mojkovac.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In January, parliament appointed a new Supreme State Prosecutor, a post which had been vacant since 2021. There were further delays in the trial of a former Bosnian Serb

Army soldier, indicted for rape and murder in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in 1992. In June, a police officer in the city of Niksic was charged with crimes against humanity he allegedly committed as a member of the Bosnian Serb police in Hadzici in BiH in 1992.

In February, Montenegro signed the 2023 Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and other International Crimes.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

In June, the CEDAW Committee noted that patriarchal attitudes and related gender roles and stereotypes remained deeply rooted in Montenegrin society. The Committee highlighted that women in rural areas continued to carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid work, often with limited access to running water, electricity and childcare.

The murder of a woman by her ex-husband highlighted the lack of protection for women at risk and prompted outrage, as she had repeatedly pleaded for help from the police. In another case, the High Court in the capital city, Podgorica, sentenced a man to the maximum sentence of 40 years in prison for the 2021 murder of his former partner. Women's rights campaigners continued to urge the government to amend the Criminal Code and introduce femicide as a distinct crime, and to ensure greater protection against gender-based violence.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

In October, the Palestinian Solidarity Movement called on the government to prevent the docking of MV Kathrin, a cargo vessel believed to be carrying explosives destined for Israel, as there was a clear risk that such cargo could contribute to the commission of war crimes against Palestinian civilians.[1]

UNLAWFUL TARGETED SURVEILLANCE

The Ministry of Interior purchased facial recognition technology to enhance its surveillance cameras in the cities of Podgorica, Bar and Budva without legal basis in national law. In February, the Personal Data Protection Agency suspended the use of the cameras.

1. "Israel/OPT: Slovenia, Montenegro and Portugal must not assist the MV Kathrin's delivery of explosives to Israel", 1 October ↑

MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA

Kingdom of Morocco

Authorities continued to repress dissent and target journalists, activists and government critics through prosecution and surveillance, despite a royal pardon for thousands of prisoners including journalists and human rights defenders. Morocco's laws and practices continued to uphold gender inequality and criminalize same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults. Authorities failed to meet their obligations to ensure accessible, affordable and good quality sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls, including abortion. Civil society opposed a draft Code of Penal Procedure that would hinder anti-corruption efforts. Authorities failed to effectively investigate the deadly June 2022 crackdown on migrants and refugees. Authorities arbitrarily arrested and forcibly relocated refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to remote regions, putting their safety and lives at risk. Morocco faced a severe climate change-induced drought and the authorities' response to the September 2023 earthquake was criticized as inadequate.

BACKGROUND

The authorities failed to extend an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights, who requested to visit Morocco on 24 April amid concerns of continuing human rights violations in the name of "countering terrorism".

On 4 October the European Court of Justice ruled that the 2019 EU-Morocco trade agreements regarding fisheries and agricultural products, to which the people of Western Sahara did not consent, were concluded in breach of the principle of self-determination.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In July, around 2,460 prisoners, including several high-profile journalists and human rights defenders, were released by royal pardon. They included journalists Omar Radi, Taoufik Bouachrine and Suleiman Raissouni, as well as YouTuber Mohamed Réda Taoujni. After his release, Suleiman Raissouni became the target of smear campaigns.

Journalists, activists and government critics were subjected to prosecution, digital surveillance and smear campaigns by pro-state media. Several were imprisoned for criticizing the monarchy or publishing what authorities deemed "false news".

In February and September, the UN Human Rights Committee requested that authorities put in place interim measures to protect the health of the 81-year-old human rights lawyer and ex-minister for human rights, Mohamed Ziane, who was sentenced in November 2022 on bogus charges related to his human rights work. According to the organization Alkarama, which submitted the complaint, authorities did not comply with the request.

In November, the Rabat Court of First Instance sentenced journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui, the director of the Badil website, to 18 months in prison and a fine after convicting him of "disseminating false allegations" and "defamation", stemming from a complaint by the minister of justice, Abdellatif Ouahbi.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

Authorities continued to restrict dissent and the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly in Western Sahara.

In January, police violently dispersed a peaceful demonstration by Sahrawi women activists in Laayoune and subjected protesters to beatings.

In February, police prevented a press conference on the human rights situation in Western Sahara by the Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders Collective (CODESA) from taking place at the Laayoune home of the organization's president, Ali Salem Tamek.

In April the Moroccan army and gendarmerie bulldozed and destroyed the homes of 12 Sahrawi families in the town of Al-Jitir, north of Smara. Moroccan authorities stated they were acting against unregulated construction. The homes were destroyed without reasonable notice or the provision of alternative housing, amounting to forced evictions.

In August, police subjected 13 activists at the airports of Laayoune and Dakhla to arbitrary searches and confiscated documents and other personal belongings. The activists were returning from a conference in Türkiye.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Domestic legislation continued to entrench gender inequality, including in relation to inheritance and child custody.

On 28 June, King Mohamed VI submitted a revised draft of the Family Code to the High Council of Ulemas for religious assessment prior to it being put to a vote in parliament. Authorities did not share the draft publicly and provided limited information regarding consultations with human rights organizations and activists.

Authorities failed to meet their obligations to ensure accessible, affordable and good quality sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion, forcing women and girls into dangerous situations and violating their human rights.[1] The criminalization of abortion, which carried a punishment of imprisonment even in cases of rape, continued to have devastating consequences for women and girls.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Article 489 of the Penal Code continued to criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations, which were punishable by up to three years' imprisonment and a fine.

According to LGBTI rights organization Akaliyat, LGBTI people continued to face arbitrary arrest, prosecution, ill-treatment in detention, hate crimes and other discrimination, while most did not feel safe enough to report violations.

According to Moroccan media, in June and September local authorities prevented two same-sex weddings.

On 9 September, parliamentarian Mustafa Ibrahimi requested that the government ban an early childhood education curriculum book because it had a rainbow on the cover. His request had not been heeded by the end of the year.

IMPUNITY

On 29 August the government approved Bill 03-23, amending and supplementing Law 22-01 relating to the Code of Penal Procedure. The text was awaiting final adoption by parliament at the end of the year. The reform was opposed by the Moroccan Bar Association for infringing the rule of law and right to a fair trial, and by civil society organizations, including Transparency Morocco and the Moroccan Association for the Protection of Public Funds, as it would prevent civil society from lodging complaints against officials for corruption.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In September Morocco's National Human Rights Institution, the National Human Rights Council, announced it would carry out genetic tests to confirm the identities of human remains in the former secret detention centre of Tazmamart, in which authorities subjected detainees to torture and other ill-treatment between 1973 and 1991. According to the Families of the Victims of Tazmamart, this notable decision came two decades too late and their other demands regarding reparations remained unfulfilled. The association called for a thorough and impartial investigation into the circumstances and causes of the deaths of prisoners in Tazmamart.

According to the National Human Rights Council, as of June 2024, 27,723 individuals had received financial compensation since 1999 for violations committed between 1973 and 1991, including former victims of enforced disappearances or their rightful claimants, with a total of USD 211.8 million distributed.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Authorities failed to ensure a transparent and effective investigation into the deaths of at least 37 people and the disappearance of 77 others when Moroccan and Spanish security forces used anti-riot equipment and less-lethal weapons to violently disperse a group of up to 2,000 sub-Saharan African migrants, asylum seekers and refugees attempting to cross the border from Morocco into the Spanish enclave of Melilla on 24 June 2022.[2]

On 24 June, Spanish press agency EFE, citing sources from the Moroccan public prosecution office, announced that Moroccan authorities had closed an investigation opened earlier in the year into the deaths of 23 people in Melilla in June 2022 because of "the lack of evidence of a crime" and based on the conclusion that security forces' use of force was proportional. The Moroccan authorities did not publish the results of their investigation. The Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) reported that, between 6 and 12 June 2024, the authorities conducted secret burials of at least 13 of those killed during the crackdown.

According to an investigation published in May by Lighthouse Reports and a consortium of media outlets, Moroccan authorities carried out racially targeted arrests of Black refugees and migrants in urban centres before abandoning them in remote areas close to the Algerian border, putting their security and lives at risk.

In January and February, two Mauritanian and four Malian nationals were killed in drone strikes conducted by the Moroccan authorities in Western Sahara, according to CODESA. The authorities justified the attacks as part of government efforts to counter smuggling and unauthorized activities such as artisanal gold mining or trade. No independent or effective investigations into

their deaths had been conducted by the end of the year.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

In April the government announced it would increase the minimum wage for public sector, private sector and agricultural workers over the next two years and decrease income tax.

A study published in June by the High Planning Commissioner, a government statistical institution, found a decline in living standards of 3.1% between 2019 and 2022, leading to an increase in absolute poverty levels, related in particular to Covid-19 and the multi-year drought. The poorest 10% of the population spent 50% of their income on food.

In July, parliament referred draft organic law 97-15 on the right to strike to Morocco's Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) for an advisory opinion. The CESE stated that the draft required significant revisions to meet Morocco's international commitments on workers' rights.

FIFA announced that the 2030 men's football World Cup would be co-hosted by Spain, Portugal and Morocco. Morocco faces several risks arising from hosting the event that are yet to be addressed, notably in relation to labour rights, migrants' rights, child labour and forced evictions.[3]

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Morocco continued to suffer a prolonged and severe climate change-induced drought. In January, authorities reported that dams were critically low, and rainfall was 70% lower than average. The drought affected the irrigation of farmland with adverse consequences on the rights to food and an adequate standard of living. Agriculture remained the largest economic sector and the main employer in rural areas. In August and September, heavy rainfall and thunderstorms hit several south-eastern and northern regions, causing floods resulting in at least 30 deaths.

In May, AMDH shared a preliminary assessment of the government's response to the devastating earthquake that struck the Al Haouz region on 8 September 2023, causing around 3,000 deaths. AMDH reported a lack of preparation by state institutions to manage the disaster, including the absence of relevant national programmes and weak logistical organization and coordination of relief and rescue operations, among other findings.

DEATH PENALTY

Courts continued to impose death sentences, predominantly for murder. Morocco had not carried out executions since 1993.

1. *Morocco: "My Life is Ruined": The Need to Decriminalize Abortion in Morocco*, 14 May ↑
2. "Morocco/Spain: Reveal fate of migrants who remain missing two years after deadly Melilla border incident", 24 June ↑
3. *Playing a Dangerous Game? Human Rights Risks Linked to the 2030 and 2034 FIFA World Cups*, 5 June ↑

MOZAMBIQUE

Republic of Mozambique

Police increasingly used excessive and unnecessary force to repress protests, particularly those held by opposition members and supporters, resulting in at least 277 deaths. The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly were severely undermined; journalists faced intimidation, harassment, threats and attacks. At least 20 civilians were killed by armed groups and a government militia in the conflict in Cabo Delgado province. Police failed to protect people from kidnappings by criminals.

BACKGROUND

General elections took place on 9 October. Large-scale protests were prompted by allegations from opposition members and independent observers of vote-rigging. On 19 October, unidentified gunmen killed Paulo Guambe, an official for the Optimist Party for the Development of Mozambique (PODEMOS), and Elvino Dias, the lawyer for Venâncio Mondlane, an independent presidential candidate backed by PODEMOS,

in the capital, Maputo. On 21 October, in response to the killings, Venâncio Mondlane called for 25 days of nationwide peaceful protests. On 23 December the Constitutional Council confirmed presidential candidate Daniel Chapo and his party, the Front for Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo), as the winners, continuing Frelimo's almost 50-year rule.

The government failed to take adequate measures to protect agricultural production from the effects of the prolonged drought caused by the El Niño effect. Drought affected about 1.8 million people, particularly women from the southern and central regions. In Vanduzi district, Manica province, food insecurity increased.

Cyclone Chido resulted in 94 deaths and displaced or otherwise affected 622,000 people in northern Mozambique.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

Protests erupted following disputed election results to which police responded with violence, using live ammunition and tear gas. At least 277 people died, including two children and two bystanders, and at least 600 others had been injured by 29 December. Authorities took no steps to bring the alleged perpetrators to justice.

On 10 October, police shot and injured two opposition party election observers, one in the George Dimitrov neighbourhood of Maputo city, and the other in Bandua neighbourhood in Buzi district, Sofala province, after they attempted to break into polling stations to prevent alleged electoral fraud. On 16 October a protester was injured by police gunfire in Nampula city during a PODEMOS rally to welcome Venâncio Mondlane. On 21 October, police deployed helicopters to fire tear gas at the population in Maxaquene neighbourhood, the epicentre of Maputo city's protests. Some of the tear gas canisters hit people, including children, while they were in their homes. On 24 October, two men and a woman were shot dead in the cities of Nampula, Chimoio and Tete respectively; the woman was shot in the head while inside her house. On the same day, dozens of protesters were admitted to hospitals with bullet wounds in these cities as well as in Maputo. One week later, two demonstrators were killed by police gunshot in marketplaces in Nampula city, one of them while he was in a café. On the same day, three protesters were killed in Mecanhelas district, Niassa province, when police fired live ammunition.

On 1 November, police shot dead a man after he, along with other protesters, damaged Frelimo party offices in Mecubúri district, Nampula province. On 4 November, police killed at least four people, including two children, in the Magoanine and Hulene neighbourhoods of Maputo. On the same day, in Matola city a man was killed by a police bullet in the Mahlampsene neighbourhood and police helicopters fired tear gas in the Patrice Lumumba neighbourhood. Meanwhile, police shot dead two protesters and 23 others were injured, eight of them seriously, in Meconta district, Nampula province. On 13 November police shot dead seven protesters and wounded dozens in the Namicopo neighbourhood of Nampula city when protesters marched towards Waresta market. On 26 November an army vehicle ran over a woman during a protest in Maputo city. One month later, police shot dead a blogger when he filmed police firing tear gas at protesters in Ressano Garcia, Maputo province. Between 23 and 25 December, police killed 88 protesters nationwide.

On 25 December, security forces killed at least 35 people who had escaped from a maximum-security prison in Maputo.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Police increasingly cracked down on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

On 4 June, tens of heavily armed Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR) (riot police) officers dispersed about 200 former agents of the National Service of Popular Security, most of them older people, who were camping outside the UN Development Programme offices in Maputo city. They were demanding compensation they claimed was owed to them under a 1992 peace agreement. Two

journalists filming the story were attacked by police officers and had their camera seized.

Following Venâncio Mondlane's call for 25 days of peaceful protests on 21 October, (see Background), the police repressed the majority of protests using excessive and unnecessary force in the cities of Maputo, Matola, Chimoio, Tete and Nampula, in Moamba and Mecanhelas districts, and elsewhere. On the day of the call to protest, police repressed a protest attended by Venâncio Mondlane in Joaquim Chissano Avenue, Maputo city. Three days later, also in Maputo, police fired tear gas at student protesters in Mao Tse Tung Avenue, forcing them to retreat. Police stopped a protest taking place a few miles from the president's office located in Julius Nyerere Avenue, and another in Moamba district, close to the town of Ressano Garcia on the border with South Africa. On 7 and 13 November, police used tear gas to prevent protesters from marching between Matola and Maputo, as well as in Nampula city. Between 5 and 25 December, police repressed more than 10 protests in the cities of Maputo, Matola and Nampula.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Police continued to use arbitrary arrests and detentions. Before and after the elections, hundreds were arrested for their support or membership of PODEMOS, while thousands were arrested for joining protests between 21 October and 29 December. Many remained in detention at the end of the year.

On 9 February, civil society activist Joaquim Pachoneia was arrested in Nampula city for inciting violence and "insulting" the president and the police force. He was released on bail on 12 February. On 3 September, three people were arrested in Dondo district, Sofala province, for allegedly attacking members of the opposition Democratic Movement of Mozambique party. On 15 September a PODEMOS member was arrested in Tete city, accused of damaging the Frelimo flag. During the PODEMOS rally on 16 October (see above, Excessive and unnecessary use of force), musician David Calisto Bandeira was arrested and charged with inciting violence for his pro-PODEMOS songs. He was released hours later on the basis of lack of evidence.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The right to freedom of expression was severely restricted, particularly during the election period. The government repeatedly cut internet access and, after 21 October, intermittently blocked social media sites. Journalists and others faced police intimidation, threats and violence.

On 27 August, UIR officers detained an election observer from the Public Integrity Center, a national NGO, in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, despite his carrying the appropriate credentials issued by the National Electoral Commission, after he photographed posters in a local school. The law prohibits schools from exhibiting posters. He was accused of being a member of "the terrorists" active in Cabo Delgado but was released hours later after his family intervened.

On 21 October, police fired tear gas at journalists who were interviewing Venâncio Mondlane on Joaquim Chissano Avenue in Maputo city, hitting Gaspar Chirindza of Soico TV in the leg with a tear gas canister.

On 25 October, Nuno Gemuce Alberto, a journalist with Gilé Community radio, was assaulted by police after he covered police violence against protesters in Gilé district, Zambezia province.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

At least 20 civilians were killed in the Cabo Delgado province in attacks by armed groups and a local government militia known as the Naparama. Armed groups systematically looted supplies from warehouses belonging to NGOs and the World Food Programme. The NGO Médecins Sans Frontières said it had had to relocate staff and suspend local activities following the attacks. The violence resulted in the internal displacement of more than 700,000 people.

On 28 January a man was decapitated by armed groups in Metuge district as he was returning home from Pulo, an agricultural area. There was a surge of attacks by armed

groups in the Chiúre district. On 15 February, armed groups killed a civilian and burned down two churches in the villages of Muerota and Kitivahola. The next day, they killed another civilian and burned down a church, 24 houses and a school in Nkiura village. Between 26 and 27 February, at least eight civilians were killed by armed groups who also set fire to a hospital and a school in Mmala village. On 10 May, armed groups raided Macomia district, destroying houses and public infrastructure. On 11 December, armed groups killed two civilians in Miangelewa village, Muidumbe district, and looted their supplies.

On 8 March the Naparama killed three civilians in Chiúre district they considered to be "terrorists". They had been carrying out an educational electoral registration programme for local people.

RIGHT TO LIFE AND SECURITY OF THE PERSON

Authorities failed to take adequate measures to ensure the safe release of at least 12 businesspeople of Asian descent or their family members who were kidnapped by criminals demanding ransoms. Nor did they take necessary measures to prevent such crimes.

The victims included Saif Arif and Ali Mamade, who were kidnapped in March and May respectively and later released, and Aboo Gafar, taken in July, whose whereabouts remained unknown. The three men were kidnapped in Maputo city.

MYANMAR

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

The internal armed conflict escalated. The frequency of military air strikes increased, as did military attacks on schools, hospitals and civilian infrastructure. The conflict and military repression deprived people of their right to education. Ethnic Rohingya people experienced the worst violence since 2017. Arbitrary arrests continued, with unfair trials and raids targeting activists. Journalists were subjected to harsh prison sentences, creating a chilling effect and further restricting the rights to freedom of expression. Shipments of aviation fuel still reached the country despite sanctions and global campaigns to disrupt the supply chain to prevent air strikes.

BACKGROUND

Military rule continued after the ousting of the democratically elected government on 1 February 2021. Senior General and coup leader, Min Aung Hlaing, continued to lead the State Administration Council, the official name for the junta. He also assumed the post of acting president from Myint Swe, who was said to be suffering from health problems. Nearly four years after the coup, Myanmar's human rights situation entered a new and deadly phase. The country's western, northern and south-eastern border areas were riven by internal armed conflict.

Powerful ethnic armed organizations continued to align with the People's Defence Forces, the armed wing of the opposition National Unity Government, which emerged in the aftermath of the coup, even as alliances within the groups started to fracture. The military struggled to hold onto territory, losing towns, bases, outposts and police stations. Cities with large populations, including Myanmar's second-biggest, Mandalay, were affected by the fighting. The risk to civilians increased, as Myanmar's military responded with ever harsher force. Air strikes reached record numbers, up five-fold in the first six months of the year compared to the previous year. The number of internally displaced people surpassed three million. More than 20,000 people remained behind bars. The number of people killed by the military during the year surpassed 6,000.

Military air strikes reached unprecedented levels, mainly as part of counteroffensives against Operation 1027. Named after its start date on 27 October 2023, Operation 1027 was a burst of anti-military assaults led by three ethnic armed organizations: the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army

and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army. Starting in Shan State and pausing for the first half of 2024 after a China-brokered ceasefire, the operation then recommenced and spread to several parts of the country. Joined by People's Defence Forces, Operation 1027 fighters captured entire towns, strategic roads, an airport and two of 14 regional military commands.

In November, the ICC Prosecutor's Office sought an arrest warrant for Senior General Min Aung Hlaing for the crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya people during military operations in 2017.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

The nature of the military counteroffensive was in keeping with past practice, namely indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks paired with deadly ground raids. Military air strikes hit religious buildings, schools, hospitals and areas where internally displaced people were sheltering, including a camp and a monastery. Operation 1027 members were also accused of abuses, including the forced recruitment of civilians.

In January, Myanmar military air strikes killed 17 civilians – including nine children – as they gathered to attend church in Sagaing Region's Kanan village near the western border with India.[1]

On 9 May, the Myanmar military launched an attack on a monastery in Saw Township's Ah Kyi Pan Pa Lon village in central Myanmar's Magway Region. After two initial air strikes, witnesses said that the fighter jet then circled back and directed heavy gunfire at those fleeing the initial explosions. The attacks killed 12 civilians and injured 26. The monastery, which was believed to be roughly 100 years old, was destroyed.[2]Also in May, the military raided Byaing Phyu village near Rakhine State's capital Sittwe, targeting civilians from the ethnic Rakhine group due to their perceived affiliation with the Arakan Army. At least 50 people were killed.

On 19 June, a senior religious figure in Myanmar's Buddhist community, Bhaddanta Muninda Bhivamsa, was shot and killed while travelling in a car in Mandalay Region's Ngazun Township. The 78-year-old was the head abbot of Win Neinmitayon Monastery in Bago Region. He was travelling with another monk who was injured along with the driver. Later accounts said that soldiers fired on them after their car tried to pass a military truck in a conflict area.

On 5 August, a drone and mortar attack on Rohingya people fleeing fighting in northern Rakhine State killed an estimated 200 men, women and children, the worst attack against the Rohingya since 2017.[3] Members of the community blamed the Arakan Army, one of the three groups involved in Operation 1027 against the military. In an official response to Amnesty International, it denied the allegation.

On 5 September, the military carried out an air strike on a camp of internally displaced people in southern Shan State's Pekon Township, killing an estimated eight civilians including six children. One resident said there was no fighting nearby and that there were only "helpless women and children" displaced by armed conflict.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The military carried out unlawful attacks on schools, killing and injuring students and teachers and further violating the right to education among other rights. Although the development of an education system in areas under the opposition's control enabled students to continue their studies, military attacks and intensified armed conflict put further strain on teaching providers. Many were forced to build bomb shelters on school grounds, rebuild schools after bombings, or turn them into mobile education units to avoid becoming targets.

On 6 February, an air strike hit a school in Daw Sei Ei village in Karenni State, killing four children. The 5 September bombing of the camp for internally displaced people in southern Shan state killed and displaced students. By the end of the year, more than 750 children had been killed or injured across Myanmar.

The enduring disruption to education, which had started during the pandemic, led many to abandon their studies. The coup and

its aftermath had a severe impact on access to education in the country. Millions were not attending class in a formal school setting, and more than 13,000 schools were reportedly forced to close due to armed conflict. Some parents withdrew their children from school and fled to Thailand out of fear for their safety.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND UNFAIR TRIALS

The military use of the courts to crush dissent continued unabated. People were arbitrarily held without charge in interrogation centres. Mass trials took place behind closed doors, with little access to legal assistance, and there was increased use of harsher laws such as counterterrorism statutes.

A journalist for Dawei Watch media, Myo Myint Oo, was sentenced to life in prison on counterterrorism charges; his colleague Aung San Oo was also convicted and sentenced to 20 years.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

The military continued to rely on interrogation centres to forcibly extract information before bringing charges. On 9 October, pro-democracy activists Paing Phyo Min and Shein Wai Aung were arrested and sent to an interrogation centre after raids.[4]

Conditions in detention, including food and medical assistance, remained dire. Guards beat dozens of women arbitrarily detained in Daik-U prison in central Myanmar's Bago region. On 19 August, 50-year-old filmmaker Pe Maung Sein died three days after being released from prison, where injuries sustained during an "interrogation" had not been properly treated for two years. Zaw Myint Maung, the 73-year-old former chief minister of Mandalay under the civilian government ousted in the coup, died in October after nearly four years in prison. He was transferred to Mandalay's General Hospital shortly before he died of leukemia.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

New shipments of aviation fuel arrived in Myanmar, despite global calls to deprive the country's military of the resources it needed to carry out unlawful air strikes. In January, Amnesty International exposed the military's new evasive tactics for importing aviation fuel throughout 2023, following sanctions imposed on parts of its supply chain.[5] At least two additional shipments of aviation fuel entered the country between January and June 2024.

Recent shifts in the supply route led to fuel being bought and sold multiple times before reaching Viet Nam ahead of shipment to Myanmar. In two instances, a Chinese-owned oil tanker transported fuel from Viet Nam to Myanmar. A likely third shipment appeared to have come to Myanmar from the United Arab Emirates in May. It was unclear how the fuel was used after it arrived, but the military's control of the port raised significant concerns that it could be used for non-civilian purposes.

In April, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on Myanmar that, for the first time, called on UN member states to refrain from the export, sale or transfer of jet fuel to the Myanmar military. In October, the UK, EU and Canada passed more sanctions that, taken together, targeted the Myanmar military's access to funds, equipment and material, including aviation fuel.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar also noted with concern a shifting pattern of weapons supplies to Myanmar from the region, with a surge in procurement from Thailand. A significant decrease from Singaporean entities was noted.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS

There were mounting allegations of abuses carried out by opposition armed groups. Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar told Amnesty International that the Arakan Army burned down their homes, drove them out, killed civilians and stole their possessions. The Arakan Army denied carrying out abuses during fighting against the military, which carried out an extensive bombing campaign in the Arakan Army's home base of Rakhine State. Rohingya militant groups also stood accused of forcibly recruiting child soldiers. In April, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, which along with the Arakan

Army is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance that launched Operation 1027, carried out extrajudicial executions of its own personnel.

Separately, OHCHR, the UN human rights office, documented killings of civilians by other anti-military groups. In September it reported that in the first half of the year there were 124 reports of killings of administrators, civil servants, military informants and their family members.

1. "Myanmar: Military air strikes that killed 17 civilians 'must be investigated as war crimes'", 8 February ↑
2. "Myanmar: 'Reckless' shipments of jet fuel continue as air strikes multiply", 8 July ↑
3. "Myanmar: New attacks against Rohingya a disturbing echo of 2017 mass violence", 21 August ↑
4. "Myanmar: Two activists at grave risk of torture after arrests", 10 October ↑
5. "Myanmar: New data suggests military still importing fuel for deadly air strikes despite sanctions", 31 January ↑

NAMIBIA

Republic of Namibia

Around 40% of the population experienced high levels of food insecurity. Access to contraception and sex education was inadequate and there was significant public support for the decriminalization of abortion in some circumstances. A court ruled to decriminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct. Gender-based violence was widespread. Indigenous Peoples sought to negotiate the return of their land.

BACKGROUND

According to a July Afrobarometer survey, almost two-thirds of Namibians believed corruption had increased.

Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was elected Namibia's first woman president in November general elections. Opposition parties claimed there were electoral flaws.

In December heavy rains caused severe flooding and the displacement of people in some areas.

RIGHT TO FOOD

In May, the government declared a state of emergency following the worst drought in 100 years, exacerbated by the impacts of El Niño. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification reported that around 40% of the population experienced high levels of food insecurity between July and September. Malnutrition levels were concerning; among the under-fives, 17% experienced stunted growth and 48% were anaemic.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

According to a June Afrobarometer report, while most Namibians strongly supported better access to contraceptives and comprehensive sex education, opinions remained divided on abortion. Seventy-two per cent supported termination if the mother's life or health was at risk and 60% in cases of rape or incest – circumstances under which existing legislation allows the practice if certified by medical practitioners – and 47% believed it is always/sometimes justified under any circumstances.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In June the Namibian High Court ruled that legislation outlawing consensual same-sex sexual conduct was unconstitutional and discriminatory.[1] In July, the government appealed the decision.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

High rates of gender-based violence continued. The Namibian Police Force reported 4,815 cases between April 2023 and January 2024. In one high-profile case, a woman was fatally stabbed multiple times by her former partner in April.

A September UN Population Fund report noted that entrenched gender inequality and harmful socio-cultural norms disempowered women and girls, leaving them more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In March the OvaHerero and Nama Indigenous Peoples – descendants of victims

of the genocide under Germany's colonial rule – demanded renewed talks with the German government for reparations and the return of ancestral land. In a 2021 joint declaration between the German and Namibian governments, Germany had apologized for the genocide and committed to funding EUR 1.1 billion in development projects. Affected communities said that the negotiations between Namibia and Germany towards an agreed resolution excluded the meaningful participation of their representatives and the declaration failed to provide adequate reparation measures, including land restitution. In November, both countries reached the final stage of negotiations, and agreed the reparations fund. Pending sign-off of the agreement, the discussions continued but their completion was threatened by the collapse of the German coalition government in November.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In March the government secured a USD 10 billion investment from Hyphen Hydrogen Energy to develop so-called "green hydrogen" backed by Germany. While the end market for the hydrogen was unconfirmed, concerns were raised about its unproven status as a technology and the potential diversion of renewable energy from a country where many lack access to sustainable electricity.

1. "Namibia: Decision to overturn 'sodomy' laws is a victory for human rights", 21 June †

NEPAL

Nepal

Authorities used unlawful force against protesters and restricted freedoms of expression and assembly. A key step towards advancing transitional justice nonetheless contained significant gaps that could allow impunity. Violence against women and girls and caste-based discrimination persisted across the country. Forced evictions continued. Illegal recruitment of migrant workers continued.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The government suppressed criticism by enforcing restrictions on protests, using unlawful force, and forcibly dispersing and detaining demonstrators.

In January, police arrested at least eight people for protesting in a "prohibited zone" at Maitighar, a landmark area near key government buildings in the capital, Kathmandu. In February, three people were arrested in the same place for protesting against the ban on demonstrations. On 26 February, police used force to break up a protest encampment in a public park where loan shark victims, who had marched barefoot to Kathmandu from across Nepal, had gathered. In response to a subsequent protest that saw 50 people enter parliament, authorities extended protest restrictions by expanding "prohibited areas". On 6 March, 13 protesters were arrested and detained in front of the Prime Minister's residence, a prohibited zone. In April, some protests were allowed in Maitighar, but areas around key government institutions remained prohibited areas. In May, 11 students protesting corruption in front of the parliament building were arrested for demonstrating in a prohibited area.

Police responded to protests with tear gas and lethal weapons. On 5 January, a man was shot dead by police during a protest in Barahathawa municipality, Sarlahi. In February, a journalist was assaulted and arrested in Kathmandu while reporting on police brutality against street vendors. In April, police in Kathmandu fired tear gas and water cannons and used batons against pro-monarchy protesters. In May, police in Kathmandu responded with unlawful force to a peaceful protest calling for disability rights. The National Human Rights Commission reported that police beat and detained 20 protesters, including persons with disabilities.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Journalists, activists and online critics faced intensified restrictions on freedom of expression. Between January and December, the Freedom Forum organization recorded 57 incidents of threats, arrests and mistreatment by local authorities and members of political parties, including gender-based violence towards female journalists.

In August, police arrested and detained three people for four days for chanting anti-government slogans during a Hindu festival in Kathmandu.

Online critics faced reprisals for posting criticism of politicians on Facebook. Two men were detained in August for criticizing former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife. On 5 September, a 21-year-old man from Bajura district was arrested under the Electronic Transaction Act for criticizing Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in a Facebook post.

Journalists

On 10 February, two journalists were arrested in Kanchanpur district for reporting on police mismanagement. In April, the Federation of Nepali Journalists raised concerns that a journalist was threatened for reporting on illegal riverbed mining. In May, the Chairperson of Kantipur Media Group, Kailash Sirohiya, was arrested and detained in Kathmandu in retaliation for the group's reporting on corruption.

The Media Council Bill was tabled in the National Assembly in May, retaining provisions from the previous version that severely restricted the independence of the media and freedom of expression.

IMPUNITY

A Bill to Amend the Disappeared Persons' Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act was passed in August, with provisions that could help advance truth, justice and reparations for conflict-era atrocities. It nevertheless contained serious accountability gaps, including definitions of crimes that do not comply with international standards, reductions in sentencing for serious crimes, and other provisions that could shield from prosecution those responsible for wartime crimes.[1]

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Three same-sex marriages were officially registered in 2024; however, registration did not confer full marital rights.

In July, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of a transgender woman's right to have her gender identity recognized on official documents. Other individuals seeking legal recognition of gender identity continued to face obstacles.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Despite legal prohibitions against child marriage, child labour and *chhaupadi* (banishing menstruating women and girls to huts), harmful practices and sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls continued. On 17 June, a 16-year-old girl was raped in a menstrual shed in Achham district. In July, a police inspector was remanded for repeatedly raping a 10-year-old girl working in his house for over three years. Between July 2023 and June 2024, police recorded over 16,000 domestic violence cases. Many incidents remained under-reported due to stigma and systemic barriers.

DISCRIMINATION

Caste-based discrimination, including untouchability, persisted. Despite legal frameworks, widespread impunity for caste-based violence compounded the barriers to justice for Dalits, in particular Dalit women and girls.[2] In January, a man was arrested for the alleged murder of his 15-year-old daughter, due to her relationship with a Dalit youth. On 6 June, reports emerged regarding the lack of essential services – such as drinking water and electricity – in Dalit settlements in Mirchaiya Municipality-7, Siraha.

FORCED EVICTIONS

Hundreds of families living in informal settlements remained at risk of forced eviction by local authorities. Although the National Land Commission (dissolved in

March) was brought back in October by the new government, there was no action by the Commission before the end of the year to ensure that land and housing was allocated to the landless, Dalits and people living in informal settlements.

In July, Dhangadhi city officials bulldozed the makeshift houses of 10 families living in informal settlements and forcibly evicted them in Kailali district. At least 500 flood-affected families in Kailali were rendered homeless in July when the District Forest Office forcibly evicted them by demolishing their shelters. Marginalized Tharu and Dalit communities were particularly affected by the subsequent humanitarian crisis.[3]

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Thousands of young Nepalis continued to take on difficult and dangerous jobs in Gulf countries, Malaysia and elsewhere, paying illegal recruitment fees and working without proper labour protection (see Saudi Arabia entry).

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

The government failed to prevent torture and end impunity.[4] In July, a man died in custody after being detained for four days. A man was found dead in police custody in October. On 5 November, a man was found dead in custody in Kapilvastu district. A clash at a juvenile correction centre in Banke in July resulted in 60 detainees escaping from the centre. In June, the National Human Rights Commission reported 55 investigations into complaints of torture.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Torrential rains during the monsoon season in June and September caused flash floods and landslides, killing more than 300 people in Kathmandu and adjacent districts.[5] According to the World Weather Attribution initiative, this flooding was linked to urbanization and climate change.

1. "Nepal: New Transitional Justice Law a Flawed Step Forward", 20 August ↑
2. "Nepal: Systemic descent-based discrimination against Dalits needs urgent action", 10 May ↑
3. "Nepal: Preliminary findings of the joint monitoring of forced evictions by civil society organisations", 16 July ↑
4. "Nepal: Government must fulfil its promise and end the use of torture and other ill-treatment", 26 June ↑
5. "South Asia: Devastating Floods Yet Another Reminder for Urgent Human Rights-Consistent Climate Action", 12 July ↑

NETHERLANDS

Kingdom of the Netherlands

The new government announced proposals that would discriminate against refugees and asylum seekers. Racial profiling persisted in law enforcement and welfare fraud detection. Peaceful protesters were subjected to unlawful surveillance measures. A new sexual offences law included a consent-based definition of rape. Climate policies were weakened.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In April, a group of civil society organizations began legal action against the government for concluding and implementing a 2016 agreement whereby EU member states seek to outsource refugee protection to Turkey, despite the foreseeable human rights violations.[1]

The new government announced proposals to restrict the procedural position of asylum seekers, including limiting legal aid and removing their right to appeal a court decision on their asylum claim.

In Aruba, a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Venezuelan asylum seekers, including children, lacked access to fair and effective asylum procedures.[2]

DISCRIMINATION

Racial profiling in law enforcement and welfare fraud detection remained a structural and government-wide problem.[3] Protection against the use of discriminatory risk models in the benefits system remained inadequate.[4]

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In July, the Sexual Offences Act came into force, establishing a consent-based legal definition of rape in line with international human rights standards.[5]

In October, the State Secretary of Justice announced a bill to criminalize psychological violence in the context of domestic violence.[6]

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Throughout the year, police employed drones and video surveillance cars with advanced cameras and facial recognition technology as surveillance tools against peaceful protesters, without adequate regulation, safeguards or accountability.[7]

In February, the minister of justice, the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office responded to farmers' protests, highway blockades by Extinction Rebellion and Palestinian solidarity protests, stating "these are not protests" and announcing firmer and faster action against activists. In May, a majority in parliament voted in favour of a ban on the chant "From the river to the sea". In August, the new minister of justice stated that he wanted to explore restrictions on the right to demonstrate.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

On 12 February a court of appeal ordered the Netherlands to halt the export and transit of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel, finding that there was a "clear risk" that the parts would be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

In April, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing noted that the right to housing was not guaranteed in domestic law, and expressed concerns about the acute housing crisis, homelessness and in particular the treatment of non-citizens who are homeless.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The new government weakened climate policies, threatening the target of a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The government postponed plans to phase out domestic fossil fuel support measures.

1. "Netherlands: NGOs sue Dutch state over EU – Turkey refugee deal", 8 April ↑
2. *Netherlands: Unprotected: Unveiling Gaps in the Protection of Venezuelan Refugees in Aruba*, 1 October ↑
3. *Netherlands: Ethnic Profiling is a Government-wide Problem*, 21 March (Dutch only) ↑
4. *Netherlands: Profiled Without Protection, Students in The Netherlands Hit by Discriminatory Benefits Fraud Detection*, 21 November ↑
5. *Netherlands: Insufficient Implementation of the Istanbul Convention*, 3 July ↑
6. "Netherlands: Cabinet wants to criminalize psychological violence", 17 October (Dutch only) ↑
7. *Netherlands: Recording Dissent: Camera Surveillance at Peaceful Protests in The Netherlands*, 16 October ↑

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand

New legislation undermined Māori rights. Legal reforms placed environmental protections at risk. A new report from a Royal Commission of Inquiry, which focused on the period between 1950 and 1999, documented serious abuse and neglect of people in care. Concerns for the well-being of children in care continued.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Despite significant opposition, the government adopted or proposed new laws that undermined Māori rights.

In March, legislation was enacted to abolish the Māori Health Authority, a body that was established in 2022 to improve Māori health outcomes and address inequities in healthcare. In July, the Local Government Amendment Act was passed reducing the ability of local councils to establish Māori wards and help ensure equitable representation of Māori in local government.[1]

In May, the government proposed legislation to repeal a provision (section 7AA)

of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, which was aimed at reducing the over-representation of Māori children in state care.

In November, the government introduced the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Bill which would reduce the rights of Māori. The Waitangi Tribunal, the body that hears claims brought by Māori regarding te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi stated that if the bill was enacted that it would be the "worst, most comprehensive breach of the Treaty/te Tiriti in modern times". Despite their being a Treaty partner, the government did not meaningfully engage with Māori before introducing the bill. Its introduction sparked mass protests with tens of thousands of people participating in a nine-day nationwide hīkoi (march) to parliament.

Māori remained over-represented in the criminal justice system. A report, published in August by an independent panel appointed by the Police Commissioner, recognized that there was evidence of structural racism across many different sectors including the justice system. It found that being Māori increased the likelihood of prosecution by 11% compared to New Zealand Europeans.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

New Zealand fell seven places, to 41, in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI). CCPI experts called on the government to set more ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets.

New legislation was introduced that undermined environmental protections. The Fast-track Approvals Bill, adopted in December, established an accelerated process for approving mining, housing, development and other projects that could bypass existing environmental protections.[2] The Crown Minerals Amendment Bill, which was introduced in August, sought to reverse a 2018 ban on new offshore petroleum exploration permits.

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

The final report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Abuse in Care, published in June, reported estimates indicating that up to 256,000 children, young people and adults in state care or in faith-based institutions between 1950-2019 suffered abuse and neglect. However, the report noted that the true number will never be known.

A report by the National Preventive Mechanism responsible for monitoring places of detention under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture found ongoing serious concerns about the safety and well-being of children in the state care system.

1. "Aotearoa New Zealand: Submission on the Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Bill 2024", 29 May ↑
2. "Aotearoa New Zealand: Submission on the Fast-track Approval Bill", 19 April ↑

NICARAGUA

Republic of Nicaragua

Expulsions, deprivation of nationality and arbitrary detentions of dissenters and others continued, exposing them to severe vulnerability and violations of their rights. Authorities imposed strict restrictions on the media, threatening freedom of expression. Journalists were at risk of death and enforced disappearance. Indigenous Peoples remained at risk of displacement, enforced disappearance and attacks by pro-government armed groups.

BACKGROUND

Repression continued, having begun during the 2018 protests, including the dismantling of civil society organizations and criminalization of dissent. More than 5,000 organizations had been closed since 2018 as of September 2024 including religious groups of various denominations.

In 2024, the UN Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua issued four thematic reports highlighting human rights violations and abuses committed against Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities,

members of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations, rural communities, and students, teachers, academic administrators and other university staff. Despite repeated calls from the international community for the government to investigate and be accountable for human rights abuses, impunity prevailed.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The housing situation remained critical in hurricane-affected regions, with government promises of reconstruction unfulfilled. The healthcare system was politicized, disproportionately impacting opposition members and political prisoners, while maternal and adolescent health services remained inadequate. The closure of 34 universities disrupted studies for 37,000 students and many of those fleeing the country were denied access to their academic records.

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF NATIONALITY

In January, 16 Catholic Church representatives, including Rolando Álvarez, who had been imprisoned for over a year, were expelled and stripped of their nationality. In September, authorities expelled to Guatemala another 135 individuals who had previously been incarcerated for political reasons, some for over two years. Since the expulsions started in 2023, more than 400 individuals have been left without access to their property, facing restrictions on their rights and freedoms, and encountering serious difficulties integrating into host countries.

The UN Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua reported that the expulsion of both Nicaraguan nationals and foreign residents without due process not only stripped the former of their nationality but also left them all in a state of severe vulnerability, and reinforced a climate of fear for others who may be seen as critics of the government.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

The Mechanism for the Recognition of Political Prisoners in Nicaragua documented at least 151 individuals detained for political reasons in 2024. By the end of the year, 45 of these remained in detention.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights granted provisional measures for many of those detained for political reasons. The court ordered Nicaragua to "take the necessary measures to effectively protect their lives, integrity, health, adequate nutrition, access to drinking water, and personal freedom". Violence and torture and other ill-treatment in prisons were widely reported, including physical and psychological abuse by prison authorities. The international community, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, issued precautionary measures to protect several detainees, but conditions in detention centres remained dire.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Authorities continued implementing measures to silence independent media, creating an information vacuum and making it difficult for Nicaraguans to access independent news and information. Between 2018 and 2024, at least 276 journalists were forced to flee the country, according to a report published in September by the Independent Journalists and Communicators of Nicaragua. The government confiscated the assets of media outlets, further stifling dissent. Between 2018 and June 2024, more than 50 media outlets had their assets seized. The government also implemented legislation aimed at controlling online content, requiring telecommunications companies to provide user data and restricting permissible content at artistic events.

In July, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights presented Case 14.746 to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, highlighting the extrajudicial killing of journalist Ángel Eduardo Gahona López by state agents. Impunity in the case persisted.

Local organizations reported the enforced disappearance of at least one journalist; in her last public communication she reported that her home was being raided.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Indigenous Peoples continued to face forced displacement and attacks by pro-government armed groups and settlers. According to the Permanent Human Rights Observatory of the Nicaragua Lucha Coalition, multiple violations were reported against Indigenous human rights defenders, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and displacement in territories such as the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve.

In March, regional elections on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast were held without Indigenous political party participation for the first time in years. The exclusion of the Yapti Tasba Masraka Nanih Asla Takanka (YATAMA) political party followed the cancellation of its legal status in September 2023 and the detention of its leaders Brooklyn Rivera and Nancy Elizabeth Henríquez, who were later charged with treason and conspiracy. At the end of the year, the whereabouts of Brooklyn Rivera's place of detention was not released by the authorities. Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience in December.[1]

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled against Nicaragua, highlighting violations of Indigenous rights, including forced displacement and lack of consultation on projects such as the interoceanic canal, reaffirming the need to protect Indigenous territories. Mayagna forest rangers defending the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve remained imprisoned on dubious charges, reflecting the heightened risks for Indigenous Peoples.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Abortion remained prohibited in all circumstances.

1. "Nicaragua: Ortega's repressive machinery continues to stifle any dissent", 17 December ↑

NIGER

Republic of Niger

Dozens of politicians, including deposed president Mohamed Bazoum, were arbitrarily detained. Rights to information and freedom of expression were routinely violated. Armed groups and army forces continued to commit abuses against civilians. Women and girls continued to be victims of the practice of *wahaya* and early marriage. Migrants, including a three-year-old girl, died of exhaustion after being forcibly expelled from Algeria. The authorities took measures to improve people's right to health, but did not take preventive measures to respond to climate-induced severe flooding.

BACKGROUND

The National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland, which came to power in a coup in July 2023, dissolved all elected municipal and regional councils and replaced them with military administrators. ECOWAS sanctions against Niger, including border closure, and economic and financial sanctions, were lifted in February. A month earlier, Niger had announced its intention to leave ECOWAS in a joint declaration with Mali and Burkina Faso.

Two rebel groups emerged in 2024: the Patriotic Front for Justice, and the Patriotic Front for Liberation, both of which launched attacks against oil infrastructure.

US and German troops left Niger after a 10-year presence.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

Several people who criticized the authorities were arbitrarily detained.

In January, Ibrahim Yacouba, a former energy minister, was arrested at the airport on his return to Niger. He was accused of "plotting against state security" and detained in Ouallam prison. In July a court ordered his provisional release but as of the end of the

year the ruling had not been implemented by the Niger authorities.

In April the Niger authorities initiated the procedure to lift the immunity of deposed and detained president Mohamed Bazoum to prosecute him for "high treason", as announced in August 2023. Mohamed Bazoum was refused access to his lawyers and to information on the charges against him.[1] In June a state court lifted his immunity. Mohamed Bazoum's spouse also remained arbitrarily detained at the presidential palace at the end of the year.

In April a high court in the capital, Niamey, ruled that the detention of Abdourahmane Ben Hameye and Mohamed Mbarek – both security officials and relatives of the former president – and 25 other individuals, including civilians, accused of a conspiracy to free Mohamed Bazoum and his family, was illegal and ordered their release. Two days after the ruling, they were all brought before a judge and charged with "plotting against the safety of the state or against state authority." The civilians were provisionally released.

On 13 April, Ousmane Toudou, a journalist and former communications adviser to the presidency, was arrested by the gendarmerie. He was charged in May with "plotting against state security" and put in pretrial detention in Kollo prison. In the days following the July 2023 coup, Ousmane Toudou denounced the military takeover on social media.

On 26 April, security forces arrested Ali Marounfa, a civil society activist better known as "Ali Tera", following an interview he did with BBC Hausa, in which said that the security situation in Tillabéri region was deteriorating.

In June, the politician Intinicar Alassane was arrested and charged with "disseminating data likely to disturb public order and human dignity" after he conducted a video interview with victims of an armed attack in the Tillabéri region, denouncing the resurgence in violence against civilians. He was sentenced on 9 July to one year in prison and a XOF 5 million (USD 8,300) fine.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 29 January, the minister of home affairs suspended the activities of the Maison de la Presse, an independent media organization encompassing various press associations, and set up a new ad hoc management committee headed by the Interior Ministry's secretary general.

On 24 April, security forces arrested Soumana Maiga, editor of L'Enquêteur, after the newspaper reported a story published by a French newspaper about the alleged installation of electronic interception devices by Russian agents on official state buildings.[2] He was accused of "threatening national defence" and released pending trial on 9 July.

On 12 June, the Niger authorities revised the 2022 amendments to the 2019 Cybercrime law, and reinstated jail sentences for the offences of "dissemination, production and making available to others data that may disturb public order or threaten human dignity through an information system", and defamation, reversing progress previously made on freedom of expression.

In August, the government created a national registry listing individuals and groups associated with terror acts or threats to national defence. Those on the registry risked being deprived of their nationality. At the end of the year, at least 21 Niger nationals were listed on the registry and temporarily stripped of their citizenship.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

Armed groups

On 10 January, alleged members of the Islamic State-Sahel province (IS-Sahel) attacked the village of Tongo Tongo, Tillabéri region, and killed six civilians accused of collaborating with the Niger army. A few weeks later, they reportedly attacked the village of Motogatta, Tillabéri region and killed 22 civilians.

On 15 July, alleged members of IS-Sahel attacked the village of Kouregou, Tillabéri region and killed seven civilians and destroyed shops and other private property, according to humanitarian sources. Two days

later, a Boko Haram faction abducted 10 civilians, including six women, in the village of Tourban Guida, Diffa region and took them to Nigeria.

Army forces

In January, a drone strike by the Niger army reportedly killed around 50 civilians in the village of Tiawa, Tillabéri region, in response to an attack by an armed group.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women and girls continued to be subjected to harmful customary practices, laws and social norms despite a 2019 ruling by the Niger Supreme Court qualifying as illegal the practice of *wahaya*. This practice, in which girls from discriminated groups are forcibly married as "fifth wives", persisted in rural communities. The marriage of girls before their 18th birthday was common – the legal age being 15 for girls, as opposed to 18 for boys.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The expulsion of migrants from Algeria to the desert in northern Niger continued unabated. More than 20,000 migrants were expelled from Algeria to Assamaka, a town in the Agadez region of Niger between January and August, according to Alarm Phone Sahara.

Between 9 and 13 May, five men died on the route from "Point Zero" on the border with Algeria to the village of Assamaka, a walk of 15 km. Three further people, including a three-year-old girl, died at the health clinic in Assamaka, apparently of exhaustion.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

In August the government announced a 50% reduction in patients' fees for medical treatments, laboratory tests, imaging and medical and surgical procedures. Fees for childbirth and dialysis were abolished in public hospitals.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Niger experienced exceptional rainfall and floods, which killed at least 339 individuals, according to official data. As of October, 1,176,528 people in 158,399 households were affected by severe floods, according to the government. However, there lacked plans to combat flooding, and construction continued along the Niger river, the area most prone to flooding.

1. "Niger: Rights in free fall a year after coup", 25 July ↑
2. Niger: "Press freedom in jeopardy as journalists working on conflict intimidated and arrested", 3 May ↑

NIGERIA

Federal Republic of Nigeria

Journalists and critics of the authorities were arrested, charged and arbitrarily detained. Security forces arrested and ill-treated protesters, and used excessive force to quash protests, resulting in the deaths of several protesters. Hundreds of people were murdered in mob violence. Girl victims of abductions by Boko Haram continued to be denied support and justice. Communities in Rivers state were given the go-ahead in a UK court to hold Shell accountable for environmental devastation.

BACKGROUND

Flooding in 33 states killed more than 300 people and displaced tens of thousands. More than 61,000 hectares of land in Kogi state were inundated. In Borno state, flooding prevented access to humanitarian aid for 27,000 people. Also in Borno state, 1,618 children were recorded as malnourished between mid-May and June due to the high price of staple foods as well as a lack of adequate sanitation. As of mid-October, more than 14,000 suspected cases of cholera were recorded, resulting in 378 deaths.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 23 July the House of Representatives introduced the Counter Subversion Bill, which aimed to impose strict penalties on Nigerians who failed to recite the newly approved national anthem, or who criticized

politicians or community leaders. The Bill passed the first reading and proceeded to the second, but on 14 August was withdrawn by the House speaker following a public outcry.

The authorities continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain journalists and others expressing dissenting views. On 15 March, journalist Segun Olatunji from the online news outlet The First News was abducted from his home by members of the Nigerian Army. This was because of an article he wrote accusing an official from the Nigeria Defence Intelligence Agency (NDIA) of nepotism. Following public pressure, NDIA officials acknowledged having him in their custody and released him on 28 March.

On 1 May, Daniel Ojukwu, a reporter with the Foundation for Investigative Journalism, was abducted and detained by the police. This was after he had reported that Adejoke Orelope-Adefulire, senior special assistant to the president on sustainable development goals, had paid NGN 147 million (USD 106,154) into a restaurant's bank account. The payment came from public money intended for school building. Daniel Ojukwu was released 10 days later after a public outcry. On 14 August, Fisayo Soyombo, editor-in-chief of the Foundation for Investigative Journalism, was detained over the same report. He was released later that day on conditional bail.

On 29 August, journalist Muktar Dahiru was arrested by police for a Facebook post considered "insulting" to Governor Abba Yusuf of Kano state. He was charged with criminal conspiracy, defamation of character and intentional insult.

On 29 May a federal high court in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT) remanded Chioma Okoli in prison after she was charged with defamation under the Cybercrime Act. Chioma Okoli had posted on Facebook that a tomato purée produced by Erisco Foods Ltd contained an unhealthy amount of sugar. She was released on 31 May on stringent bail terms. Her trial was ongoing at the end of the year.

On 27 May, Precious Eze Chukwunonso, the publisher of online news outlet News Platform, was arrested by police and detained for 18 days. He had written an article alleging that a local businessman was involved in a confrontation with a neighbour in a Lagos residential estate, during which shots were fired. He was facing criminal charges of "conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace, provoking a breach of the peace by offensive publication, and conspiracy to commit a felony".

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

On 8 August, police raided the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) headquarters. On 19 August, the Department of State Service (DSS) called Joe Ajaero, the NLC president, for questioning over alleged criminal conspiracy, terrorism financing, treasonable felony, subversion and cybercrime. On 9 September, Joe Ajaero was arrested by DSS officials at Nnamdi Azikwe airport in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The government placed unlawful restrictions on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Following the #EndBadGovernance protests from 1 to 10 August, more than 1,000 people were detained nationwide and at least 24 protesters were killed in violent crackdowns by the security forces in the cities of Kano and Maiduguri and in the states of Jigawa, Katsina, Niger and Kaduna.[1]

On 2 September, the authorities arraigned 12 #EndBadGovernance protesters: Adeyemi Abiodun Abayomi, Musa Abdullahi, Michael Tobiloba Adaramoye, Bashir Bello, Angel Love Innocent, Nuradeen Khamis, Buhari Lawal, Lucky Ehis Obiyan, Mosiu Sadiq, Opaluwa Eleojo Simeon, Suleiman Yakubu and Abdulsalam Zubairu. They were brought before a federal high court in Abuja FCT on bogus charges, including felony and treason, conspiring to destabilize Nigeria, inciting mutiny, and levying war against the Nigerian state.

On 1 November, after being arrested and ill-treated, 114 #EndBadGovernance protesters were arraigned in groups at a federal high court in Abuja FCT. The majority of those arraigned in one of the groups were

children. Four of the children collapsed in the courtroom, having spent more than two months detained in appalling conditions. In Katsina state, 12 children under the age of 16 were also facing an unfair trial, charged with participating in the #EndBadGovernance protests. Many of these children were arrested simply for being on the streets during the protests.[2]

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 10 July, the ECOWAS Court ruled in *Obianuju Catherine Udeh and 2 Others v. Federal Republic of Nigeria* that the Nigerian authorities had violated #EndSARS protesters' rights. The rights violated included the rights to security of person, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, as well as freedom from torture and other ill-treatment, duty of the state to investigate, and the right to an effective remedy. However, the Court failed to hold the Nigerian authorities accountable for the killing of 12 protesters in October 2020 in two incidents: at Lekki toll gate; and in the district of Alausa, Lagos state.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

In a report published in October, Amnesty International documented at least 555 deaths from mob violence in 363 documented incidents between January 2012 and August 2023. Many of the victims were tortured to death or murdered after being accused of theft, witchcraft and blasphemy, among other things. The small number of these incidents investigated and prosecuted demonstrated a failure by the authorities to protect people from violence.[3]

Between December 2023 and February 2024, gunmen attacked communities in Barkin Ladi, Bokkos and Mangu local government areas of Plateau state, killing 1,333 people, including 260 children.

In March, a bomb exploded in Kawori, in the Konduga local government area of Borno state, killing 16 people and injuring dozens.

In April, farmers and herders clashed in Omala local government area of Kogi state, resulting in the deaths of 21 people. In June, eight people were injured in an attack by herdsmen in Birninkudu, Dutse and Kiyawa local government areas of Jigawa state.

On 24 December, gunmen killed at least 15 people — majority of them women and children —during an attack on Gidan Ado community of Ganawuri in Riyom LGA of Plateau state, with dead bodies scattered in homes, backyard and farms.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

On 30 September, the Nigerian Air Force conducted air strikes on Jika da Kolo village in Yadin Kidandan district, Kaduna state, killing 23 villagers, including children. Worshippers at a mosque and shoppers at a market were among the victims.

On 25 December, military air strikes killed at least 10 persons at Gidan Sama and Rumtuwa communities in Silame LGA of Sokoto state.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The authorities failed to take effective measures to prevent attacks on girls and schools. Ten years since 276 schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram fighters in Chibok, Borno state, 82 continued to remain in captivity. Twenty of those released were forced to stay with "repentant" Boko Haram fighters who they had been forced to marry while in captivity. Several girls had been abducted in subsequent attacks.[4]

Amnesty International reported in June that girls associated, or perceived to be associated with Boko Haram, having survived years of abuse by both Boko Haram and Nigerian forces, were denied reintegration support and justice.[5]

On 24 August, a bill to repeal the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015) – a law designed to curb gender-based violence in Nigeria – advanced to its second reading in the Senate.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

An inflation rate of 33.4% – an increase of 9.32% from July 2023 – and the high cost of goods and services caused a drop in people's standard of living. On 5 September, the

government increased the price of petrol from NGN 617 (USD 0.37) to NGN 817 (USD 0.50) per litre without providing any compensatory measures to protect incomes. On 9 September, Department of State Service agents unlawfully broke into the office of human rights organization, Socio-Economic Rights Accountability Project, after the organization had called on the president to reverse the price increase within 24 hours.

Between 18-22 December, 67 people — the majority of them on the brink of starvation — were killed in stampedes while trying to get food in charity events for the sharing of rice. On 18 December, 35 children died in Ibadan town in Oyo state. On 21 December, 22 people died in Okija town in Ihiala LGA of Anambra state. On 21 December 10 people died in Abuja FCT.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

On 11 October, the UK Court of Appeal ruled that the case presented in 2015 by the Bille and Ogale communities of Rivers state against Shell Petroleum Development Company should proceed to a full trial. This will likely result in the disclosure of crucial internal Shell documents. This overruled a decision by a UK High Court in March that denied justice to the two communities who had filed the case to hold Shell accountable for decades of environmental devastation caused by oil spills.

Nigeria's response to climate change remained inadequate due to its poor climate policies and insufficient renewable energy options.

1. *Nigeria: Bloody August: Nigerian Government's Violent Crackdown on #EndBadGovernance Protests*, 28 November ↑
2. "Nigeria: President Tinubu must release all #EndBadGovernance protesters", 1 November ↑
3. *Nigeria: Instantly Killed! How Law Enforcement Failures Exacerbate Nigeria's Wave of Mob Violence*, 28 October ↑
4. "Nigeria: Decade after Boko Haram attack on Chibok, 82 girls still in captivity", 14 April ↑
5. *"Help Us Build Our Lives": Girl Survivors of Boko Haram and Military Abuses in North-East Nigeria*, 9 June ↑

NORTH KOREA

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The government continued to exercise total control over all aspects of life, severely restricting the rights to freedom of expression, access to information and free movement. Thousands of people, including those accused of dissent or attempting to flee the country, were detained in prison camps. Prisoners were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Public executions were reported. Forced labour was systematically used as a form of control and to keep the economy running. Food shortages worsened but the government continued to reject international aid.

BACKGROUND

Severe flooding in July destroyed thousands of homes and reportedly left up to 1,500 people dead or missing. Diplomatic relations between North Korea and South Korea became increasingly strained.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Restrictions on the right to freedom of expression intensified. The government tightly controlled all forms of communication including by monitoring phone calls, text messages and internet activity and prohibiting contact with the outside world.[1] Access to information from external sources also remained forbidden. Foreign media, particularly South Korean news, television programmes and music, were banned; the government imposed severe punishments, including years of "reform through labour", on individuals who accessed or distributed such content.[2] People who defected from North Korea reported that even minor criticism of the government in private conversations could result in arrest and imprisonment, contributing to a pervasive atmosphere of fear.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Arbitrary arrests and detention remained widespread. Thousands of people, including entire families, were reportedly detained in political prison camps (*kwanliso*). Crimes included attempting to flee the country, practising their religion and others deemed to be "reactionary ideology and culture". Individuals forcibly repatriated from China faced serious human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, forced labour and, in some cases, torture or other ill-treatment, or death.

Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees was widespread but was particularly systematic in *kwanliso*. Individuals who had successfully fled the country during the year described beatings and other physical and psychological violence against prisoners. These were used both as a form of punishment and to extract confessions. Women prisoners were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Prisoners also faced grave physical and mental harms as a result of inhumane conditions in camps including lack of food and denial of medical treatment. The government continued to deny the existence of such camps.

FORCED LABOUR

In a report published in July, OHCHR, the UN human rights office, said that forced labour was widespread and institutionalized and that the extensive, multi-layered system of forced labour was used to control and exploit the population. OHCHR identified six types of forced labour, including in the context of state-assigned jobs, military conscription, school children on "work trips" and people deployed in "Shock Brigades". The report suggested that the widespread use of forced labour in prisons, in which detainees were systematically compelled to work under threats of physical violence, may amount to the crime against humanity of enslavement. Forced work was often in construction, farming, logging and mining and involved arduous and dangerous conditions, long working hours and inadequate compensation.

DEATH PENALTY

The death penalty was reportedly imposed for a wide range of offences, including attempted defection, accessing foreign media and criticizing the government. The extent of its use was unknown, but reports by people who had fled the country and from South Korea-based human rights organizations suggested that executions were common. According to unconfirmed reports, up to 30 state officials were executed for corruption and dereliction of duty in relation to the widespread flooding in July. In August, two women were reportedly publicly executed in the north-eastern city of Chongjin after being found guilty of attempting to help people flee the country.

RIGHT TO FOOD

Food shortages worsened due to prolonged drought and widespread flooding that damaged crops and agricultural infrastructure in the counties of Sinuiju and Uiju in North Pyongan province. According to media reports, the food crisis was further exacerbated by the government's ongoing failure to reform the centralized food distribution system, its prioritization of food supplies for the military and political elites over ordinary civilians, and international sanctions. According to the UN, an estimated 10.7 million people, or more than 40% of the population, were undernourished. Children and older people, particularly those living in rural areas, suffered from malnutrition. The government downplayed the scale of food shortages and refused offers of food relief and other support from other governments and international humanitarian agencies.

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1. "Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – HRC55", 18 March ↑
2. "Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Execution for Expression: Submission to the 47th Session of the UPR Working Group", 8 April ↑

NORTH MACEDONIA

Republic of North Macedonia

The authorities failed to address concerns about torture and other ill-treatment, including against prisoners and minorities. Roma children were not provided with equal access to education. The government did little to fight prejudice and hate speech against Roma and LGBTI people. Refugees and migrants, mostly from the Middle East and Asia, remained at risk of abuse and violence at the country's borders.

BACKGROUND

A new president was elected and a government was appointed in May, following campaigns marred by online and verbal attacks on politicians, minorities, women and the LGBTI community. North Macedonia's accession to the EU stalled as parliament failed to pass a constitutional amendment enshrining Bulgarians as "constituent people".

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

The UN Committee against Torture (CAT) raised concerns about the overall lack of funding and chronic understaffing of the prison system, and called for effective investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, including use of coercion and excessive force. It also urged the authorities to ensure that discriminatory motives behind crimes were adequately investigated and considered in criminal prosecutions.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In February, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the European Roma Rights Centre and mostly Roma children placed in the Tetovo correctional home in Volkovija. The court ordered a reassessment of a 2022 ruling by the Skopje Court of Appeal regarding equal access to education for children in custody. The Court of Appeal had previously rejected a complaint alleging that the child correction system failed to provide equal access to education for children in custody, which constituted both direct and indirect discrimination. It then issued a revised ruling that the authorities had to provide access to education in the correctional home; however, such measures remained to be implemented.

In June, the CAT welcomed the adoption of the Law on Justice for Children, which incorporated the principle of the best interests of the child in contact with the justice system. UNICEF commended the law's restorative justice approach, emphasizing the child's right to be heard and aiming for rehabilitation and reintegration as desired outcomes.

However, the CAT also raised serious concerns about reports of a high rate of mental health conditions and over-medication of children in correctional institutions.

DISCRIMINATION

The revision of laws on gender equality and on civil registry (the latter enabling legal gender recognition for transgender people) remained stalled as a result of a coordinated, public "anti-gender" campaign.

Roma

In September the Commission on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (CPPD) issued an opinion on the beating in 2021 of a Roma child by police officers in Prilep. The commission identified direct discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and race, and recommended that the Ministry of Interior conduct a genuine, prompt and full internal investigation and provide access to justice to the victim. The CPPD also recommended that Prilep municipality take steps to address school segregation affecting Roma children in the town.

In April, with the support of NGOs, local action plans for Roma integration were adopted in 14 municipalities, including Shuto Orizari in Skopje, Kicevo, Prilep and Bitola.

Muslim women

The CPPD issued an opinion in April, establishing discrimination on grounds of

gender and religious belief in relation to a complainant who was refused service in a restaurant because she was wearing a headscarf.

LGBTI people

The CPPD also issued several opinions on online discrimination and incitement against LGBTI people, finding that negative public attitudes persisted on social media. As the UN CAT noted, the Criminal Code does not incorporate a clear and comprehensive definition of hate speech that includes sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds. In September, responding to recommendations received through the UPR, the government indicated that it did not plan to introduce such amendments to the Criminal Code.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In February, the NGO Legis reported that groups of refugees and migrants trying to reach Serbia had been stripped of most of their clothing in freezing temperatures at the border, allegedly by Serbian border police, and returned to North Macedonia. Macedonia did not systematically provide access to shelter and essential services for refugees and migrants. The NGO also reported on the continuing practice of unlawful pushbacks to Greece at the southern border.

NORWAY

Kingdom of Norway

The Parliamentary Ombudsperson expressed concerns over conditions and treatment experienced by vulnerable people in prison. Women's reporting of rape increased. A new law extended legal abortion limits. UN experts expressed concern at high levels of hostility and discrimination against people of African descent. The government failed to stop the exploration of new oil and gas fields.

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

Reports released by the Parliamentary Ombudsperson in May and June expressed concerns based on visits to the Halden and Bodø prisons in 2023. The reports noted the use of reinforced "security cells" as a coercive measure, including for people at risk of suicide.

On 15 October, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Norway had violated the right to life and the right to an effective remedy after a man took his own life in prison in 2020. The ECtHR found that, despite having been aware of his mental health issues, the authorities had failed to provide adequate follow-up care after the man was transferred from hospital to Oslo prison.

On 18 October, the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsperson filed a complaint to the Directorate of Correctional Services on behalf of women in prisons. He noted that, while only 6% of people in prison were women, they accounted for 80% of self-harm cases and 75% of suicide attempts.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In December, parliament adopted a new law extending the legal limit for abortion on request to 18 weeks' gestation.

DISCRIMINATION

In March, UN experts urged the government to take steps to ensure the human rights of people of African descent, who continued to face racial profiling, advocacy of hatred and discrimination in employment.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government continued to express support for phasing out fossil fuels but had yet to stop the exploration of new oil and gas fields. In January, the Oslo District Court ruled that development permits issued for three new oil fields without an assessment of their climate impact were invalid. The government appealed the ruling and the Court of Appeals split the case, requesting an advisory opinion from the EFTA court on the understanding of the EIA Directive. The

opinion was pending at the end of the year. In October, the environmental organizations lost the part of the case regarding an interim injunction to cease the oil field developments. They appealed against this to the Supreme Court.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In March, agreements were reached between Indigenous Sami reindeer herders and wind power companies on the Fosen peninsula. The agreements followed a 2021 Supreme Court verdict declaring invalid any licences for wind farms built on winter grazing lands.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

In August, the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund stated that it was re-evaluating its investments in companies involved in Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory. The announcement followed the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in July on the unlawfulness of the Israeli occupation. In October, the government stated that businesses should avoid activities that "may be associated with serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law".

PAKISTAN

Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Authorities weaponized laws relating to criminal defamation, sedition, hate speech and "cyber terrorism" to muzzle dissent as militancy-related security attacks increased. Climate-induced floods and heatwaves, with temperatures reaching 50ºC in some areas, continued to cause hardship. While inflation rates receded, low and daily wage workers were denied rights to unionize and access to safe environment and fair pay.

BACKGROUND

The general election on 8 February brought the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz to power. Election results were contested by opposition parties and the election period was marked by intense violence, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. There were nationwide protests throughout the year, despite heavy restrictions. Attacks from armed groups such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and Baloch Liberation Army increased. Inflation significantly decreased to 4.1% in December from 29.66% in December 2023. Pakistan secured a 37-month USD 7 billion loan extension from the International Monetary Fund in September. The World Bank reported that the poverty rate was expected to stay at 40%. Extreme weather events resulted in rain- and heat-related casualties and losses. In February at least 45 people, including 27 children, died due to heavy rainfall and snowfall. At least 143 people died from lightning strikes and storm-related incidents in April. More than 350 deaths were attributed to heavy rainfall and flooding in July and August.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Authorities used laws and digital technology to restrict freedom of expression. The Punjab Defamation Act 2024, applicable to the Punjab province of 127 million, passed in May despite strong opposition, further eroding free speech protections.

Significant mobile networks were shut down in Gwadar district for over 10 days during the Baloch National Gathering in July and August, and in October and November for two days and four days respectively, during protests planned by the political party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI).

Internet speeds were slowed by up to 40% from July to October, due to upgrading of the national web monitoring system enhancing ability to block online content.[1] Social media platform X was blocked from 17 February. Short-term restrictions were placed on various social media platforms during the election period, particularly during "virtual rallies" hosted by the PTI in January.

Journalists

Journalist groups raised grave concerns regarding the authorities' failure to protect journalists' safety and effectively investigate

attacks. At least seven journalists were killed in targeted attacks. Authorities summoned at least 32 journalists under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) for alleged "propaganda" against the judiciary. In February at least two people, including journalist Asad Toor, were arrested in relation to the allegations. Asad was released on bail after three weeks in detention. In July, 10 PTI workers, including international media coordinator Ahmed Waqas Janjua and information secretary Raoof Hassan, were arrested on allegations of "anti-state propaganda" under the PECA. They remained on bail at the end of the year. In November, journalist Mattiullah Jan was arrested on terrorism and narcotics charges for critical reporting on the government's handling of protests.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Civilians were held under military custody throughout the year. Out of the 105 participants in the 9 May 2023 protests who were tried in military courts, 20 were released in March, and the remaining 85 were sentenced to between two and 10 years' imprisonment in December in secret trials. At least 1,058 protest participants remained in custody waiting for trials in civilian courts, including PTI leaders Yasmin Rashid and Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan remained in arbitrary detention awaiting further trials. Amnesty International found violations of his rights to liberty and fair trial.[2]

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) leader and former MP, Ali Wazir, was detained in the capital, Islamabad, in August on charges of "manhandling" police officers. He was re-arrested several times before the end of the year under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance, despite being granted bail in earlier cases.

In June, 36 members of the Ahmadiyya community were arbitrarily detained under the MPO Ordinance before and during the Muslim religious holiday Eid ul-Azha while practising their religious rites.[3] In October, over 100 members of the PTM were arrested and detained under the MPO Ordinance, prior to the Pashtun Qaumi Jirga.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Authorities clamped down on protest and assemblies through restrictive laws, arbitrary restrictions and unlawful use of force. In September, the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act 2024 was enacted without any consultation, giving broad power to the authorities to restrict or ban assemblies in Islamabad. A similar law was passed in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir in October.

Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure was used to impose discretionary blanket restrictions on public protests and gatherings, placing the onus on activists and political organizers to obtain administrative permission to protest. In October, the Punjab government empowered the district and home departments to ban gatherings in Punjab districts for up to 30 and 90 days, respectively.

In January, 44 government employees in Balochistan province were suspended for attending a sit-in against the killing of Balaach Mola Bakhsh. On 8 March, barbed wire was used to block the protest site of the annual women's day Aurat March in Islamabad. In April, dozens of farmers protesting the government's handling of the wheat crisis were arrested by police in Lahore.

Protests by the PTI were repeatedly attacked and restricted, and the party was denied permission to hold its rallies. Thousands of members and leaders of the party were arrested prior to and following various protests throughout the year.

Intimidation and harassment of protesters

In January, Baloch activists were targeted with arbitrary arrests and detentions during a month-long peaceful protest against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, organized and led by Baloch women.

In September, the government placed 137 people, including members of the PTM and Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), on the Fourth Schedule under the Anti-Terrorism

Act, 1997 (ATA). This imposed severe restrictions on their rights to liberty, freedom of movement and expression. In October, it designated the PTM as a "proscribed organization" under the ATA, in anticipation of its major gathering, Pashtun Qaumi Jirga. Arbitrary restrictions were placed on BYC leaders Sammi Deen and Mahrang Baloch, preventing them from travelling overseas.

Excessive and unnecessary use of force

Use of lethal force against peaceful protesters resulted in several deaths. In February, two National Democratic Movement workers were killed and 15 injured, including party leader Mohsin Dawar, when police fired on protesters outside an election office in Miramshah city. In May, three people were killed and nearly 100 injured when police fired at protesters during the Kashmir Long March in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir. In July, three people were killed by law enforcement using firearms during the Baloch National Gathering. Security officers fired on a rally for peace in Bannu city, killing one and injuring several. In November, 12 people were allegedly killed after lethal ammunition was used against protesters in Islamabad during a PTI protest.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Enforced disappearances continued unabated, targeting journalists, activists, students, comedians, political opponents and families of political opponents. By June, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances had already received 197 missing persons' cases. Defence of Human Rights recorded 2,332 cases of enforced disappearances throughout the year.

People were recorded as missing for days, only to return without any explanation or accountability. Kashmiri journalist and poet, Ahmad Farhad, an outspoken critic of enforced disappearances, was forcibly disappeared for two weeks in May. He faced criminal charges upon return. Comedian Aun Ali Khosa was forcibly disappeared for three days from his home in Lahore in August after his video satirizing the cost of living in Pakistan went viral. In July, 17-year-old Faizan Usman was forcibly disappeared for two months from his home in Islamabad.

In February, activist Hidayat Lohar, previously forcibly disappeared for two years in 2017, was shot dead by unknown persons in Nasirabad city. The police reluctantly filed a case to investigate the killing after court orders to do so. In October, three students were extrajudicially killed in two separate incidents. Sajan Malokani and Sarmad Bhayo were killed by police in Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab province; Vaneesh Kumar was killed in Hyderabad, Sindh province.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

There were several attacks on places of worship and burial sites of the Ahmadiyya community. In January, the police and district administration in Daska and Bharoke destroyed tombstones in Ahmadi graveyards. In June, 17 graves of the Ahmadiyya community were desecrated in Bahawalpur district. On Eid day, 17 June, a violent crowd attacked the Ahmadiyya place of worship in the city of Kotli. In September, police officials in Okara demolished minarets and Islamic inscriptions in an Ahmadi place of worship. In October, police in Gujranwala vandalized two Ahmadi places of worship.

The Pakistani authorities failed to protect religious minorities, curb incidents of violence related to blasphemy allegations or ensure accountability for blasphemy-related killings. The majority of the suspects involved in the 16 August 2023 Jaranwala riots against the Christian community remained at large. At least 40% of survivors had received no compensation from the state by year's end.[4]

Death penalty

At least seven people received the mandatory death penalty and five were imprisoned for life for blasphemy.

For the 2023 Jaranwala attack, while the two brothers accused of blasphemy by the rioters were acquitted, a Christian man was sentenced to death for allegedly sharing a blasphemous TikTok video that was said to incite the riots.

Unlawful killings

There were six killings of Ahmadis in incidents of targeted faith-motivated attacks. In May, a crowd in Sargodha attacked a Christian family over allegations of burning the Quran, injuring a 70-year-old man, Nazir Masih, who later died of his injuries. In June, a local tourist was killed by a group of people in Swat district after he was taken from police custody.

Extrajudicial executions

In September, two men separately accused of blasphemy were killed by police officers in custody. On 12 September, a police officer in Quetta killed a man in custody on suspicion of blasphemy. On 19 September, a doctor accused of blasphemy was killed by police officers in a staged "encounter" in Umerkot. His body was later violently taken from the family and burnt by a crowd.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Girls' schools were targeted by militants, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, with four attacks in May alone. These attacks impacted literacy rates among girls in Pakistan, where four million fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school. During the general election, a *fatwa* (Islamic decree) prohibiting canvassing by women candidates was issued in Kohistan district. The *fatwa* was rejected by the Election Commission.

Despite laws to address so-called "honour" killings, they remained endemic. A total of 531 honour killings were recorded from January to November, and 101 cases were reported between January and June in Sindh province. In the first half of the year, 1,630 cases of child abuse (59% of which were girls) were reported by child rights NGO Sahil. Girls from religious minorities were subject to forced conversions and marriages, particularly in Sindh and Punjab.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government failed to guarantee access to adequate healthcare, food and housing in the wake of floods and heatwaves. The heatwaves in June resulted in the deaths of at least 45 people in Karachi city according to official figures, although aid organizations asserted that the figure was significantly higher. Frequent power outages, often for more than 10 hours per day, as well as suffocating high temperatures in urban and informal settlements, contributed to the high death toll.

The summer rains displaced more than 141,601 people in Sindh province. The government's failure to provide adequate relief disproportionately affected women, persons with disabilities, children and older people.[5]

In October, the right to a clean and healthy environment was inserted into the Constitution as a fundamental right. Air pollution in major cities in Punjab province, such as Lahore and Multan, reached unprecedented levels, with concentrations of PM2.5 over 100 times the WHO's air quality guidelines. As a result, 1.93 million cases of respiratory diseases were reported from 15 October to 14 November. UNICEF warned that air pollution had endangered the health of 11 million children in Punjab.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Deportations of unregistered refugees continued as part of the "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan". In March, the government announced plans to deport those on registered Afghan Citizen Cards. A total of 315,100 Afghan refugees were unlawfully returned to Afghanistan. Harassment of Afghan refugees continued; at least 10,566 Afghan refugees in Pakistan were arrested and detained. While Pakistan extended the validity of UNHCR-issued Proof of Registration cards for Afghan refugees until 30 June 2025, no concrete measures were taken to provide protections.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The minimum wage increased (to USD 133 per month) but remained well below living wage levels (USD 374 per month). Informal work patterns, underpayment and lack of written contracts continued to be a challenge for many workers. Workers and trade unionists, including in the garment industry, faced "anti-union" harassment from their

employers and the state. The devolution of labour law administration since 2010 continued to undermine the right to freedom of association for workers in Special Economic Zones, with employers targeting workers with reprisals for forming or joining unions.

Sanitation workers, largely belonging to Christian minorities, were denied safe working environments. Several workers died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks.

1. "Pakistan: Authorities must be transparent about internet disruptions and surveillance tech", 26 August ↑
2. *Pakistan: Authorities Must Immediately Release Imran Khan from Arbitrary Detention*, 11 September ↑
3. "Pakistan: Authorities must end escalating attacks on minority Ahmadiyya community", 21 June ↑
4. "Pakistan: One year since Jaranwala attack, minority Christians await justice", 16 August ↑
5. "Pakistan: Flood survivors in Sindh province suffer disease and food insecurity amid government inaction – new testimony", 31 October ↑

PALESTINE (STATE OF)

State of Palestine

Palestinian armed groups fired hundreds of indiscriminate rockets and mortar shells towards Israel, including from civilian areas in Gaza, endangering civilians. Palestinian armed individuals or members of armed groups killed Israeli civilians, including hostages in Gaza and settlers living illegally in the occupied West Bank. Journalists and critics of the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank were arrested and arbitrarily detained. Critics of the authorities in Gaza were physically assaulted. Palestinians detained in the West Bank and released Israeli hostages reported torture and other ill-treatment. Women and girls were not protected by Palestinian authorities from gender-based violence and discrimination.

BACKGROUND

In July and December, the parallel authorities of Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip announced their intention to mount joint efforts to rebuild Gaza once Israel's campaign of devastation and genocide ends. No Palestinian parliamentary elections had been held since 2006.

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh resigned in February when his government came under pressure from the USA to take over governance of Gaza. President Mahmoud Abbas appointed a new prime minister, Mohammad Mustafa. Israeli authorities claimed responsibility for killing four Hamas leaders in Gaza, and were widely thought to be responsible for the assassination of two other senior Hamas politicians in Lebanon and Iran. Of the surviving Hamas leaders, Khalil al-Hayya led negotiations in Cairo, Egypt, for a ceasefire from October.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Armed conflict in Gaza

Palestinian armed groups fired hundreds of indiscriminate rockets and mortar shells towards Israel, causing no fatalities in Israel, according to OCHA. They fired indiscriminate rockets from or near civilian areas in Gaza and located their fighters in civilian areas, including shelters for displaced people, endangering Palestinian civilians.

Hamas's leaders continued to justify violence against civilians inside Israel. Abu Obeida, the spokesperson for Al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's armed wing, repeatedly made threats against civilian hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. Palestinian armed groups published some 20 videos, photographs and messages showing the suffering of hostages and captives. On 1 September the Israeli military announced that it had recovered the bodies of six Israelis – five civilians and one soldier – who had been shot at close range shortly before their retrieval. Statements posted by Abu Obeida suggested that they were killed to prevent their rescue.[1]

Attacks on Israeli civilians

Palestinian armed individuals or groups killed 19 Israeli civilians, of whom seven were settlers living illegally in the occupied West Bank, according to OCHA. On 11 August, fighters from Al-Qassam Brigades killed an Israeli civilian and injured another near Mehola, an illegal Israeli settlement in the northern Jordan Valley.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

West Bank

Demonstrators were occasionally met with violence from Palestinian police. Following the police's dispersal of a protest by university students in Ramallah on 30 April, 60 students complained of excessive use of force by police to the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), the Palestinian national human rights institution.

Critics of the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank were arrested and held without charge. The ICHR received more than 241 complaints of arbitrary detention.

According to the Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), 41 journalists were detained by the Palestinian police for periods ranging from a few hours to a week, and interrogated about their work.

Gaza

According to the international Committee to Protect Journalists, journalists came under pressure from Palestinian authorities in Gaza. On 8 July, Amin Abed, a prominent critic of Hamas, was assaulted in Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza by masked armed men whom he identified as Hamas affiliates. He required hospitalization for multiple fractures. In November and December, nine journalists were attacked or otherwise prevented from reporting. Government officials stopped journalists from covering local protests against Hamas's management of aid scarcity, according to MADA.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

West Bank

Eyewitnesses reported excessive use of force by Palestinian police conducting armed arrest raids on Jenin and other Palestinian towns in the northern West Bank. ICHR and Lawyers for Justice reported that Palestinian police killed 15 Palestinians during these raids, including two children, who were alleged to be members of Palestinian armed groups. On 1 May, Palestinian forces shot and killed Ahmed Abu al-Ful, a member of an armed group, while he was driving in Tulkarem. Witnesses said he was unarmed at the time of the shooting, though the police disputed this. No criminal investigation was opened into his killing, according to the ICHR.

Palestinian police did not intervene to prevent the killing in Jenin of Karam al-Jabarin by armed men affiliated with Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) on 21 March. Police failed to investigate the case or make arrests, despite the public announcement of his "execution" by PIJ. Armed groups affiliated with PIJ recruited child fighters for their clashes with Palestinian security forces.

Gaza

On 26 September, Hamas security forces killed aid worker Islam Hijazi in Khan Younis in central Gaza by firing 90 bullets at her car. Hamas blamed the killing on mistaken identification and failed to conduct any investigation or hold those responsible accountable.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

OCHA reported that 97 civilians and soldiers taken by Palestinian fighters on 7 October 2023 remained captive in Gaza, including two children: five-year-old Ariel Bibas and his one-year-old brother Kfir. All hostages were held without contact with the ICRC. Dozens of hostages were feared killed either in attacks by Israeli forces or in unlawful killings by Palestinian armed groups. Hostages who were released said that they had endured or witnessed severe beatings and sexual assault.[2]

Between January and November, the ICHR received 123 complaints of torture and other ill-treatment in Palestinian detention centres and prisons in the West Bank, mostly during interrogations. Because of the ongoing conflict, the ICHR could not collect complaints of torture or other ill-treatment by Palestinian authorities against Palestinians in Gaza.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Hamas authorities continued to consistently fail to conduct investigations into serious violations of international law, including possible war crimes.

Arrest warrants were issued by the ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber on 21 November against Al-Qassam Brigades leader Mohammed Deif, as well as Israel's prime minister and former minister of defence. Israeli forces claimed to have killed Mohammed Deif in July.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women and girls were not protected by Palestinian authorities from gender-based violence and discrimination. Women in camps for displaced people in southern Gaza reported to local women's rights organizations that they faced domestic abuse as well as harassment and injury in crowds at food distribution points.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Despite relatives' appeals to the Ministry of the Interior, the fate of six men subjected to enforced disappearance by Palestinian authorities in the West Bank town of Salfit in 2002 remained undisclosed.

The conditions and whereabouts of two citizens of Israel with mental disabilities, Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed, remained undisclosed after they went missing in Gaza in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Just 1% of Palestine's waste was recycled.

In March, authorities conducted training aimed at building a climate-resilient healthcare system.

1. *Israel/OPT: Amnesty International's Research Into Hamas-Led Attacks of 7 October 2023 and Treatment of Hostages*, 2 December ↑
2. "Israel/OPT: Hamas and other armed groups must immediately release civilians held hostage in Gaza", 12 July ↑

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Independent State of Papua New Guinea

Authorities continued to restrict media freedom and the right to peaceful assembly. Gender-based violence continued unabated. Law enforcement responses to inter-ethnic and gang-related violence were ineffective. New legislation promised greater environmental protection, but climate commitments were undermined by environmentally destructive mining projects, corruption and illegal logging.

BACKGROUND

In May, a landslide caused the deaths of over 160 people in the highland province of Enga, impacting the right to life and livelihoods in an area already plagued by violence. Five years after the population of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville voted for independence, the Papua New Guinea parliament had yet to enact laws to implement the outcome of the referendum.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In January, protests by police over a salary dispute in the capital Port Moresby and coastal city of Lae escalated into riots and looting leading to the deaths of 25 people.[1] There were reports that police officers were responsible for inciting some of the unrest. The authorities failed to investigate the deaths.

The authorities persisted with plans to further restrict media freedom through a National Media Policy to regulate journalists, media outlets and the currently independent PNG Media Council. The draft policy, first

introduced in 2023 and revised in July, was adopted in November.

Journalists and other media workers continued to face harassment and intimidation. In August, the authorities prevented a reporter from the online news service BenarNews from attending a press conference with Indonesia's president-elect Prabowo Subianto apparently because of the outlet's reporting on the human rights situation in Papua, Indonesia (see Indonesia entry).

Defamation laws criminalized freedom of expression. In August, the Supreme Court ruled that the Cybercrime Act 2016, which carries a 25-year prison sentence or a heavy fine, did not undermine constitutional rights to freedom of expression. The case was brought by journalist Kila Aoneka Wari, who was charged with defamation under the Act in 2022.

The authorities also restricted peaceful protests. In July, police arrested six men for burning the national flag during a protest against the eviction of informal settlers from the Bush Wara area of Port Moresby. All six were charged under the National Identity Act for "improper use of the national flag" and unlawful assembly under the Criminal Code Act.

RIGHT TO LIFE

Inter-ethnic and gang violence persisted across several highland provinces, despite new curfews, restrictions on freedom of movement, and authorizations of the use of lethal force against anyone carrying a weapon introduced in 2024. Prosecutions for crimes committed in the context of inter-ethnic violence were rare.

Over 80 inter-ethnic violence-related killings were reported in Enga province during the year, including around the Porgera mining site. In July, gang violence in East Sepik province resulted in 26 deaths, including 16 children.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to an academic study published in July, attacks against women and girls accused of sorcery were more severe than attacks against men. Female survivors were also less likely to be able to access justice through the courts.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In February, parliament passed the Protected Areas Act, under which 30% of the country will be earmarked for conservation. There were concerns among conservationists about the enforceability of the law.

The country remained reliant on fossil fuel extraction and other environmentally destructive mining projects for economic revenue and development. Government commitments to tackling climate change were also undermined by illegal logging.

1. "Papua New Guinea: Police and military must exercise restraint to avoid escalation of deadly riots", 11 January ↑

PARAGUAY

Republic of Paraguay

Insufficient funding for public healthcare caused delays, shortages and expenses for patients and their families. A new bill and a parliamentary commission of inquiry threatened freedom of association and expression for civil society organizations and the media. Rulings on 10 lawsuits regarding the legal recognition of the names of transgender people were still pending. Gender-based violence was a huge concern. Children continued to suffer sexual abuse and mistreatment, and the number of adolescent pregnancies remained worryingly high. Climate and environmental disasters, as well as forced evictions, disproportionately affected Indigenous Peoples.

BACKGROUND

The alarming surge in organized crime became a pressing domestic and international concern, prompting an expansion of the military forces for internal

security across four departments (administrative areas).

Inequality persisted, with the National Institute of Statistics reporting that 17.2% of the population were experiencing multidimensional poverty, impacting their rights to work, social security, adequate housing, health, healthy environment and education. Additionally, 22.7% were living below the monetary poverty line and 4.9% were living below the extreme poverty line, affecting their rights to food and an adequate standard of living. In 2024, the wealthiest 10% of the population earned nearly 20 times more than the poorest 10%.

In February, Eusebio Torres Romero, a former police officer, was sentenced to 30 years in prison for torture committed in 1976, during the military regime.

Civil society organizations expressed concern about the violations of due process in the expulsion of an opposition senator from the National Congress.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The government allocated insufficient resources to the public health system, undermining the right to health, particularly for groups that face discrimination, including Indigenous Peoples and transgender women.[1] Public health investment stood at 4% of GDP, below the 6% recommended for universal coverage by the Pan American Health Organization.

The government failed to increase progressive taxation and strengthen primary healthcare provision, leaving families to cover 38.4% of total healthcare costs from their own resources, one of the highest out-of-pocket health expenditures among countries with similar development levels.

The legislature rejected a bill to increase the tobacco tax by 6% to fund healthcare for cancer patients, missing an opportunity to fulfil the right to health.

In April, students held demonstrations and occupied universities, protesting at the government's decision to change the financing of free tuition and scholarship programmes at public universities. They called for more meaningful consultation on the issue and a new tax agreement that would fund social policies, including higher education.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Congress approved a vaguely worded bill that threatened freedom of association and could increase control over civil society organizations and lead to arbitrary restrictions, including the suspension of their activities.[2]

The Paraguayan Journalists Union reported that journalists and organizations investigating political power had been subjected to harassment and defamation through fake news disseminated by senators during deliberations about this bill.

In August a parliamentary commission of inquiry into money laundering was established, aimed at investigating civil society organizations and the media. The hearings were kept confidential, raising concerns about the transparency of this new scrutiny mechanism.

Three activists charged with arson and disorderly conduct relating to protest during the Covid-19 pandemic were acquitted after an eight-month trial.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The judiciary had yet to issue final rulings on 10 lawsuits filed by transgender people seeking legal recognition of their names in accordance with their gender identity. Two of the plaintiffs, transgender women Yren Rotela and Mariana Sepúlveda who sued in civil courts for such recognition in 2016, were awaiting a decision from the UN Human Rights Committee regarding communications submitted under the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Gender-based violence remained prevalent. The Ministry of Women reported 31 femicides and 52 attempted femicides in 2024, compared with an average of 37 femicides per year for the period 2019-2023.

Alexa Torres, a survivor of sexual harassment by a Catholic priest, filed a

complaint before the CEDAW Committee after the judiciary overturned her alleged aggressor's conviction on the basis of statutory limitations.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Children's rights continued to be violated. In 2024, the Public Prosecutor's Office registered 3,524 complaints of child sexual abuse and 1,679 complaints of child mistreatment, compared with 3,543 complaints of child sexual abuse and 1,559 complaints of child mistreatment in the previous year.

Adolescent pregnancies continued to be high, and child survivors of rape continued to be forced to carry pregnancies to term due to an almost total ban on abortion. The Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare registered 8,578 births by adolescent girls aged between 15 and 19 years, of whom 602 were Indigenous, and 339 births by girls aged 10 to 14, of whom 82 were Indigenous.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Paraguay to adopt sexual and reproductive health and gender-related education in schools. The committee also called on Paraguay to ensure, among other things, that in cases of child abuse, including sexual violence, the criminal justice system applies a child-friendly and multisectoral approach to avoid re-traumatization.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Climate and environmental disasters disproportionately affected Indigenous Peoples. In July, the Coordinator of Indigenous Leaders of the Bajo Chaco reported that local communities had exhausted their drinking water reserves and were not receiving humanitarian assistance. In September, a wildfire affected the Cerro Chovoreca National Park, ancestral territory of the Ayoreo Indigenous People who live in voluntary isolation.

Forced evictions of Indigenous Peoples continued. The Tekoha Sauce Indigenous community of the Avá Guaraní Paranaense people were still awaiting the restitution of their ancestral territory, appropriated by the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam, violating their rights. The community still faced an unresolved eviction lawsuit before an appeals court.

1. "Paraguay: Well-being of millions depend on urgently needed improvements to public health system", 6 May ↑
2. "Paraguay: Veto anti civil society bill", 10 October ↑

PERU

Republic of Peru

Investigations continued into deaths during protests in 2022 and 2023. Bills before Congress threatened to restrict civil society. Wildfires affected large areas causing death and destruction. Human rights defenders remained at risk, particularly Indigenous leaders, and protection mechanisms were lacking. Public health facilities were inadequate and people increasingly used private services at their own expense. LGBTI rights were overlooked and "transsexuality" was declared a "mental disorder". Only therapeutic abortion was legal and access to it was inadequate. Lawmakers proposed the elimination of comprehensive sex education. Sexual and gender-based violence remained widespread. Actual and proposed changes to legislation risked impunity for historic crimes against humanity. Authorities continued to expel refugees and migrants, and a resolution made access to visas for Venezuelans and others more difficult.

BACKGROUND

Congress made political decisions weakening the mandate of several state institutions that protect human rights.

The presidential announcement of the closure of the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations demonstrated the government's lack of commitment to combat gender-based violence.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Criminal investigations were ongoing into 50 deaths and hundreds of injuries during protests between December 2022 and February 2023.[1] In July, the Public Prosecutor's Office initiated criminal proceedings against high-ranking military and police officers and the Attorney General presented a second constitutional complaint against President Dina Boluarte and five of her former ministers. Investigations into killings during protests in November 2020 had not made significant progress.

Bills were presented before Congress that would expand state supervision over civil society organizations, restrict civic space and external financing, and create administrative offences for actions that disturb public order.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Between January and November, the National Institute of Civil Defence identified more than 241 wildfires in the country, causing 35 deaths and injuring 285 people. Several communities and protected natural areas were severely affected.

Three years after the oil spill off the coast of Ventanilla on the outskirts of the capital Lima, the Environmental Assessment and Oversight Agency reported that 19 affected sites still showed evidence of environmental damage. Authorities continued to fail to provide adequate support to communities affected by environmental contamination in Espinar province, Cusco department.

In December, authorities declared a 90-day environmental emergency due to an oil spill on Lobitos beach, Talara province, Piura department, that affected over 275 hectares, including the southern section of the Mar Tropical de Grau National Reserve.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Four land, territory and environmental defenders were killed in the year. Two of them were killed in the buffer zone around the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve and had protection measures from the Intersectoral Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

The Ministry of the Interior continued to lack a protocol to coordinate the protection of human rights defenders with the police.

In April, the perpetrators of the 2014 murder of four environmental defenders of the Ashéninka Indigenous people were convicted.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Structural barriers existed in access to adequate healthcare.[2] As a result, rates of self-medication remained high and there was increased demand for medical attention in pharmacies, private clinics and hospitals, disproportionately burdening people on lower incomes.

The Peruvian Medical Association denounced the shortage of medicines in public health facilities and the authorities' inadequate response to tackle the issue.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The rights of LGBTI people continued to be disregarded and Congress failed to pass a law on legal gender recognition and marriage equality.

A decree by the Ministry of Health declared "transsexuality" a "mental disorder", contrary to WHO guidelines. Following complaints, the ministry clarified that in practice transgender people should not be treated as having mental disorders, but the decree remained in place.

Civil society organizations criticized a civil union bill for same-sex couples that advanced in Congress, as it was considered discriminatory, focused on the protection of patrimony and did not include all rights of same-sex couples, such as obtaining nationality or residence.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

One hundred years after the decriminalization of therapeutic abortion, barriers that limit access to this fundamental right persisted and access to such abortions was inadequate. In 2024, 1,080 girls under 15 years of age carried pregnancies to term, one of whom was aged under 11.

The state failed to apply the recommendations on therapeutic abortions

for all minors issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which in 2023 ruled in favour of the case of Camila, a 13-year-old Indigenous girl who had been denied an abortion.

Access to the Ministry of Education's comprehensive sex education guides was temporarily restricted, but resumed after complaints from civil society organizations. Nonetheless, in October, lawmakers introduced Bill 9174 which proposed the elimination of comprehensive sex education.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In 2024, the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations registered 168,492 cases of violence against women and other vulnerable groups. Of these, 32,388 were cases of sexual violence, of which 22,797 (70%) were against people aged up to 17 years. The Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations registered 12,924 cases of rape against women, of which 65% (8,416 cases) were against girls and adolescents. However, only 2,768 rape kits were delivered, raising questions about whether all protection protocols for victims of sexual violence had been implemented. Over the same period, 162 femicides were registered. According to the Ministry of the Interior, 10,278 women and girls were reported missing in 2024, representing 58% of all missing persons.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In August, Law 32107 came into effect applying the statute of limitations to crimes against humanity and war crimes committed before the Rome Statute came into force in 2002. This ran contrary to Peru's obligations under international law, such as the 1968 Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity. Nevertheless, judges did not apply this law in at least three cases, including the Huanta case, in which a ruling against two former Senior Commanders of the Peruvian Navy was finally made on the murder of six people and the enforced disappearance of more than 50 in 1984 in Huanta province, Ayacucho department, as well as the enforced disappearance of journalist Jaime Alaya during the internal armed conflict. Congress continued to discuss Bill 7549, which would grant amnesty to members of the armed forces, police and government officials who have not received a final sentence in cases relating to the fight against armed opposition groups between 1980 and 2000.

In June, the judiciary handed down a historic sentence against 13 former members of the military for the rape of 10 peasant women in Manta y Vilca, Huancavelica province, Huancavelica department in the 1980s, during the internal armed conflict.

A court order initiated the process of comprehensive reparations for victims of forced sterilization during the 1990s.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Authorities continued to expel migrants under the legal framework of the Special Exceptional Administrative Sanction Procedure without the guarantee that individuals would be received by another country.

In July, a resolution came into force eliminating the exemption to require a passport for the issue of humanitarian visas for vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly and chronically ill. It also required valid passports for Venezuelans, undermining the rights of thousands with limited access to updated identity documents.

In October, the government issued a decree making it compulsory for hotels and other accommodation to request foreigners' travel documents and report this information to the authorities, with fines for establishments that failed to do so.

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1. *Who Called the Shots? Chain of Command Responsibility for Killings and Injuries in Protests in Peru*, 18 July ↑
2. *Right to Health, a Privilege of a Few*, 29 October (Spanish only) ↑

PHILIPPINES

Republic of the Philippines

The last fabricated charge against human rights defender Leila de Lima was dismissed. Concern grew as more activists were forcibly disappeared. The practice of "red-tagging" human rights defenders, including young activists, persisted, and the government continued to use counterterrorism measures against humanitarian workers. Killings in the context of the "war on drugs" continued. Human rights violations – such as of the right to health – beset the country's drug treatment programme.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

"Red-tagging" – the public vilification of human rights defenders and other targeted groups and individuals as alleged members and clandestine recruiters of the communist New People's Army (NPA) – continued. This was despite a Supreme Court ruling in May that "red-tagging" threatens a person's life, liberty and security. UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, made repeated calls on the government to denounce and penalize the practice.

Authorities, mainly the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, created a climate of fear among young human rights defenders by weaponizing social media, misinformation and a flawed anti-terrorism law.[1]

The government continued to use counterterrorism measures against "red-tagged" organizations, including humanitarian groups. In May, the Anti-Money Laundering Council froze the bank accounts of the Leyte Center for Development for allegedly financing "terrorist" organizations, including the NPA. In the same month, 27 development workers linked to the Community Empowerment Resource Network, a consortium of humanitarian organizations, posted bail of PHP 200,000 (USD 3,477) each; the Department of Justice had charged them with terrorism financing. Over 30 activists and human rights defenders faced terrorism-related charges in May after the military accused them of being involved in an armed encounter in 2023; charges against at least four were dismissed in September.

In May a regional trial court convicted a man of homicide after he supposedly confessed to killing government critic and broadcaster, Percival "Percy Lapid" Mabasa, in 2022. The trial of another suspect continued at year's end, but the alleged mastermind, former Bureau of Corrections chief Gerald Bantag, remained at large.

On 24 June another court dismissed the last charge of conspiracy to commit drug trading against human rights defender and former Senator Leila de Lima.[2] The fabricated charges against her stemmed from her investigation of violations in the context of the "war on drugs" under former president Rodrigo Duterte, from 2016 to 2022.

In July the Court of Appeals voided a 2018 shutdown order by the Securities and Exchange Commission against news website Rappler. A cyber libel charge, carrying a penalty of imprisonment, against Rappler founder and Nobel laureate Maria Ressa and her former colleague remained pending.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Activists increasingly became victims of enforced disappearances. In April, labour organizer William Lariosa was reportedly abducted in Bukidnon province; the military denied holding him in custody. He remained missing at year's end.

In September the Supreme Court granted a temporary protection order in the case of missing activists Gene Roz Jamil de Jesus and Dexter Capuyan. The order prohibited certain individuals, including police and military officials, from being within a radius of one kilometre from the two activists' immediate families. De Jesus and Capuyan remained missing following their reported abduction in 2023. By end of year, the Court of Appeals continued to hear their families' petition to compel government agencies to

present the two in court if they were being held in custody or to allow access to information pertaining to them.

Environmental activist Rowena Dasig went missing after being released from detention in Quezon province on 22 August; she was found safe over two months later. Unidentified people reportedly abducted friends and activists James Jazmines and Felix Salaveria Jr, also in August, in separate incidents in Tabaco City, Albay province. Both remained missing at year's end.

On 28 September, farmer organizer Fhobie Matias was reportedly forcibly taken by soldiers to a military camp in Laguna province; weeks later, the Philippine Army said she had voluntarily surrendered and admitted to being an NPA member.

IMPUNITY

Unlawful killings in the context of the ongoing "war on drugs" continued. Monitoring by university-based group Dahas showed at least 871 people killed in anti-drug police operations throughout the year.

Both the Lower House and the Senate held hearings to investigate extrajudicial executions in the "war on drugs". Retired police official Royina Garma alleged that former president Duterte and Senator Bong Go ordered and coordinated, respectively, a cash reward system for those who killed people suspected of using or selling drugs. Former police chief and Senator Ronald Dela Rosa was accused of falsely implicating human rights defender Leila de Lima in the illegal drug trade. Both Go and Dela Rosa denied the allegations. In the Senate, Duterte admitted in October that he had maintained a "death squad" to kill alleged criminals during his years as Davao City mayor. Before this, Garma revealed that Duterte had asked her to replicate the "Davao model" – a direct reference to death squads and unlawful killings – once he became president. In November, the Department of Justice created a task force to investigate the "war on drugs" of the Duterte administration, including the possibility of charging Duterte with violating international humanitarian law.[3]

Accountability for unlawful killings remained almost non-existent; however, at least two cases resulted in convictions of police officers. On 27 February a court convicted a police officer of homicide for the killing of 17-year-old Jemboy Baltazar in August 2023. Four other police officers were also convicted of illegal discharge of firearms and one was acquitted. Another court convicted four police officers of homicide for the killing of father and son Luis and Gabriel Bonifacio during a police anti-drugs operation in 2016.

A three-year joint programme on human rights between the UN and the Philippine government concluded in July. Civil society groups called for an objective assessment of the programme, noting that it failed to advance accountability for drug-related extrajudicial executions.[4] Following the programme's conclusion, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr created a "Special Committee on Human Rights Coordination", which various groups criticized as flawed and superfluous.[5]

The ICC's investigation into extrajudicial killings continued. In July the government confirmed that the ICC prosecutor requested an interview with various Philippine officials considered to be "under suspicion". The government, however, repeated that it would not cooperate with the ICC investigation.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

In July the UN and the government jointly held a drug policy summit aimed at amending the country's anti-drugs law and identifying health-based approaches to drug policy.

Research by Amnesty International revealed how the government's drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes were beset with violations of the rights to health, liberty, privacy and informed consent, and freedom from torture and other ill-treatment. The research also detailed how people accused of using drugs were forced into undergoing a court-mandated programme that was not evidence-based and amounted to arbitrary detention.[6]

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In May the proposed Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, or Sex Characteristics Equality Bill reached the House of Representatives' plenary discussions, nearly a year after it was approved at committee level. However, it remained excluded from the government's list of priority bills.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In August, a House of Representatives committee approved a bill that will force companies to limit their greenhouse gas emissions in line with the government's decarbonization plans. By year end, the bill had not been approved by both chambers of Congress and the President, as required to become law.

1. "Philippines: "I turned my fear into courage": Red-tagging and state violence against young human rights defenders in the Philippines", 14 October ↑
2. "Philippines: Vindication for Leila de Lima as last bogus charge dismissed", 24 June ↑
3. "Philippines: Ensure long-awaited accountability for 'war on drugs'", 22 November ↑
4. "Philippines: Oral Statement to HRC: Item 10: Technical assistance and capacity-building", 9 October ↑
5. "Philippines: HR super body superfluous, Amnesty urges Marcos to adhere to UN recommendations", 12 May ↑
6. "Philippines: 'Submit and surrender': The harms of arbitrary drug detention in the Philippines", 28 November ↑

POLAND

Republic of Poland

The new government passed legislation further endangering the rights of refugees and migrants at the Polish-Belarusian border. Reproductive rights, in particular greater access to abortion and the decriminalization of aiding an abortion, remained a topic of political debate but there were no changes to the law. LGBTI people continued to face discrimination. The European Court of Human Rights found Poland had violated the right to privacy in its use of Pegasus spyware. The Supreme Court upheld the acquittal of three activists charged with "offending religious beliefs". Parliament adopted a consent-based definition of rape. A significant proportion of the population lived in substandard or overcrowded conditions. The government took no steps to phase out reliance on fossil fuels in the short term.

BACKGROUND

By year's end, after one year in power, the new government had not made significant progress on campaign promises to improve Poland's respect for the rule of law, reproductive rights and the rights of refugees, migrants and LGBTI people. Despite attempts to restore the rule of law, previously compromised institutions – such as the Constitutional Tribunal, the National Council of the Judiciary and the Professional Liability Chamber of the Supreme Court – remained unchanged.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Concerns continued about violations of the rights of refugees and migrants at the Polish-Belarusian border. In October the government announced a new strategy for migration and proposed a bill that would allow the Ministry of Internal Affairs to "temporarily suspend" the recognition of asylum applications in a given area when deemed necessary because of security concerns. The proposals could endanger the rights of people seeking safety.[1]

In June the government declared a "buffer zone" around the border with Belarus. It also curtailed the ability of journalists and civil society to monitor and report on the situation there, including on potential violations of human rights by Polish border guards and officials.

Also in June, civil society organizations expressed concern about an amendment to the Criminal Code that, among other things, legalized the use of firearms for law enforcement officers at the border in violation of existing laws governing the use of deadly force.[2] This amendment could increase the

risk of refugees and migrants being subjected to potentially lethal force by law enforcement officials and weaken accountability for the actions of police and border guards.

Several human rights defenders were acquitted of criminal charges relating to rendering humanitarian, often life-saving, assistance to refugees and migrants, although at least one such case continued.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Abortion remained criminalized, except when the health or the life of the pregnant person was at risk or when the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest. Thousands of people in need of an abortion were compelled to seek care abroad, while others had to depend on the help of civil society organizations. Women human rights defenders were persecuted for supporting women in need of safe abortion and several criminal cases were filed against family members and activists charged with providing such assistance. Four draft bills broadening access to abortion or decriminalizing abortion were presented to parliament but none had passed by the end of the year. Both the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Prosecutor General also issued guidelines that were supposed to ease access to legal abortion, but these made no significant change. The Ministry of Health guidelines were heavily criticized by the Supreme Doctors' Council for shifting the responsibility to doctors and putting them at risk of liability for their decisions.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Out of 105 homophobic local government resolutions passed since 2019 setting up what were known as "LGBTI-free zones", only five remained in place by the end of the year. However, LGBTI people continued to face discrimination and violence, as did those working to defend and promote their rights. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) expressed concern about the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and that legislation on hate crimes and incitement to hatred did not specifically mention sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

In 2023, in the case of *Przybyszewska and others v. Poland*, the European Court of Human Rights had directed Poland to introduce a form of legal recognition of same-sex couples. A bill aiming to recognize same-sex civil unions was introduced into parliament in October, but had not passed by year's end.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

In May, in the case of *Pietrzak and Bychawska-Siniarska and Others v. Poland*, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the government had violated the right to privacy through "secret surveillance". The case related to the use of Pegasus spyware targeting mostly opposition-affiliated politicians. The court also criticized the lack of oversight mechanisms for surveillance operations, the unlimited access by national authorities to telecommunications data and the lack of safeguards.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In March the Supreme Court upheld the decision of a lower court that had acquitted three activists charged in 2019 with "offending religious beliefs" for possessing and distributing posters and stickers depicting the Virgin Mary with an LGBTI rainbow halo. The Prosecutor's Office had sought to challenge their acquittal.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In June, parliament adopted a consent-based definition of rape, to enter into force in February 2025, which brought the law in line with human rights standards. However, there were concerns that the new law might not provide adequate protection for people with disabilities including those with intellectual disabilities.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Poland had still not accepted any of the UN mechanisms allowing complaints of alleged violations of social, economic, and cultural rights to be lodged at the international level.

Right to housing

The CESCR expressed concern that a shortage of affordable housing had resulted in a significant proportion of the population living in substandard or overcrowded conditions. It recommended "prioritizing funding for the construction of new and affordable housing units and renovating and modernizing substandard housing". The committee also recommended that Poland "strengthen oversight and enforcement mechanisms to prevent exploitation by landlords and reduce the risk of homelessness".

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In May a court acquitted Joanna Wolska, an activist of the Women's Strike organization, of alleged breaches relating to the way a protest concerning abortion was conducted.

In July, activists from the Last Generation group glued themselves to a street in the capital, Warsaw, to protest against climate change. They reported that the police failed to intervene to protect them when they were attacked by some drivers.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Poland was given a "low" rating by the Climate Change Performance Index for its climate policies, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. The government took no steps to phase out reliance on fossil fuels in the short term. In September, severe flooding, particularly in the south-west, resulted in seven deaths. The World Weather Attribution initiative reported that the flooding was made more likely by human-induced climate change.

1. "Poland: Plans to suspend the right to seek asylum 'flagrantly unlawful'", 16 October ↑
2. "Poland: New firearms regulations risk undermining the rule of law", 10 July ↑

PORTUGAL

Portuguese Republic

There were credible reports of torture and ill-treatment in prisons. Freedom of assembly was undermined by the misuse of decades-old legislation. Access to abortion was not fully guaranteed. Dozens were injured during attacks against migrants in the city of Porto. An exceptional heatwave and wildfires resulted in five deaths. Access to affordable housing remained inadequate.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In July, following visits to 17 prisons in 2023, the National Prevention Mechanism (NPM) of the Ombudsman's Office reported finding ill-treatment of people in detention in almost half the prisons visited. The NPM expressed concern about the failure of authorities to investigate and share credible reports of ill-treatment with prosecutors. The NPM also noted the degrading conditions experienced by dozens of migrants while detained at Lisbon Airport. These included being forced to sleep in interview rooms and international boarding areas, in some cases for as many as six nights.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

In October, in Cova da Moura, Amadora, a police officer shot dead Odair Moniz, a 43-year-old chef of African descent, in unclear circumstances. The killing was followed by days of unrest against police violence in several neighbourhoods around the capital, Lisbon. An investigation was opened.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The authorities continued to impede the organization of peaceful demonstrations. They relied on decades-old legislation to place burdens and liabilities on the organizers of peaceful assemblies, as well as on vague provisions criminalizing acts deemed to disturb "public order and tranquillity".

In January, the then Minister of Internal Affairs ordered an investigation into allegations that police had carried out abusive searches of two female climate activists arrested after a protest, and kept all detained activists handcuffed for more than 10 hours.

In February, a peaceful counter-demonstration to a far-right demonstration was allegedly dispersed without warning and with excessive force. The General Inspectorate of Internal Affairs began an investigation into allegations that police use of batons had left several counter-demonstrators requiring medical treatment, including for fractured ribs.

In July, eight climate activists who briefly interrupted traffic during a peaceful protest received 18-month suspended prison sentences.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In February, the Prosecutor General's Office reported that, in 2023, domestic violence had resulted in 22 deaths, including of 17 women and two children; 72% of the killings were by partners or former partners.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Access to abortion care was not guaranteed throughout the country due to the authorities' failure to adequately regulate conscience-based refusals by medical staff to carry out abortions.

DISCRIMINATION

The Prosecutor General reported in October that just 17 prosecutions had resulted from investigations into 895 hate crimes between 2020 and the first half of 2024, while 761 of the cases were dismissed. Disaggregated data was not gathered on these hate crimes.

The high threshold for hate-motivated prosecutions continued throughout the year. In October, police excluded racial motivation in three separate attacks by six men on Algerian and Moroccan nationals in the city of Porto.

In June, following a visit to the country, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance warned Portugal to improve housing conditions for the Roma population and to strengthen measures for combating hate crime.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In May, a peer-reviewed scientific study on deaths related to heatwaves reported that Portugal was one of the 20 most affected countries globally in the last 30 years, with 650 such deaths per year between 2010 and 2019. A separate study showed that the heatwave that hit Portugal in July would not have occurred without human-induced climate change. In September, wildfires devasted northern Portugal, causing five deaths and injuring hundreds.

In October, the government approved measures to mitigate climate change by increasing renewable energy consumption to 51% by 2030, thus exceeding the EU overall target of 42.5%.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

In May and September, the government revoked measures introduced by the "More Housing" programme to tackle affordable housing shortages. Concerns were raised that the elimination of provisions such as rent freezes and regulation of short-term rentals could aggravate the shortage of affordable housing. In March, the National Statistics Institute estimated that almost 13% of the whole population lived in overcrowded housing. Among people at risk of poverty, 27.7% live in overcrowded conditions.

Data published in June by the General Inspectorate of Finance estimated that 60% of tenants did not enjoy security of tenure.

PUERTO RICO

Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

Abortion clinics were subject to excessive government regulation and investigation. The Senate approved restrictions on access to abortion for minors. Legislative changes discriminated against LGBTI people. Femicides increased. Wage inequality

worsened, with women earning significantly less than men. Thermoelectric plants failed to meet air-quality standards and put lives at risk. The Department of Economic Development lacked legal mechanisms to penalize companies that did not comply with environmental laws. Failures in the electricity supply put people whose lives depend on electrical equipment at risk. Freedom of expression was threatened by police intimidation towards protesters.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In March, the Department of Justice published the results of an investigation into abortion clinics in response to allegations that they had not been reporting sexual abuse of minors. The investigation concluded that clinics had failed to report to the Departments of Family and Justice possible cases of sexual abuse of two minors aged under 15 who were undergoing abortions potentially resulting from abuse. Organizations in favour of abortion rights criticized the government, alleging that the investigation had not considered other minors experiencing a pregnancy that could be the result of sexual assault or incest, such as children aged under 16 who gave birth in hospitals or received prenatal care in clinics or medical institutions. The investigation only looked at abortion clinics and had not considered hospitals or medical institutions that received pregnant minors under the age of 16.

In June, the Senate approved Bill PS 495, introducing restrictions on abortions for minors and requiring the authorization of a parent or guardian for the procedure.

In September, the Department of Health adopted amendments to the regulations governing the licensing and operation of abortion centres. The measures placed excessive procedural burdens on abortion clinics such as keeping more statistical records of their work. The changes did not apply to other health facilities that handle pregnancies in under 16-year-olds.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI people continued to face discrimination due to legislative measures promoted by conservative groups in power. In January, House Bill 1821 was approved, criminalizing artistic activities or those aimed at children or for family entertainment that are performed in drag.

In April, the governor of Puerto Rico proposed an amendment to Senate Bill 427, which prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to housing for older people. The bill states that no provider may refuse to offer services for discriminatory reasons, and applies to all housing and elderly care facilities licensed by the Department of the Family. The amendment added an exclusion so that the regulations do not apply to religious entities. Due to the lack of consensus between the governor and the legislature, this proposal remained unsigned.

In May, House Bill 1740 was filed, prohibiting unisex toilets in the offices of government agencies. The measure proposed that all toilets be categorized as male or female. At year's end the bill was still pending approval.

The Puerto Rico Police Bureau reported the murder of a transgender woman, which was being investigated as a possible hate crime.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Gender Equity Observatory recorded 82 femicides up to 14 December, 10 more than in 2023. An investigation by the organization Kilometre 0, published in February, with data from 2018 to 2023, revealed that Puerto Rican police officers committed four times more femicides than the general population. The investigation referred to officers who had committed femicide against their partners or ex-partners. The report also highlighted that the police force had failed to demonstrate that it had trained officers in the handling of domestic violence cases.

According to a study by the Department of Labour, women earned USD 0.83 for every dollar earned by men. The report stated that the gender pay gap had increased in recent

years, highlighting persistent salary inequality.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

According to a press report relating to US Environmental Protection Agency findings, the air quality in two areas of the country, the capital city San Juan and southern Puerto Rico, had failed to meet air-quality standards set by the government in 2014. According to the report, this put at risk the health of thousands of people living or working nearby.

In July, the government sued multinational energy and petrochemical companies for environmental damage allegedly caused by illegal business practices. The outcome was still pending at the end of the year. A journalistic investigation found that the Department of Economic Development did not have legal mechanisms to fine or revoke the concessions of companies that did not comply with environmental laws. According to the investigation, four medical device sterilization companies were included in an elevated risk notice from the US Environmental Protection Agency for emitting a toxic substance that could cause cancer in humans.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

The health and lives of vulnerable people were put at risk by the inadequate electricity supply. The government failed to regulate electricity providers despite blackouts and voltage fluctuations that put vulnerable populations at risk.

Seven years after Hurricane Maria, the government still lacked an integrated system to identify people with special medical needs – such as those whose lives depend on electrical equipment – in the event of disasters. According to the US Energy Information Administration, Puerto Rico was among the six jurisdictions in the USA with the highest energy costs, despite having the lowest per capita income, which in turn had a disproportionate impact on people whose lives depend on electricity. Furthermore, according to a report by the Investigative Journalism Centre, only 6% of people with such needs received subsidies to cover electricity consumption for the equipment their lives depend on.

In August, during Tropical Storm Ernesto, more than half a million people were left without electricity, which had serious psychological impacts. The Health and Addiction Service Administration recorded 23,000 calls to the Psycho-social First Aid helpline between 9 and 22 August, of which 7,300 (more than 30%) were from people emotionally affected by the lack of power in their homes.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Protesters and pro-Palestine organizations denounced government attempts to intimidate them by deploying police during protests.

QATAR

State of Qatar

Migrant workers, including domestic workers, continued to face human rights abuses, including wage theft, harsh working conditions and poor access to redress mechanisms. Qatar and FIFA again failed to provide redress for the vast numbers of migrants abused while working on 2022 World Cup projects. The right to freedom of expression remained curtailed. Women and LGBTI people continued to face discrimination in law and practice. Qatar's latest emissions reduction target was undermined by a plan to vastly expand liquefied natural gas production.

BACKGROUND

In November, a constitutional referendum to amend several provisions resulted in an article amendment rescinding people's right to elect members of the Shura Council (Consultative Council).

MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS

Migrant workers continued to face serious abuses, including wage theft, restrictions on

changing jobs and inadequate grievance and redress mechanisms.

Seventeen men from East Africa who paid exorbitant recruitment fees to secure jobs in Qatar were abandoned by their sponsors upon arrival in Qatar, leaving them without food, money or Qatari identity documents. After several months, they were admitted to a government-run shelter, where their passports were confiscated, they were questioned about their connections to various organizations, and their freedom of movement was severely restricted. They were eventually permitted to return to their home country but received no compensation for the abuses they had suffered.

Migrant domestic workers continued to face harsh working conditions. In June, Qatar's Shura Council proposed requiring domestic workers to obtain their employer's permission before leaving Qatar, effectively reinstating exit permits which were abolished in 2020. The proposal included penalties for workers reported as "absconding" and those sheltering them. If adopted, this would further endanger domestic workers in vulnerable situations.

The authorities failed to adequately protect workers from extreme heat. The Ministry of Labour reported more than 350 violations of the midday outdoor work ban between 1 June and 15 September but provided no details of the penalties.

Right to remedy

Qatar and FIFA failed to ensure long-overdue remedy, including compensation, for the vast numbers of workers whose rights were abused for a decade while working on projects related to FIFA's 2022 men's football World Cup.

An independent review, recognizing FIFA's responsibility to remedy a significant range of abuses endured by hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in Qatar, was approved by FIFA's council in March but was not published until November. Its key recommendation to compensate victims was rejected by FIFA.[1] A few days earlier, FIFA had announced that, in partnership with Qatar, it was launching a USD 50 million "Legacy Fund" for the 2022 World Cup. The fund includes contributions to the WHO, the World Trade Organization and UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, but excludes any compensation for affected workers.[2]

The Qatari authorities continued to fail to investigate effectively the deaths of migrant workers and to hold employers or authorities accountable, preventing any assessment of whether the deaths were work-related and depriving families of the opportunity to receive compensation.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

The authorities continued to curtail the right to freedom of expression, including by arbitrarily detaining individuals who spoke out for greater rights and freedoms.

In July the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) called for Abdullah Ibhais, a former media manager for Qatar's 2022 World Cup, to be immediately released and compensated. He was arrested in 2019 and sentenced to three years' imprisonment on trumped-up bribery charges after he raised concerns about migrant workers' conditions on World Cup construction sites. WGAD found his trial to be grossly unfair, citing coerced "confessions" and denial of legal assistance; findings to which the authorities failed to respond.[3]

In December, activists reported that a Qatari lawyer who had been serving a life sentence since 2022 was released. His brother, who is also a lawyer, remained in arbitrary detention serving a life sentence following his 2022 conviction on charges related to contesting laws ratified by the emir and organizing unauthorized public meetings.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice. Under the guardianship system, women needed a male guardian's permission to marry, study abroad on government scholarships, work in many government jobs, travel abroad if aged under 25, and access reproductive healthcare.

Women remained inadequately protected in law against domestic violence.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Legislation continued to discriminate against LGBTI people. Authorities detained individuals for their sexual orientation or gender expression.

In February, plain-clothes security forces arrested Manuel Guerrero Aviña, a British-Mexican national, shortly after he agreed to meet another man through the LGBTI dating app Grindr. His family believed he was entrapped by law enforcement officials. Authorities detained him without charge for more than six weeks, interrogated him without a lawyer and forced him to thumbprint a so-called "confession" in Arabic, which he did not understand. The authorities subsequently charged him with drug-related offences and sentenced him to a six-month suspended prison term.[4] He returned to the UK in June after receiving a deportation order.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In January, Qatar announced its Third National Development Strategy, which included a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% "relative to the business-as-usual scenario by 2030". However, in February, Qatar announced plans to expand its liquefied natural gas production by 85%.

Qatar joined other higher-income countries during COP29 to mobilize USD 300 billion annually by 2035 to help lower-income countries address climate change.

1. "Global: FIFA must publish its review into compensation for workers harmed delivering the World Cup in Qatar", 9 May ↑
2. "Qatar: FIFA's Qatar World Cup Legacy Fund ignores exploited workers", 27 November ↑
3. "UN body calls for release of Qatar whistleblower", 24 July ↑
4. "Qatar: Quash conviction of British-Mexican national sentenced to six-month suspended prison term in grossly unfair trial", 5 June ↑

ROMANIA

Romania

Roma people, including Roma refugees escaping the conflict in Ukraine, continued to face segregation and discrimination when accessing basic services. Multiple protests took place peacefully without police using excessive force. The government adopted a new plan to prevent ill-treatment of people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. Reports of domestic violence continued to increase.

BACKGROUND

In December, the Constitutional Court cancelled the first round of the 2024 presidential elections, held in November, due to irregularities and violations of electoral regulation. New presidential elections were scheduled for May 2025.

DISCRIMINATION

Roma

In a human rights report published in April, the US State Department denounced racism against Roma across the region, including in Romania. It noted that Roma in Romania continued to face discrimination and segregation in education and housing and to allege police harassment and brutality.

In June, the European Roma Rights Centre NGO reported that Roma refugees from Ukraine faced discrimination in accessing basic services including housing, education and healthcare. Focusing on the experiences of Roma refugees in five Eastern-European reception countries including Romania, it noted that these problems were heightened by a general context of discrimination and inequality against Roma, as well as by issues such as lack of documentation and language barriers.

The NGO Centre for Legal Resources raised concerns that little progress had been made in overcoming segregation in the education of Roma children, with an

inadequate regulatory framework matched by lack of will and effort by institutions.

Jewish people

In April, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found that Romania had discriminated against and violated the rights of two Jewish plaintiffs, both Holocaust survivors. The court said that by failing to inform the plaintiffs and the wider public of extraordinary appeal proceedings – which had acquitted two high-ranking military officials previously convicted of crimes connected with the Holocaust – and by denying them access to the proceedings and files, Romania had caused "emotional suffering" and breached the plaintiffs' rights to private life and psychological integrity.

LGBTI people

A citizens' initiative bill aiming to change the constitution's existing definition of family as based on marriage between "spouses" to a definition based on marriage between "a man and a woman" remained pending. Its sponsors claimed it was designed to "protect the family". NGOs denounced the initiative as stigmatizing and discriminatory. At the end of the year, same-sex marriage and partnership remained unrecognized.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

In February, the ECtHR ruled that a judge's freedom of expression was violated when the Superior Council of Magistracy gave him a disciplinary sanction for posting Facebook comments about the "resumption of political control over institutions" in 2019.

Peaceful protests took place across the country on issues ranging from environmental policies to women's rights and solidarity with Palestinian people in Gaza. There were no reports of excessive use of force by police.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In May, the government adopted a five-year National Action Plan for the prevention of ill-treatment in medical and social institutions. Requested by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the plan was developed after the ECtHR condemned Romania in 17 cases. These concerned violations of the rights of people with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities who were deprived of liberty and held in institutions.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Law enforcement agencies continued to register an increase in reported incidents of domestic violence compared with previous years. NGOs denounced the inadequacy of legal mechanisms and judicial procedures, including prohibitive costs and inefficient court processes. These structures failed to protect victims – predominantly women – from alarming levels of violence.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

NGOs reported that access to safe abortion services was being hindered by lack of information and a decreasing number of hospitals and clinicians providing abortions. Services were often available only in costly private clinics, while many doctors and entire public hospitals increasingly cited religious or moral objections to performing abortions.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

According to the National Integrated Energy and Climate Change Plan, Romania aimed to phase out coal production by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2045. However, NGOs criticized the plan's incomplete legal framework and the lack of specific targets, actions and budgets for the development of renewable energy.

Greenpeace launched legal proceedings seeking the suspension of a major gas extraction project in the Black Sea, arguing that this would have a significant polluting impact on the environment.

RUSSIA

Russian Federation

Russia continued its war of aggression against Ukraine. The rights to freedom of

expression, peaceful assembly and association remained severely restricted. Dissenters faced arbitrary prosecutions, unfair trials, heavy fines and lengthy prison terms under a plethora of laws that failed to meet international human rights standards. Counter-extremism and counterterrorism legislation was weaponized to prosecute government critics and religious groups as well as children. A growing number of people were prosecuted for treason and espionage. More than 60 organizations were declared "extremist" and banned. Trials failed to meet international standards of fairness. Torture and other ill-treatment in custody prevailed and was committed with near total impunity. Persecution of LGBTI people increased. Regional authorities continued introducing barriers to abortion. Russia failed to demonstrate any commitment to addressing climate change.

BACKGROUND

Russia continued its war of aggression against Ukraine, committing numerous violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes (see Ukraine entry).

In August, Ukrainian forces occupied part of Russia's Kursk region. According to unconfirmed reports by authorities, dozens of civilians were killed, hundreds injured, hundreds went missing and more than 150,000 people were internally displaced. The Russian Ombudsperson reported that around 50,000 of the displaced were provided with temporary housing by the authorities. Many evacuees complained that there had been no organized evacuation by the Russian authorities at the beginning of the Ukrainian offensive. Fighting in the region hampered humanitarian assistance to those who remained in these occupied territories. In November, the Russian Ombudsperson reported that 46 civilians transferred by Ukrainian forces to Ukraine had been returned to Russia. In December, missile attacks on the towns of Rylsk and Lgov in Kursk region left nine people dead and 19 injured. Ukraine's strikes into the Belgorod region continued and Russian media reported at least 161 civilians killed by the end of the year. Ukraine used drones to attack oil depots and other objects in Russia. Some of these attacks resulted in civilian deaths and injuries and damaged civilian infrastructure.

On 22 March, an armed group attacked the Crocus City Hall concert venue in the capital, Moscow, killing 145 people and injuring 551 others.

In August, Russian authorities pardoned, released and exiled 15 prisoners, including prominent civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders as part of an exchange deal brokered with some European countries and the USA.

In August, Russia left the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. It still refused to recognize the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, which was extended by the UN Human Rights Council in October for another year.

Despite reported economic growth driven by huge military spending, the cost of living increased for many due to spiking inflation and ongoing international sanctions.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

In October, nine Ukrainian prisoners of war were reportedly shot dead by Russian forces in the Kursk region; no investigation was conducted into the allegations (see also Ukraine entry).

On 2 November, the Military Investigative Committee reported that it was "documenting proof of crimes by Ukrainian nationalists" based on a photo (not provided) allegedly featuring "Russian military prisoners without signs of life" in the Kursk region.

IMPUNITY

In February, prominent opposition leader Aleksei Navalny died in custody under suspicious circumstances. The authorities delayed releasing his body for nine days and tried to insist on a secret funeral, but his mother refused to accept this. In September, an investigative journalist from The Insider published documented allegations that Aleksei Navalny had been poisoned. The

circumstances of his death were not effectively investigated.

In March, the ICC issued arrest warrants against two top Russian commanders, followed in June by warrants for former defence minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, all for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity.

A law adopted in March legalized the pre-existing practice under which prisoners and criminal suspects were released and relieved of criminal liability if they agreed to join Russian forces in military combat.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities used legislation on "foreign agents", "undesirable organizations" and "war censorship" to persecute civil society and silence criticism of the ongoing war against Ukraine and other policies. At least 98 new criminal cases were initiated and 171 people sentenced under the "war censorship" laws.

The use of counter-extremism and counterterrorism legislation against government critics surged. At least 114 new criminal cases were initiated under "justification of terrorism" charges for merely sharing views on specific events or individuals.

Books, films and theatre and television productions were censored or withdrawn due to references to same-sex relationships, other prohibited topics or their authors' status as "foreign agents".

In August and December respectively, authorities blocked the Signal and Viber messaging platforms.

In February, prominent human rights defender and co-chair of Memorial, Oleg Orlov, was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment on charges of "discrediting the Armed Forces" for an article published in the French media. He was released in August as part of the prisoner exchange.

In March, journalist Roman Ivanov was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for "disseminating knowingly false information about the Armed Forces", based on his publications about alleged war crimes committed by Russian forces in Ukraine.

In July, theatre director Evgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriychuk were sentenced to six years' imprisonment on charges of "justification of terrorism" for their award-winning play about women who married members of armed groups in Syria.

In July, detained pianist Pavel Kushnir started a dry hunger strike and died days later. He had been arrested under charges of "public calls to terrorism" for expressing his peaceful anti-war views on YouTube.

Following the death of Aleksei Navalny, the authorities continued reprisals against his Anti-Corruption Foundation and other groups associated with him. Trials of his three lawyers and four journalists on arbitrary charges of "participation in an extremist association" started in September and October respectively.

In October, the trial of six activists from the youth movement Spring started in St Petersburg, under a set of charges arising from their peaceful opposition to the war in Ukraine. They faced up to 15 years' imprisonment.

In October, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in a case of 107 organizations and individuals designated as "foreign agents" that Russia had violated the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and private and family life.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Authorities continued to violate the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by refusing to authorize protests and dispersing them, while allowing pro-government assemblies to proceed.

In January, authorities dispersed a mostly peaceful protest against the sentencing of civil activist Fail Alsynov in the town of Baymak, Bashkortostan, and prosecuted at least 81 participants. Many complained of torture and one detainee died in police custody. Trials of some of the protesters were ongoing at year's end while allegations of torture remained uninvestigated.

In February, the authorities arbitrarily arrested at least 387 people in 39 cities

across Russia for publicly mourning Aleksei Navalny. Dozens received severe administrative penalties including fines and short periods in detention.

In the same month, police arrested around 30 individuals, mostly journalists, covering a rally organized by The Way Home, a group of women demanding the return of their relatives mobilized to fight in the war against Ukraine.

In May, The Way Home was declared a "foreign agent". Their June and September rallies were also dispersed. At least four participants were fined for violating the restrictive rules covering public assemblies.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The authorities continued to target civil society using repressive legislation, listing 169 more organizations, media and individuals as "foreign agents" and 65 more organizations as "undesirable". Dozens of people faced administrative or criminal penalties for alleged violations of laws on "foreign agents" or "undesirable organizations". Many proceedings were conducted in absentia.

Restrictions on individuals and organizations designated "foreign agents" were ramped up. A new law passed in March prohibited the promotion of or advertising on platforms belonging to "foreign agents" and was punishable by heavy fines or up to two years' imprisonment.

In May, amendments to the "foreign agents" legislation banned "foreign agents" from running for election at all levels. At least six local politicians who had been designated as "foreign agents" were expelled from elected bodies.

Amendments to the "undesirable organizations" legislation enacted in August extended its scope from non-governmental organizations to organizations established by or with the participation of foreign governments.

In June, the Supreme Court banned what it called the Anti-Russian Separatist Movement, a group which did not appear to exist, as "extremist". Following this decision, in July, the Ministry of Justice listed 55 organizations, including those of Indigenous Peoples, as "extremist".

In September, the trial of Grigory Melkonyants, co-chair of the election watchdog Golos, began. He was charged in connection with purported links between Golos and the "undesirable" European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations, and faced up to six years' imprisonment.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Arbitrary prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses under "extremism" charges continued: 24 new criminal cases were opened against 34 believers and 116 believers were sentenced, with 43 of them imprisoned for up to eight years. As of December, 171 Jehovah's Witnesses from Russia and Russian-occupied Ukraine were serving sentences in penal colonies.

Russian Orthodox priests who expressed an anti-war position were defrocked or otherwise disciplined, with more than 60 punished since February 2022.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Russia continued to unlawfully prosecute Ukrainian prisoners of war, charging them with crimes related merely to their participation in hostilities and sentencing them to lengthy prison terms in unfair trials.

In July, human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov was remanded under "extremist" charges for displaying Facebook's logo online. In September, he spent two weeks in a psychiatric hospital for "examination". He remained in pretrial detention at year's end. A growing number of dissenters were tried in their absence.

Trials on charges of terrorism, extremism, treason or espionage were increasingly common. In the first six months of the year, convictions for treason and espionage were over three times (52 individuals) and nine times (18 individuals) higher, respectively, compared with the same period in 2023.

Prosecution of imprisoned dissenters, under new false charges, proliferated. Journalist Maria Ponomarenko was tried for attacking prison officers. Former municipal

councillor Aleksei Gorinov, serving a seven-year imprisonment under "war censorship" laws, was sentenced to a further three years' imprisonment for "justification of terrorism".

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment in custody remained endemic, with perpetrators enjoying near total impunity.

Four men suspected of the armed attack on the Crocus City Hall venue in March appeared in court with apparent signs of torture. Footage circulated online allegedly showed one of the suspects' ears being cut off during interrogation by a security official and another suspect being subjected to electrocution. No investigation followed.

Ukrainian prisoners of war and detained civilians were held in inhumane conditions and systematically subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, and enforced disappearance.

Conditions in detention across the country commonly amounted to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and adequate healthcare was often denied. The authorities targeted those incarcerated on politically motivated charges by depriving them of contact with their family and subjecting them to arbitrary disciplinary punishments, including solitary confinement.[1]

Aleksei Gorinov (see above) continued to be subjected to prolonged solitary confinement as an arbitrarily imposed disciplinary punishment, and refused adequate medical care.

In August, the UN Human Rights Committee called on Russia to provide the necessary medical treatment to Igor Baryshnikov, a civil society activist from Kaliningrad region imprisoned for over seven years under "war censorship" laws. He had his long overdue surgery in September.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Persecution of the LGBTI community grew, including through arbitrary criminal or administrative penalties for "extremism" and "LGBT propaganda". At least 24 police raids on LGBTI nightclubs were conducted across the country.

In March, two staff members and the owner of a nightclub in the city of Orenburg were detained pending trial under criminal charges of "extremism", which carry up to 10 years' imprisonment. The same charges were brought in October against the owner of a nightclub raided by police in the city of Chita.

Also in October, police raided a nightclub in the city of Yaroslavl. They physically assaulted and humiliated its patrons, forcing them to lie face down on the floor for several hours. Some were arrested and accused of administrative violations under the "LGBT propaganda" law.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Regional authorities continued introducing barriers to abortion. In June, parliament in the Komi Republic prohibited "coercion to abortion", effectively introducing heavy fines for facilitating the procedure. Similar local laws were passed in 14 other regions. Various private clinics refused to perform an abortion despite it not being expressly prohibited.

In November, a federal law prohibiting "propaganda of refusal to bear children" was signed into law. It envisaged censorship, heavy fines and arrests for disseminating information promoting the voluntary choice not to have children.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In October, it was reported that indoctrination lessons called "Conversations about important things", introduced in schools in 2022, would be extended to kindergartens. Topics for such classes included promotion of so-called "traditional values" and the glorification of Russia's war against Ukraine.

A law adopted in December prohibited the children of foreigners from enrolling in school unless they passed a Russian-language test and were in Russia legally.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Authorities persecuted children for their anti-war position and fabricated criminal cases against them under "counterterrorism" charges.[2]

In June, a military court in Moscow sentenced 15-year-old Arseniy Turbin to five years' imprisonment for alleged "participation" in the Freedom of Russia Legion, a military unit formed in Ukraine of Russian and Belarussian citizens and designated as a "terrorist" organization in Russia. The sentence was upheld on appeal in November.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Migrants' rights continued to be violated and discrimination against them was rife. Authorities in a further 24 regions banned migrants from working in certain occupations on grounds such as national security or "prioritizing the employment of Russian citizens", despite reported shortages in the work force. In seven regions the list of existing prohibitions on employment was extended.

Following the Crocus City Hall attack, when the suspects were described as migrants, the authorities ramped up anti-migrant rhetoric and practices.

Migrants who sought Russian citizenship were targeted for military recruitment after naturalization. In June police raids to identify undocumented migrants, or those who had received Russian citizenship but had not registered at military commissariats, were reported in at least eight regions. Also in June, the Head of the Investigative Committee claimed that more than 10,000 migrants who had received Russian citizenship were deployed in Ukraine.

Amendments adopted in August and set to come into force in 2025 introduced further restrictions on the rights of undocumented and some other categories of migrants.

In November, foreign citizenship was made an aggravating circumstance when committing a crime.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Russia further increased its output of oil and gas by around 10% and demonstrated no commitment to either addressing climate change or reducing its reliance on fossil fuels. Only about 1% of its energy came from renewable sources, far short of its unambitious pledge of 4.5% by 2024.

1. *Russia: "I Would Love To Hug Her, but It Is Impossible": Imprisoned Dissenters Deprived of Family Contact,* 26 June ↑
2. "Russia: "Your Children will Go to an Orphanage": Children and the Crackdown on Protest", 31 May ↑

RWANDA

Republic of Rwanda

There was evidence of torture and other ill-treatment in detention, with a rare prosecution offering limited accountability. Enforced disappearances were reported. New restrictions on NGOs were introduced. The prosecution of opposition members for participating in a training on non-violent action continued. The legal framework for refugees was updated. Trials of suspected perpetrators of genocide took place in Rwanda and abroad. A UN committee made recommendations to address inequalities faced by disadvantaged groups of women.

BACKGROUND

In July, following presidential and parliamentary elections, Paul Kagame was elected president for a fourth term with 99.17% of the vote. Prior to the elections, the High Court refused requests for legal rehabilitation by opposition leaders Victoire Ingabire and Bernard Ntaganda, who both previously served prison sentences. This would have restored their civil rights and allowed them to stand for office.

The Rwanda Defence Force was involved in military operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) eastern region, and provided support to the M23 armed group.

Relations with Burundi remained tense. Burundi closed its land border with Rwanda in January, following attacks claimed by an armed group which the UN Group of Experts on the DRC accused Rwanda of supporting (see Burundi entry).

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Journalist Dieudonné Niyonsenga, who was arrested in 2020 for reporting on Covid-19 restrictions and was serving a seven-year sentence in Mageragere prison for forgery, impersonation and hindering public works, appeared at his appeal hearing in January. He bore visible signs of ill-treatment. He told the court that he was beaten frequently, detained in dark conditions in a hole that often filled with water, and that his hearing and eyesight were consequently impaired. His conviction was upheld in March and no investigation was conducted into his complaints of torture. He had previously complained to the court of torture and other ill-treatment in detention in 2022.

Eighteen prison officials and prisoners were prosecuted on charges including assault, murder and torture carried out at Rubavu prison. Among them was former prison director Innocent Kayumba, who was convicted of the assault and murder of a detainee in 2019 and sentenced in April to 15 years in prison and a fine. Three officials were acquitted, including another former prison director. Two other prison officers and seven prisoners who had been put in charge of security were convicted of beating and killing prisoners. No accused officials were found guilty of torture.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Reports of enforced disappearances continued. UN Special Procedures publicly called on Rwanda to provide information on the fate and whereabouts of three forcibly disappeared people. Rwandan human rights defender Yusuf Ahmed Gasana was abducted by unidentified people from his home in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2023 and allegedly transferred to Rwanda. Kenyan and Rwandan authorities did not respond to requests for information from his family, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. There was no news of the fate or whereabouts of brothers Jean Nsengimana and Antoine Zihabamwe since police took them from a bus in Eastern Province in 2019.

Rwanda again failed to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

In July, a new NGO law imposed restrictions on budgeting and management decisions of national NGOs, including an obligation not to exceed 20% of their budget on overhead costs without providing a written explanation to the Rwanda Governance Board, an official body. The law allows the board to definitively suspend NGOs for a range of activities that could be interpreted broadly.

In May, immigration officials denied entry to Human Rights Watch's (HRW) researcher Clementine de Montjoye at Kigali airport, citing "immigration reasons". She was the fourth HRW researcher to be blocked from entering Rwanda since 2008.

The prosecution of nine Development and Liberty for All (DALFA-Umurinzi) members (including one in her absence) and journalist Theoneste Nsengimana continued with a closed pretrial hearing on 18 October, followed by the trial which began in December. They were arrested in 2021 and faced charges in relation to their participation in a training on non-violent action, and for allegedly planning to mobilize the population and inspire non-cooperation.[1]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In April, Rwanda's legal framework was amended to establish detailed procedures for asylum applications and to institute an asylum appeals tribunal.

Also in April the UK parliament passed the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill. However, plans to implement a deal to send asylum seekers to Rwanda were postponed, and the incoming UK government scrapped the deal (see UK entry).

Rwanda continued to host large numbers of refugees, primarily from neighbouring DRC (60.8%) and Burundi (38.4%). By the end of October, it had registered over 135,000 refugees and asylum seekers.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In April, Rwanda marked the 30th anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi population, in which an estimated 800,000 people were killed, including Hutu people and others who opposed the genocide and the extremist government that orchestrated it.[2]

In April, Huye Intermediate Court convicted Beatrice Munyenyezi of murder as a genocide crime, complicity in genocide, incitement to commit genocide and complicity in rape, and sentenced her to life imprisonment. She was acquitted on the charge of planning genocide. She had been deported from the USA in 2021.

In May the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals announced that the remaining fugitives indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Charles Ryandikayo and Charles Sikubwabo, were deceased.

A Belgian court sentenced Emmanuel Nkunduwimye to 25 years in prison in June after finding him guilty of war crimes and genocide for murder, rape and attempted murder.

On 31 July, Wenceslas Twagirayezu was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity by the Court of Appeal in the capital, Kigali. In January he had been acquitted by the High Court Chamber for International Crimes (HCCIC) after being extradited from Denmark in 2018.

In September, Venant Rutunga was found guilty as an accomplice to genocide and complicity in extermination as a crime against humanity. The HCCIC sentenced him to 20 years in prison. He had been extradited from the Netherlands in 2021.

On 30 October a Paris court found Eugene Rwamucyo guilty of complicity in genocide, complicity in crimes against humanity and conspiring to prepare those crimes but acquitted him of genocide and crimes against humanity. He received a 27-year prison sentence.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The CEDAW Committee considered Rwanda's periodic report in May. While recognizing the government's efforts to promote gender equality, it raised concerns about inequalities faced by disadvantaged groups, including women and girls with disabilities, and rural, Batwa and refugee women. It noted the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes that constitute an underlying cause of gender-based violence against women, recommending that the lesser penalty for marital rape should correspond with the standard penalty for the crime of rape. The Committee welcomed measures to increase women's financial literacy and access to financial credit, but remained concerned about the significant gender gap in access to loans and barriers to accessing credit, including collateral requirements, and women's limited agency to manage land resources jointly owned by both spouses.

1. *Rwanda: Repression in the Context of Elections*, 8 July ↑
2. "Rwanda: 30 years on, justice for genocide crimes more urgent than ever", 5 April ↑

SAUDI ARABIA

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Human rights defenders and others exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials leading to lengthy prison terms, and travel bans. Despite some limited labour reforms migrant workers, in particular domestic workers, continued to be subjected to forced labour and other forms of labour abuse and exploitation, and lacked access to adequate protection and redress mechanisms. Thousands of people were arrested and deported to their home countries, often without due process, as part of a government crackdown on individuals accused of violating labour, border and residency regulations. Saudi

Arabia carried out executions for a wide range of crimes, including drug-related offences. Courts sentenced people to death following grossly unfair trials. Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice. Saudi Arabia failed to enact measures to tackle climate change and announced plans to increase oil production.

BACKGROUND

Saudi Arabia and the EU held their fourth human rights dialogue in the capital, Riyadh, on 17 December. The EU acknowledged progress on women's rights but raised serious concerns about the rise in executions, including for non-lethal and drug-related crimes, as well as concerns about restrictions on civil and political rights, referring to long prison sentences imposed for online expression on social media.

On 11 December, FIFA confirmed Saudi Arabia as the 2034 men's football World Cup host. Civil society organizations condemned the decision, highlighting risks of exploitation, discrimination, forced evictions and repression.

Between 15 and 19 December, Saudi Arabia hosted the 19th Annual Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum in Riyadh. An Amnesty International delegation called for the release of individuals detained for their online expression.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

The authorities continued to arbitrarily detain individuals without giving them any opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of their detention, and in many cases sentenced people to lengthy prison terms or the death penalty on vague, over-broad charges that criminalized peaceful expression as "terrorism", in violation of their fair trial and due process rights, as well as their right to freedom of expression. The Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), established to try terrorism-related crimes, continued to convict and sentence individuals to lengthy prison terms following grossly unfair trials solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association, including online on X (formerly Twitter).

The leaked draft of Saudi Arabia's forthcoming Penal Code criminalized freedom of expression by codifying as crimes and prescribing punishments for defamation, "insult" and "questioning the integrity of the judiciary". It also included vaguely worded provisions for crimes including "indecent acts" and "words affecting honour".

Unfair trials

On 9 January the SCC sentenced Manahel al-Otaibi, a fitness instructor and women's rights activist, to 11 years in prison in a secret hearing for charges related solely to her choice of clothing and expression of her views online, including calling on social media for an end to Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system. Manahel al-Otaibi's sentence was only revealed publicly several weeks after the court judgment, in the government's formal reply to a joint request for information about her case from several UN special rapporteurs. Her family could not access her court documents, nor the evidence presented against her. In November, she told her family that the SCC Court of Appeal had upheld her sentence.

On 29 May the SCC sentenced teacher Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi to 20 years in prison for social media posts criticizing the government's Vision 2030 social and economic programme and expressing condolences for the death in prison of a prominent human rights defender.[1] Two months later the SCC Court of Appeal reduced his sentence to 15 years in prison. Asaad al-Ghamdi's brother, Mohammad al-Ghamdi, a retired teacher, was convicted and sentenced by the SCC Court of Appeal to 30 years in prison after his death sentence was quashed in September. He also had been charged solely for his social media posts.[2]

In September the SCC reduced Salma al-Shehab's sentence from 27 years in prison to four years in prison and four years suspended. In March 2022 the SCC had sentenced her to six years in prison under the counterterrorism law solely for her writings and re-tweets on X in support of

women's rights. Following a series of appeals the sentence was increased to 27 years imprisonment in 2023.

The authorities continued to detain Yemeni-Dutch national Fahd Ramadhan without charge or access to legal representation. After arresting him on 20 November 2023, authorities held him incommunicado from 21 November 2023 to 1 January 2024. He told Dutch officials that he believed he was detained for sympathizing online with a critic of the Saudi royal family. In January, Fahd Ramadhan's family appointed a lawyer who was prevented from visiting him and told by prison authorities that he should not interfere in the case.[3]

Travel bans

Prominent human rights defender Loujain al-Hathloul, who was released in February 2021 after serving two-and-a-half years in prison on charges related to her human rights work, continued to be subjected to an arbitrary travel ban despite the expiry of her prison term and her judicially imposed travel ban. In September 2024 the Board of Grievances, an administrative court, agreed to address a judicial complaint filed by Loujain al-Hathloul against the Presidency of State Security for continuing to impose her travel ban. In December the judge closed the case, citing lack of jurisdiction.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The authorities continued their crackdown on individuals accused of violating residency, border and labour regulations, including through arbitrary arrests, detentions and deportations often without due process solely due to their irregular immigration status. According to the Ministry of the Interior, during the year at least 573,000 foreign nationals, out of more than 994,000 arrested for such violations, were returned to their home country. More than 61,037 people, mostly Ethiopian and Yemeni nationals, were arrested for crossing into Saudi Arabia irregularly from Yemen.

Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia continued to be subject to the *kafala* sponsorship system and faced widespread abuses, some of which may have amounted to forced labour, in various employment sectors and geographic regions. The national minimum wage continued to be applied to Saudi nationals only.

In June, Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI), a global trade union, filed a landmark complaint against Saudi Arabia at the ILO, accusing the country of violating ILO conventions on forced labour due to the exploitative living and working conditions faced by its large migrant workforce.

Migrant workers contracted to sites in Saudi Arabia franchised by Carrefour Group were deceived by recruitment agents and subjected to excessive working hours and wage theft by a local franchise and third-party labour suppliers. This treatment in some cases likely amounted to forced labour and human trafficking. Following Amnesty International's investigation, Carrefour Group instructed a third-party audit of its franchise partner's operations and took some steps to improve conditions.[4]

In February, in response to a 2023 Amnesty International report on the abuse of workers in Amazon warehouses, the company reimbursed unlawful recruitment fees for more than 700 workers. Amazon also introduced measures to improve worker accommodation, third-party inspections and grievance procedures.[5]

Migrant domestic workers continued to face labour abuse and exploitation. Rather than extending the protections of the labour law to include them, the government introduced a new regulation, which took effect in October. Its provisions stipulated a ban on passport confiscation, set a maximum number of working hours and outlined occupational safety and health regulations. However, the new law fell short of human rights standards by not mandating paid overtime, allowing the employer to negotiate with the workers their weekly day off, failing to set a minimum wage and lacking proper enforcement mechanisms.

The authorities announced further reforms for migrant domestic workers. In February the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD) launched a new

insurance scheme, ostensibly to protect the rights of domestic workers and their employers. However, the scheme favoured employers, offering them compensation in cases where the domestic worker dies or is absent or otherwise unable to work, as well as covering the cost of repatriation in the event of death. In contrast, domestic workers' salary payments were only guaranteed if the employer dies or becomes permanently disabled, but not where the employer otherwise fails to pay wages.

In March the MHRSD introduced a regulation allowing employers of domestic workers to terminate their contracts under certain conditions by filing a "discontinuation from work" report against them. The change, which had been previously introduced to the private sector, ostensibly removes the ability of employers to file abusive "absconding" charges. However, it continues to lack legal protections that would allow migrant workers to challenge such reports, leaving them at risk of arrest and deportation.

In May the MHRSD launched the mandatory Wage Protection Service, which required employers to use digital payment methods for domestic workers' salaries, with the aim of providing documented proof of wage payments. It remained unclear what penalties employers would face for non-compliance.

In July the Health Insurance Council and the Insurance Authority enforced a governmental decision to make insurance mandatory for employers with more than four domestic workers registered under their name. However, the policy created unequal protection as it excluded smaller households, leaving many domestic workers without health insurance.

In October, the MHRSD announced an insurance scheme to protect migrant workers' wages where employers failed to pay. However, the scheme's design and restrictive eligibility criteria limited its ability to provide comprehensive protection for all migrant workers in need.[6]

DEATH PENALTY

The authorities carried out a record number of executions for a wide range of crimes and in circumstances that violated international law and standards. Executions for drug-related crimes soared.

At least 50 men, the majority Egyptian nationals, remained on death row in Tabuk Prison convicted of drug-related crimes.

Seven young men who were below 18 years of age at the time of their alleged offences remained at imminent risk of execution. Six had been convicted and sentenced to death for terrorism-related charges; the seventh for armed robbery and murder. All seven had been subjected to unfair trials marred by the admission of torture-tainted "confessions" as evidence.

On 17 August the Saudi Press Agency announced the execution of Abdulmajeed al-Nimr, a retired traffic police officer, for terrorism offences related to his alleged association with the armed group Al-Qaida. According to court documents, he was initially sentenced by the SCC to nine years in prison on 25 October 2021 on charges which included "seeking to destabilize the social fabric and national unity by participating in demonstrations… supporting riots, chanting slogans against the state and its rulers" and joining a WhatsApp group that included individuals wanted for security purposes. On appeal, his punishment was increased to the death sentence. The SCC made no reference to Abdulmajeed al-Nimr's involvement with Al-Qaida in its initial judgment. Abdulmajeed al-Nimr was denied access to a lawyer for around two years during his interrogations and pretrial detention and was convicted solely on the basis of a "confession" he said was obtained under duress, including being detained in solitary confinement for one-and-a-half months.

A leaked draft of Saudi Arabia's forthcoming Penal Code for Discretionary Sentences analysed by Amnesty International showed that it codified the death penalty as a primary punishment for a range of offences alongside imprisonment and fines and continued to enable judges to use their discretion to hand down death sentences.[7]

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice, including in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.

In October the CEDAW Committee reviewed Saudi Arabia's fifth periodic report, identifying more than 20 principal areas of concern with regard to Saudi Arabia's implementation of its obligations under the CEDAW convention, which it ratified in 2000. The Committee issued recommendations regarding the targeting of women human rights defenders, use of the death penalty, lack of protection for women migrant domestic workers, the persistence of a de facto male guardianship system and other issues related to safeguarding women's rights in Saudi Arabia.

UNLAWFUL TARGETED SURVEILLANCE

In October the UK High Court issued an order granting permission to Yahya Assiri, a Saudi human rights defender living in the UK, to bring a case against the government of Saudi Arabia for using spyware against him.[8] An August 2018 Amnesty International investigation revealed how Yahya Assiri and an Amnesty International staff member had been targeted with Saudi Arabia-related bait content by NSO Group's Pegasus spyware.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Saudi Arabia, a major fossil fuel producer, continued to be one of the world's top 10 carbon emitters per capita. Saudi Arabia blocked any reference to fossil fuel phase out during negotiations at COP29.

In June the energy minister announced that Saudi Arabia plans to increase its oil production capacity between 2025 and 2027, before returning to the 2024 level of 12.3 million barrels per day in 2028.

The government announced a 2060 net zero target in 2021 but had yet to release any additional information on this objective or enshrine it in law. Saudi Arabia's NDC target reflected minimal-to-no action and was inconsistent with the globally agreed 1.5°C temperature limit.

1. *Saudi Arabia: Teacher Sentenced to 20 Years for Tweets: Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi*, 16 July ↑
2. "Saudi Arabia: Authorities must immediately release man convicted over social media posts after death sentence quashed", 9 August ↑
3. "Saudi Arabia: Authorities must release arbitrarily detained Yemeni-Dutch national", 29 May ↑
4. *Saudi Arabia: "I Would Fear Going To Work" Labour Exploitation at Carrefour Sites in Saudi Arabia,* 21 October ↑
5. "Saudi Arabia: Amazon reimburses workers for unlawful fees following Amnesty International report highlighting abuses", 22 February ↑
6. *Saudi Arabia: Insurance Scheme for Migrant Workers Falls Short of Protection Against Wage Theft*, 6 November ↑
7. *Saudi Arabia: Manifesto for Repression: Saudi Arabia's Forthcoming Penal Code Must Uphold Human Rights in Line With International Law and Standards*, 19 March ↑
8. "UK court says activist can pursue spyware case against Saudi Arabia", 21 October ↑

SENEGAL

Republic of Senegal

Police fired at protesters during the pre-electoral period, killing four, including a child; more than 150 protesters were arrested, and journalists covering the protests were beaten. An amnesty law was passed in March, halting prosecutions for the killings of 65 protesters and bystanders between March 2021 and February 2024. The Family Code still contained provisions violating women's and girls' rights. The authorities failed to protect the rights of *talibé* children. More than 959 migrants who had departed from the Senegalese coast died at sea during the first five months of the year. The government suspended all mining along the Falémé river due to environmental degradation.

BACKGROUND

The first quarter of the year was marked by tensions linked to parliament's delay of the presidential elections, amid allegations of corruption against two members of the Constitutional Court. Elections finally took

place in March; Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who was elected president and Ousmane Sonko, who was appointed prime minister, were among hundreds of political prisoners released early in the year. In May, the new administration organized national consultations in a bid to implement structural reforms of judicial power.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS AND EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

On 9 and 10 February, the security forces killed four people – including a 16-year-old boy – protesting at the delay to the presidential elections, in violent crackdowns in the cities of Saint-Louis, in the capital, Dakar, and in Ziguinchor.[1] At least 151 people were arrested in February during the protests,[2] and several journalists were ill-treated. Mor Amar, a journalist at the newspaper L'Enquête and secretary-general of the Senegalese Young Reporters' Convention, was beaten, and journalist Absa Hane was beaten unconscious and arrested. The authorities restricted access to mobile coverage throughout the country, and suspended Walf TV, a private TV channel, for its coverage of the protests.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

In February and March, the authorities released hundreds of detainees, several of whom had been arrested between 2022 and 2024 for participating in or calling on people to join protests. Many of these detainees, including children, were never brought to trial.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

A draft amnesty law adopted by the Council of Ministers on 28 February was adopted in March by the National Assembly. This law, justified by "a spirit of national reconciliation" and the "appeasement of the political and social climate", covers offences linked to "protests or politically motivated incidents, that took place between 1 February 2021 and 25 February 2024, in Senegal or abroad". The amnesty law prevents the families of at least 65 people killed, the majority by security and defence forces during protests between March 2021 and February 2024, from obtaining justice.[3]

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

There were reports by former Rebeuss prison inmates of outbreaks of tuberculosis in January, exacerbated by the dire and overcrowded conditions of detention.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In July, the politician Ahmed Suzanne Camara was arrested and charged with "offending the head of state" after he called the president and the prime minister liars. In September, Cheikhna Keita, a former police commissioner and politician, was also arrested on the orders of the prosecutor. He was accused of spreading false news, after he spoke on TV of tensions between the president and the prime minister.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Family Code still contained provisions conferring "marital and paternal authority" solely on men, designating the husband as head of the family. This denied women and girls rights and authority over their household and children. Article 111 of the Family Code sets the minimum legal age of marriage for girls as 16, as opposed to 18 for boys.

In July, the report of the national consultation on the judiciary recommended raising the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18. It also called for amendments to sections relating to "paternal power", and the prohibition of fathers seeking paternity of a child born out of wedlock, among other measures. These recommendations were yet to be implemented at the end of the year.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Talibé children – those studying at *daaras* (Qur'anic schools) – continued to be forced to beg for food as well as money for teachers, despite this being labelled as "human trafficking" in Senegalese law. The government failed to adopt the draft Children's Code and the draft law on the status of the *daaras*. The child protection sector was poorly funded, resulting in lack of

protection for *talibé* children, who suffer a wide range of human rights violations. This situation was denounced by the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The Senegalese coastline remained one of the most active departure points for irregular migration towards the Canary Islands. More than 959 migrants departing from the Senegalese coast died at sea between January and May, according to Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras. Departures continued during the following months; many migrants died at sea and many were intercepted by the Senegalese navy. Most departed from fishing ports, which had become impoverished due to the crisis facing the fishing industry in Senegal.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

In May, the government announced an audit of the impact of the phosphate mines in the town of Ndendory, Matam region, and called on local authorities to identify all the households affected so that they could be compensated.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In June, the authorities suspended all mining activities within 500m of the north bank of the Falémé river until 30 June 2027. The decision was made because of health and environmental concerns relating to the use of chemicals during mining operations which contributed to water pollution, the destruction of local flora and fauna, and a reduction in agricultural yields along the Falémé river.

1. "Senegal: Authorities must investigate killings and police brutality against protesters", 13 February ↑
2. "Senegal: Authorities must respect the right to peaceful assembly after elections postponed", 5 February ↑
3. "Senegal: Adoption of amnesty law would be an affront to victims of deadly protests and reinforce impunity", 4 March ↑

SERBIA

Republic of Serbia

Protesters and journalists faced intimidation, harassment and vexatious lawsuits for peacefully engaging on issues of public interest. No credible effort was made towards achieving accountability for war crimes; instead, the government focused on weakening a UN resolution on the Srebrenica genocide. Discrimination remained a significant concern affecting Roma, LGBTI and refugee and migrant people. Refugees and migrants transiting through the country decreased in number but remained vulnerable to abuse and border violence.

BACKGROUND

There was no progress in implementing the EU-brokered agreement between Serbia and Kosovo on normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries. In July, the Constitutional Court annulled the 2022 government decree that blocked the opening of a lithium and boron mine in the Jadar valley, triggering mass nationwide protests against the project. The government issued a new decree soon after, approving the exploitation plans. Also in July, Serbia and the EU concluded a memorandum of understanding and strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated for months against lithium extraction, citing irreversible damage to the environment.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Investigative journalists, human rights defenders and activists continued to face attacks in pro-government media outlets and were subjected to strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). In July, a widely watched pro-government TV station named and accused some 40 civil society organizations of "waging a special war against Serbia" at the behest of foreign governments. The broadcast featured

detailed charts of organizations' finances, including the names of staff, bank details and transactions that were not publicly available. Senior government officials repeatedly called for the introduction of a "foreign agents law" to stifle dissent. The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia reported over 150 threats and attacks against journalists throughout the year. The Crime and Corruption Reporting Network alone faced 16 vexatious lawsuits over its investigative reporting.

In March the UN Human Rights Committee noted the continued prevalence of discriminatory speech targeting journalists in both online and traditional media, including by politicians and high-level officials.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Demonstrations, especially environmental protests, were heavily policed, with participants subjected to excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests. At least 33 activists in 17 towns across Serbia were arrested following lithium mining protests in August. Many were detained or questioned over posts on social media or for merely participating in peaceful protests. Some of those detained were charged with disproportionate criminal offences, including "incitement to violently overthrow constitutional order" and subjected to extensive questioning, searches of their homes and seizure of their telephones and computers.

In December, Amnesty International found evidence of widespread use of unlawful spyware and other invasive digital forensic techniques against activists and independent journalists by the authorities.[1] Following the report, local civil society organizations filed criminal charges against the police and the Security Information Agency for the development and use of spyware and unauthorized access to personal data.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Serbia strongly objected to the adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution establishing 11 July as an official International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.[2]

More than 1,700 war crimes cases remained to be investigated in Serbia.

The trial of seven Bosnian Serb ex-policemen for the July 1995 massacre of 1,313 Bosniaks from Srebrenica in the Agricultural Cooperative in Kravica remained stalled due to repeatedly delayed and postponed hearings.

DISCRIMINATION

In April, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted in its periodic report that prejudice against LGBTI, Roma and refugee and migrant persons remained widespread in Serbia, most visibly through online hate speech. In December, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, reported that the majority of refugees and migrants who had transited through the Western Balkans came from countries in the MENA region as well as Afghanistan.

Roma

In March, the UN Human Rights Committee noted that Roma, particularly those internally displaced in informal settlements, continued to suffer from high rates of poverty and exclusion, and had limited access to education, employment and healthcare, as well as to basic services such as electricity, drinking water and sanitation.

ECRI called on Serbian authorities to review the provision of social assistance through the Law on Social Cards to ensure that Roma and other disadvantaged groups had equal opportunities to access government support. The Law on Social Cards continued to be implemented without due consideration for its impact on human rights.

LGBTI people

There remained no legal gender recognition law based on self-determination in line with international human rights standards. Transgender people continued to be subjected to a compulsory year-long

hormonal treatment as a requirement for legal gender recognition.

In February a gay man and his housemate were subjected to ill-treatment including physical, psychological and sexual harassment by a group of more than 10 police officers, who entered and searched their apartment in the capital, Belgrade. By the end of the year, no credible investigation into the incident had taken place.

In January, the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture had urged Serbian authorities to adopt and implement a coherent strategy to eradicate police ill-treatment and effectively investigate such cases.

In September, the annual Belgrade Pride was held without homophobic incidents, with the participation of three government ministers.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

In July, Ecevit Piroğlu, a political activist from Türkiye who had been held in arbitrary detention since June 2021, was released and left the country.[3]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The number of newly arriving refugees and migrants declined by up to 80% compared to 2023, prompting the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration to shut several of the country's reception centres. Refugees and migrants without access to shelter were increasingly vulnerable to abuse and violence, including summary unlawful returns.

1. *Serbia: "A Digital Prison": Surveillance and the suppression of civil society in Serbia,* 16 December ↑
2. "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Srebrenica resolution an important recognition for victims and their families", 23 May ↑
3. *Serbia: Political activist on hunger strike: Ecevit Piroğlu, 13 May* ↑

SIERRA LEONE

Republic of Sierra Leone

The rights of women and girls continued to be violated, although legislation outlawing early and child marriage was passed. There was at least one allegation of police brutality against a journalist, and a political opposition member was subjected to enforced disappearance. The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression continued to be threatened. The growing use of harmful drugs and a shortage of surgeons undermined the right to health. Deforestation as a consequence of illegal mining and logging continued. The government entered an international agreement to combat overfishing.

BACKGROUND

In January, former president Ernest Bai Koroma was charged with treason and other offences for his alleged involvement in a failed coup in November 2023. In August, a military court convicted and sentenced 24 soldiers to between 50 and 120 years in prison in connection with the coup attempt.

In July, the Tripartite Committee, established after the last presidential elections, presented its final report to the president, which included recommendations on improving the electoral system.

The president signed the Criminal Procedure Act, 2024 into law which replaced the Criminal Procedure Act of 1965. Activists criticized the new law for removing the requirement for juries in criminal trials.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Female genital mutilation (FGM) remained prevalent and legal: 83% of girls and women aged between 15 and 49 and at least one in 10 girls under 15 had undergone the procedure, according to the 2019 national Demographic and Health Survey. In January, three girls aged 12, 13 and 17 died after undergoing FGM in initiation ceremonies in the North West Province.

In March, the Gender-Based Survivor Incidence Report, published by NGO Rainbo Initiative, revealed that 92.7% of the 2,763 incidents it recorded in 2023 were sexual assaults; and there were 78 convictions for sexual assault cases.

In July, the president signed into law The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 banning early and child marriage for anyone under 18, a long-term and widespread practice. The Act provided for a prison sentence of up to 15 years for offenders or a minimum fine of SLE 50,000 (around USD 2,198) or both. Offenders include adults marrying or cohabitating with a minor and those aiding and abetting child marriage. It also provided for a person who was a child at the time of their marriage to file a petition requesting an annulment and entitled them to compensation.

DISCRIMINATION

In November, the ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled that Sierra Leone's loitering laws violated the rights to equality, non-discrimination and freedom of movement. Under existing legislation, individuals can be arrested based on subjective police assessments, disproportionately impacting marginalized individuals including women who engage in sex work and people living in poverty.[1]

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

On 23 March, political opponent Abubakar Boxx Konteh was forcibly disappeared for nearly three weeks. He had been arrested in Guinea in a joint operation with the Sierra Leonean authorities for his alleged involvement in the 2023 failed coup, and drug trafficking. He was subsequently released on bail.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

In June, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists condemned an assault on journalist Munya Bawoh by a police officer at Kenema police station. Police officers had accused him of trying to record an altercation between them and a group of visually impaired people. Munya Bawoh claimed he was beaten and detained for around two hours.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In March, the Campaign for Human Rights and Development International, an NGO, publicly condemned restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. It did so after the authorities denied permission for a protest against a decision by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education to dissolve the Court of the University of Sierra Leone.

In September, Reporters Without Borders condemned the impunity enjoyed by political figures and others suspected to be responsible for the cyber harassment of anti-corruption defender and investigative journalist Chernoh Alpha M Bah.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

There was a shortage of medical practitioners, with only 30 qualified surgeons, partly due to a lack of training and remuneration, according to the Ministry of Health and Sanitation's Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

The rise in the use of kush, a cheap synthetic drug consisting of psychoactive addictive substances, continued to have a damaging effect on the health of significant numbers of young people. This prompted the president to declare a national emergency in April. He announced that a national task force, involving several sectors of society, would be established to address the crisis.

In May, the government launched a polio immunization programme aiming to provide free vaccinations for 1.5 million children under five years old. In December, it launched an Ebola vaccination programme, targeting 20,000 frontline workers.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In May, the UN published the Sierra Leone Common Country Analysis report, revealing that at least 43% of the population were exposed to land degradation in 2023, especially in rural areas, where more than 60% relied on agriculture for their income. Deforestation, including slash-and-burn

agriculture practices, was the primary cause of this.

Extensive deforestation resulting from illegal mining and logging continued. Sierra Leone had one of the highest rates of deforestation worldwide, according to the Environmental Performance Index. Two news reports in July and August, highlighted the difficulties faced by rangers monitoring the Kambui forest. These included staff shortages (62 rangers for about 14,000 hectares) and the lack of protection provided to them given that illegal loggers and miners were often armed. One report also highlighted the lack of enforcement of laws, community involvement and poor government coordination as barriers to combating deforestation.

In July, the government formally accepted the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, a multigovernmental agreement seeking to prevent harmful subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and the depletion of fish stocks.

Also, in July a World Bank report said that Sierra Leone was among the most vulnerable countries worldwide to climate change impacts, including droughts, wildfires, extreme heat and floods.

1. "Sierra Leone: Authorities must repeal colonial vagrancy laws following historic ECOWAS ruling", 13 November ↑

SINGAPORE

Republic of Singapore

The government retained a tight grip on freedom of expression and assembly, suppressing dissent and criticism. Activists faced charges for speaking out and executions continued.

BACKGROUND

Lawrence Wong became prime minister when former leader Lee Hsien Loong stepped down after 20 years. The government's long-standing policy of silencing its opponents and restricting civic space continued.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In April, three activists were investigated by the police for protesting against Singapore's arms sales to Israel. They displayed a banner reading "End SG–Israel arms trade" at Gardens by the Bay, a popular tourist destination. They were investigated under the Public Order Act, which requires a permit for any form of public demonstration.

In June, university students and alumni delivered letters opposing a new racial harmony bill to the Ministry of Home Affairs, arguing that it provided the government with further powers to clampdown on dissent. The authors were later investigated by the police. In the same month, police charged three activists – Annamalai Kokila Parvathi, Siti Amirah Mohamed Asrori and Mossammad Sobikun Nahar – with organizing a procession in a prohibited area under the Public Order Act. These charges came after they led a march to the Presidential Palace to deliver a letter of concern about the Gaza conflict. If found guilty, they could be fined up to SDG 10,000 (USD 7,360) or face six months' imprisonment.

In July, Kenneth Jeyaretnam, leader of the Reform Party, received his eighth correction order from the authorities under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA). The order was to publicly correct a so-called falsehood and related to his online post on 15 June, which questioned the government's pricing of land. The authorities also opened an investigation into Kenneth Jeyaretnam for contempt of court under the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act, which has also been used to target critics and served POFMA orders against several independent media outlets.

During the year, the government issued numerous POFMA orders regarding statements criticizing the death penalty made by the Transformative Justice Collective (TJC), a collective of activists campaigning for criminal justice and other human rights reforms. In October a photo exhibition for the

World Day against the Death Penalty organized by TJC was banned on the grounds that it "undermines national interest". In December the government issued a POFMA order designating TJC's website and social media "Declared Online Locations". TJC were required to post a notice on their sites stating they had "communicated numerous falsehoods" and were banned from receiving monetary contributions online. Activist Annamalai Kokila Parvathi, a member of TJC, received individual POFMA orders for her death penalty activism and was subject to investigation after she became the first person in Singapore to refuse to comply with a correction order.

DEATH PENALTY

Executions of people convicted of drug offences continued. On 2 and 7 August the authorities carried out the execution of two men,[1] while another was executed in October, all for drug-related offences. There were fair trial concerns in each of the cases, as all three were party to a pending court application.[2] In October the government amended the already restrictive Administration of Justice (Protection) Act, making those who file "groundless" court applications liable for contempt of court.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In March the government submitted a written statement to the International Court of Justice, showing support for its forthcoming advisory ruling on climate-related obligations. As a low-lying island nation, Singapore is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels, which could potentially threaten infrastructure and livelihoods.

1. "Singapore: Authorities must end executions and stop targeting anti-death penalty activists to curb criticism", 22 August ↑
2. "Singapore: Unlawful execution despite ongoing legal appeal raises fears of more to come", 4 October ↑

SLOVAKIA

Slovak Republic

Strict eligibility criteria for scarce public housing left thousands without adequate access to affordable housing. The government introduced amendments to existing laws that disproportionately restricted the rights to peaceful assembly and expression. Roma continued to face discrimination and social exclusion. LGBTI people's rights remained unprotected by law. Stigma and stereotypes against minorities were widely perpetuated by state representatives. Information regarding arms transfers to Israel was kept classified. The government's actions undermined its commitment to transitioning from fossil fuels.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

The authorities' failure to recognize housing as a human right caused a public rental housing crisis, affecting marginalized groups and other households struggling with excessive housing costs.[1]

Municipal housing stock was scarce, leaving thousands of low-income households without adequate access to public rental housing options. The strict eligibility criteria for public housing, including minimum income requirements, further limited access, leaving many ineligible to apply. Roma households faced systemic discrimination and segregation in the distribution of municipal housing.

Emergency housing options, intended as short-term solutions, often became long-term substitutes due to the lack of affordable housing.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

New legislation on the right to peaceful assembly, adopted in June, violated the constitution and Slovakia's international human rights obligations.[2] It imposed several new restrictions on the right to protest and

granted municipalities broad powers to prohibit peaceful assemblies.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights and transparency, faced criticism and attacks from government officials. This demonization led to the first parliamentary vote on a bill that was in breach of EU law.[3] At the end of the year, parliament was debating an amended version of the bill that could potentially restrict the right to freedom of association. Several measures to reduce NGO funding were also successfully implemented.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In June, parliament passed a new national broadcasting act that increased political influence over public media.[4]

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

The government failed to implement effective measures to fully comply with judgments on excessive use of police force against Roma people. It failed to improve investigations into police violence, address potential racial motives, and strengthen the independence of the investigative body.

DISCRIMINATION

Roma

The persistent and systemic segregation of Roma children in both mainstream and special education led the European Commission to file a complaint with the European Union Court of Justice in December 2023 for breaching the Equality Directive. The Ministry of Education further entrenched such segregation by expanding already segregated schools.[5]

A memorandum to establish the first national school for Roma was announced. The adoption of the School Act amendment relaxed the criteria for establishing Roma national schools. The reform was not supported by the Roma community.

LGBTI people

In May, parliament voted down an attempt to make legal gender recognition de facto impossible.[6] However, transgender people continued to face barriers to accessing legal gender recognition and gender-affirming healthcare.

There was no progress on granting same-sex couples the legal right to civil unions or parenthood.

Some members of parliament continued to express homophobic and transphobic views, while LGBTI people faced ongoing discrimination and hostility from the state and within society.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

There remained no consent-based legal definition of rape. Parliament attempted to shorten the statute of limitation for crimes of sexual violence from 20 to 10 years, but this effort failed due to strong opposition from experts and the public.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

There remained no effective compensation mechanism for women who were subjected to forced sterilization between 1966 and 2004.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

Information regarding arms transfers to Israel was kept classified, in conflict with the principles of transparency and reporting in the International Arms Trade Treaty.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government supported a commitment at COP28 in 2023 to transition away from fossil fuels. Yet, it continued to invest in a liquefied so-called "natural" gas terminal in the capital, Bratislava.

The integrated National Energy and Climate Plan lacked a clear timeline for reducing fossil fuel use and fell significantly short of the EU's 2030 targets on the use of renewable energy sources.

1. *Slovakia: Unattainable Right to Housing: Report on Right to Housing in Slovakia*, 10 October ↑
2. "Slovakia: Draconian bill restricting right to protest must be redrawn", 18 June ↑
3. "Slovakia: Anti-NGO law a 'full-frontal assault on civil society'", 30 April ↑
4. "Amnesty International Slovakia warns of risks of the Slovak Television and Radio Act", 10 June (Slovak only) ↑
5. "Slovakia: EU must fight root causes of racial discrimination against Roma children in Slovak education", 8 April ↑
6. "Slovakia: MPs must stop attacking queer people", 7 May (Slovak only) ↑

SLOVENIA

Republic of Slovenia

Laws regulating peaceful protest remained contrary to international law. The shortage of family doctors left 140,000 people without adequate access to primary healthcare. The "erased" who were not able to restore their residency continued to lack access to basic rights. Roma and LGBTI people faced discrimination. The government imposed stricter penalties on some harmful emissions but dropped commitments to ending fossil fuel subsidies.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

The Public Assemblies Act remained inconsistent with international law.[1] Specifically, it failed to define permissible police conduct precisely enough, allowing for significant dispersal powers. Legislation also placed disproportionate responsibilities on protest organizers, including making them liable for damages for deaths or physical injuries resulting from extraordinary circumstances such as crowd movement and generalized disorder.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

A significant shortage of family doctors persisted across the country, with approximately 140,000 people lacking adequate access to primary healthcare.

More than 230,000 women and girls older than 13 were unable to access sexual and reproductive healthcare due to a shortage of health professionals in their area. Civil society organizations warned that this number could double over the next five years as existing gynaecologists retired.

The National Institute of Public Health noted in April that access to healthcare services had significantly weakened over the preceding 10 years.

In September, the government adopted a new strategy for primary healthcare, which envisaged a coordinated approach to ensuring a more accessible, fair and sustainable public health system.

The government also proposed amendments to the Health Services Act aimed at strengthening the public health network and regulating conditions for public health workers in the private sector. Some civil society groups warned that the proposal encouraged further privatization of healthcare. Instead, they argued, the focus should be on strengthening the public health system to ensure adequate financing and accessibility for everyone without discrimination.

DISCRIMINATION

The "erased"

The remaining "erased" people – citizens of other former Yugoslav republics still excluded from the official registry of permanent residents after being unconstitutionally removed in 1992 – continued to live precariously.

In February, the government rejected a draft law to restore their permanent residency, which had been prepared by civil society groups with the support of the President's Office. This meant the "erased" continued to be denied the rights to access health insurance, work and housing guaranteed by residency status.[2]

Roma

Roma people continued to face social exclusion and discrimination, particularly those living in isolated and segregated

informal settlements in south-east Slovenia. Many lived in poorly constructed homes, lacking security of tenure, and without access to drinking water, sanitation and electricity.

LGBTI people

People seeking legal gender recognition in official identity documents were still required to obtain a certificate for a mental health disorder diagnosis from a health institution or a doctor.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In June, Slovenia reintroduced temporary border controls with Croatia and Hungary for six months, citing emerging security threats connected to migration.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In March, an amendment to the Environmental Protection Act imposed stricter limits on harmful emissions from co-incineration plants.

The government was preparing a Climate Law, with some proposals falling short of the country's Paris Agreement commitments. The Climate Council, an independent advisory board, criticized the government for reneging on the promise to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies.

In response to unprecedented floods in 2023, authorities made major flood adaptations to improve the country's resilience to intense rainfall.

1. *Europe: Under Protected and Over Restricted: The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries*, 8 July ↑
2. "Slovenia: Thirty -two years after erasure, the country should finally do what's right", 16 May (Slovenian only) ↑

SOMALIA

Federal Republic of Somalia

Civilians continued to bear the brunt of the devastating conflict. All parties to the conflict continued to commit serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Floods, erratic rainfall, diseases and persistent conflict caused massive internal displacement and a dire humanitarian crisis, including acute food insecurity. Internally displaced people faced human rights violations and abuses; women and girls were particularly exposed to gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence. The right to freedom of expression was severely restricted and two journalists were killed. Parliament passed a law to prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities. In Somaliland, authorities restricted the right to freedom of expression and media freedom before the delayed presidential elections.

BACKGROUND

Tensions with Ethiopia escalated following a January memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland, in which Somaliland reportedly leased land to Ethiopia for a naval facility on its coast in return for Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland's statehood. Somalia, which considers Somaliland to be part of its territory, accused Ethiopia of encroaching on its sovereignty.

In March, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud signed amendments to the Provisional Constitution.

The continued withdrawal of AU Transitional Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) troops raised concerns about civilian protection. On 1 August the AU Peace and Security Council adopted a strategy for a new mission led by the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia to replace ATMIS. The UN Security Council endorsed the replacement on 27 December.

In June, Somalia was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a two-year term, beginning January 2025.

Following November elections, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi replaced Muse Bihi Abdi as President of Somaliland.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS AND KILLINGS

Civilians continued to bear the brunt of the ongoing armed conflict between the Somali

government, supported by its international allies, and the armed group Al-Shabaab. While large numbers of civilian casualties were reported, there was no accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia reported 854 civilian casualties (295 killed and 559 injured) between January and September. Al-Shabaab was responsible for 65% (560) of all recorded casualties, while the others were attributed to state security forces, clan militias, and international and regional forces.

On 18 March, two strikes with Turkish-made drones, supporting Somali military operations, killed 14 children, five women and four men – all civilians – and injured 11 children, two women and four men in Jaffey farm near Bagdad village in the Lower Shabelle region. All were from the marginalized Gorgaarte clan. Analysis of photographs of the remnants of the munitions revealed that the strikes were conducted with MAM-L glide bombs, which are dropped from TB-2 drones. Neither the Somali nor the Turkish governments investigated the incident and the affected civilians did not receive truth, justice or reparations.[1]

On 14 March, Al-Shabaab attacked the SYL Hotel in the capital, Mogadishu, with two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. Four people were killed and 20 others injured.

On 2 August, another complex attack claimed by Al-Shabaab, which included a suicide bombing, killed more than 30 people in Mogadishu's Lido beach area. Nearly 250 civilians were injured, including two UN national staff.

RIGHT TO FOOD

Floods, erratic rainfall, diseases and the ongoing conflict created a dire humanitarian crisis. The UN Somalia 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan indicated that 6.9 million people needed humanitarian assistance. Acute food insecurity persisted and, according to analysis from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, at least 4 million people faced crisis or emergency food insecurity, and an estimated 1.6 million children aged between six and 59 months faced acute malnutrition. The UN classified Somalia as being among the least developed countries. Al-Shabaab continued to restrict humanitarian access in areas under their control, compounding the crisis.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Internally displaced people continued to face significant human rights violations and abuses. More than 552,000 were internally displaced due to floods, drought, conflict and food insecurity. According to the UN, nearly 200,000 people – most of whom were already internally displaced – were forcibly evicted nationwide between January and December. Women and children, who faced risks of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and evictions, constituted more than 80% of the displaced population.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls, continued. Between January and September, the UN reported 13 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 32 women and girls. In one incident, two members of the Somali National Army serving in the military police unit allegedly raped two sisters aged 15 and 16 years on 26 February. Two incidents were related to alleged forced marriages, one perpetrated by an Al-Shabaab member and the other by a soldier, both in Jubbaland state. Of the 32 survivors, 16 were internally displaced women.

The federal parliament failed to pass bills on sexual offences and female genital mutilation.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, was restricted. Two journalists were killed; one of them, Amun Abdullahi Mohamed, by gunmen believed to have links to Al-Shabaab. Other journalists were attacked by security forces and subjected to threats, harassment,

intimidation, beatings, arbitrary arrests and prosecution.

Media advocacy and press freedom organizations opposed the appointment of nine people to the new National Media Council on grounds that the selection process and the composition of the Council were not in line with the 2020 Media Law, and that the council was not independent of the government. The appointment of the members, who were proposed by the Ministry of Information, was approved by the federal cabinet on 14 March. The establishment of the council, which oversees legal compliance, among other things, had been pending since 2016.

On 22 July, police officers arrested AliNur Salad, founder and chief executive of the privately owned Dawan Media. He was detained at Waberi district police station in Mogadishu for one night and then transferred to Mogadishu Central Prison. His arrest was connected to social media posts in which he suggested that the security forces were vulnerable to Al-Shabaab attacks because of their use of the drug khat. On 23 July, AliNur Salad was charged, without a lawyer present, before the Banadir Regional Court. He was granted bail on 27 July but faced charges under the penal code including "offending the honour or prestige of the head of state", "committing obscene acts", "distributing obscene publications and performances", "insult", and "criminal defamation", as well as restrictions on travel and speaking to the media.

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

On 31 July, the federal parliament passed a law prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in all areas of public and private life and eliminating barriers towards the full enjoyment of their rights and inclusion in society.

SOMALILAND

Freedom of expression

Somaliland authorities continued to restrict freedom of expression, particularly in the period up to the delayed presidential elections. They arrested and prosecuted journalists, politicians and other government critics.

On 6 January, Somaliland intelligence officers raided the offices of MM Somali TV in Hargeisa, the Somaliland capital, interrupting a live debate about the controversial Ethiopia/Somaliland MOU (see Background). They arrested the MM Somali TV chair, Mohamed Abdi Sheikh (also known as "Ilig"), Ilyas Abdinasir, a technician, and Mohamed Abdi Abdullahi, a reporter. They also confiscated equipment, including computers, cameras and live broadcasting equipment. Mohamed Abdi Abdullahi and Ilyas Abdinasir were released on 9 January without charge, but Mohamed Abdi Sheikh remained in detention until 20 February when he was released by the Maroodi Jeh Regional Court in Hargeisa.

On 2 September, Somaliland police arrested Mohamed Abiib, an outspoken opposition MP, and detained him in Mandera Prison. Before his arrest, the Somaliland attorney general had requested the House of Representatives of Somaliland to strip Mohamed Abiib of his parliamentary immunity, a request which parliament voted against. The attorney general had accused him of meeting officials from Somalia and Djibouti and of criticizing Somaliland's involvement in the 2023 conflict in Las Anod (a city in Somaliland's Sool region). He was released on 29 September following a Somaliland Constitutional Supreme Court ruling, which deemed his detention illegal.

1. Somalia: Death of 23 civilians in military strikes with Turkish drones may amount to war crimes – new investigation, 7 May ↑

SOUTH AFRICA

Republic of South Africa

High levels of gender-based violence continued; perpetrators enjoyed impunity, and the Public Protector found that the criminal justice system failed victims. The

murder rate remained high and the police's ability to adequately investigate these crimes declined. The police failed to provide protection for human rights defenders under threat. The Department of Basic Education failed in its promise to eradicate pit latrines in schools. The National Health Insurance Bill was signed into law, triggering legal challenges. There were nationwide water shortages. The cabinet adopted a white paper that threatened to erode refugee rights. Police continued to use excessive force. The Presidential Climate Commission found that, despite strong commitments to tackle climate change, progress was slow.

BACKGROUND

The African National Congress party lost its majority in the May general elections which marked 30 years since the end of apartheid rule. A Government of National Unity was formed, comprising 11 political parties, with some cabinet positions being assigned to other political parties.

Before the elections, President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill into law.

In January the South African Human Rights Commission investigative report into riots in July 2021 found that the events were orchestrated but failed to identify those responsible or reasons for the unrest.

In October the government filed its memorial to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its ongoing genocide case against Israel, in which it said it had provided facts and evidence to prove that Israel is committing the crime of genocide in the occupied Gaza Strip.

According to official unemployment statistics, 32.1% of the working age population were unemployed; 34.2% of people between 15 and 24 were not in employment, education or training.

Extreme weather events, including flooding, in the KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces disproportionately affected marginalized communities.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

High levels of gender-based violence continued. According to quarterly crime statistics for the period July to September, there were 12,765 reported cases of sexual offences, of which 10,191 were rape cases. In the same period, 957 women were murdered, an increase of 8.6% compared to 2023. The National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Bill, intended to establish a Council to oversee the implementation of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, was signed into law in May.[1]

Impunity for gender-based violence continued. An inquest established in August 2023 at the Protea magistrate's court into the murders of Popi Qwabe and Bongeka Phungula had yet to begin, partly due to a lack of information provided by the investigating officer. The women had been shot and their bodies dumped on the side of a road in Johannesburg in 2017. Prior to the establishment of the inquest, the National Prosecuting Authority had been unable to prosecute due to insufficient evidence and the case was moved to the Department of Justice which opened the inquest.

In June the Public Protector released an investigative report that found that the conduct of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DOJ&CD), the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Department of Social Development constituted maladministration and improper conduct in relation to processing gender-based violence-related matters in the criminal justice system.

The High Court in Pretoria handed down a judgment in September that sections of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Act were unconstitutional insofar as they provide a subjective test for criminal intent, where sexual violence is not criminalized if a perpetrator wrongly and unreasonably believed that the complainant consented.

RIGHT TO LIFE AND SECURITY OF THE PERSON

The murder rate remained high. Police recorded 6,545 cases between July and September. The efficiency of the police and their ability to adequately investigate murders, including by bringing charges against suspects, continued to decline. There was an almost 60% decrease in solved murders over the last 12 years.

Threats and attacks continued against human rights defenders at Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack dwellers movement. SAPS failed to provide protection and to conduct effective and thorough investigations into the killings of Abahlali baseMjondolo members.[2]

The investigation into who ordered the murder of whistle-blower Babita Deokaran continued three years after her death. There were no further moves by the DOJ&CD to strengthen legislation to protect whistle-blowers, following the call for submissions on a discussion document in 2023.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

According to an Education Facilities Management System report, 1,770 schools still used pit latrines and 287 schools had pit latrines only. This violated the rights to education, health, dignity, safety and life and breached the government's repeated commitments to replace all pit latrines in schools.[3] In April, a three-year-old boy drowned in a pit latrine at a day care centre in the Eastern Cape province.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

In May President Ramaphosa signed the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill into law. In July the High Court in Pretoria declared invalid certain sections of the bill that would allow the government to regulate where medical workers can practice. Additional constitutional legal challenges were expected. While the NHI Bill was intended to ensure universal access to healthcare services, concerns were raised by civil society organizations and medical aid schemes that it could further limit access to healthcare due to the risk of widespread corruption. Other concerns included the exclusion of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants from the scheme, and that it would not address the declining state of the public healthcare system.

The Life Esidimeni (a subsidiary of a private healthcare provider) inquest findings into the deaths of 144 mental health patients in Gauteng province were released in July. It found that the former Gauteng member of the Executive Council for Health and the former director of the Gauteng Mental Health Directorate caused the deaths of nine of the patients by their negligence in terminating the Life Esidimeni contract in 2016, which led to patients being moved to ill-equipped and in some cases unlicensed NGOs. During this time, 144 patients died, more than 1,400 were exposed to torture and other trauma, and 44 went missing. The National Prosecuting Authority was expected to decide whether to pursue criminal proceedings in connection to the nine deaths.

Sexual and reproductive health rights

The high rate of children and teenagers giving birth remained a concern. According to a September report from Statistics South Africa, 102,406 girls aged 10-19 gave birth in 2023,[4] a slight decrease from around 105,000 such cases in 2022.

RIGHT TO WATER

Nationwide water shortages continued. Phoenix and Verulam suburbs of eThekwini metropolitan municipality, KwaZulu-Natal province, had suffered intermittent water supplies for two years and relied on water tankers. Government officials said contributing factors were alleged vandalism, a rapidly increasing urban population and a lack of maintenance of aging infrastructure. Areas across Johannesburg also experienced water cuts, some for more than two weeks, due to insufficient funding to replace failing infrastructure. Experts warned that by 2029 the Gauteng province could experience "Day Zero", meaning no water supply whatsoever. President Ramaphosa established a Water Task Team, under Deputy President Paul

Mashatile's direction, to address the challenges.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Numerous civil society organizations objected to the White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection: Towards a Complete Overhaul of the Migration System in South Africa, which was adopted by the cabinet in April. Concerns raised included its negative portrayal of migration, incorrect research used to justify limits on migration, and the proposal to withdraw South Africa from the UN Refugee Convention and re-accede with reservations that would significantly reduce refugees' constitutional rights and in turn violate international law obligations.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

Eight of the deputy president's VIP protection officers faced 12 charges, including assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm and assault by threat and obstruction to justice. The charges related to their alleged assault of three members of the South African National Defence Force on a highway in Gauteng province in July 2023. The trial continued with additional witnesses providing testimony.

Unlawful killings

As of March, the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) was investigating 1,337 cases of deaths resulting from police action. They included cases from previous years.

Police were accused of assaulting Thabelo Mbau, a student at Tshwane University of Technology in Gauteng province, resulting in his death. The IPID finalized its investigations into whether the police were responsible for his killing. Two police officers were charged with murder and their case was remanded to February 2025 for pretrial conference.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In February, President Ramaphosa announced the establishment of a new Climate Change Response Fund – a collaborative government and private sector initiative – to respond to the impacts of climate change and build resilience. It remained unclear whether the fund would be in line with a just transition.

In July, President Ramaphosa signed the Climate Change Act into law, South Africa's first piece of legislation specifically aimed at addressing the effects of climate change.[5]

Also in July, the Presidential Climate Commission released its first assessment of climate action. It found that, despite strong commitments to tackle climate change and facilitate a just transition, progress, including phasing out fossil fuels, was slow as a result of insufficient finance, incoherent policies and weak governance structures, among other things.

1. "South Africa: Signing of the National Council of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Bill a positive step, but implementation is key", 24 May ↑
2. *South Africa: "Our Lives Count for Nothing": Threats, Attacks, and Killings of Members of Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack Dwellers) Movement in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province*, 29 July ↑
3. "South Africa: Government must be held accountable for eradicating school pit toilets by the end of 2024", 24 June ↑
4. "South Africa: Continued increase in child and teenage pregnancy cannot be ignored", 1 July ↑
5. *South Africa: Amnesty International's Submission on The Climate Change Bill [B98-2022]*, 29 January ↑

SOUTH KOREA

Republic of Korea

Greenhouse gas emissions targets violated the government's duty to protect future generations. The authorities continued to restrict protests by disability activists. National security legislation was used to prosecute individuals expressing support for North Korea. Same-sex couples were legally recognized as being entitled to health insurance benefits. Insufficient action was taken to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Migrant workers continued to be subjected to exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

BACKGROUND

In December, President Yoon Suk-yeol declared martial law and suspended fundamental rights including to assembly, although the move was reversed within hours by the National Assembly. The president was subsequently impeached, as was his successor, Han Duck-soo, pending a final decision by the Constitutional Court. At year's end, the political crisis was unresolved with the Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok acting as president.

Early in the year, North Korea defector groups resumed sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets by balloon to North Korea following the 2023 Supreme Court ruling that a law banning such activities was unconstitutional. In response, North Korean authorities launched more than 5,000 excrement-filled balloons across the Demilitarized Zone towards South Korea. Some balloons were equipped with timers and detonators, which caused several fires and disrupted air traffic.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In August, the Constitutional Court ruled that the 2021 Carbon Neutrality Act did not protect basic rights enshrined in the constitution, including the right to a healthy environment, and that greenhouse gas emissions targets contained in the Act were inadequate to ensure the protection of future generations. The Court ordered the legislature to revise the law by March 2026 to include progressive reduction targets for the years before net zero is achieved in 2050. The decision followed hearings in April and May in four cases in which around 200 people, including more than 60 children, claimed that the government was failing to adequately protect them from climate change-related harms.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Authorities continued to unlawfully and overly restrict peaceful protests calling for improved access for people with disabilities to the Seoul metro system and against the termination of its job programme for people with severe disabilities. The disability advocacy group, Solidarity Against Disability Discrimination, alleged that police used excessive force to break up a protest on 6 February. On 20 April, four disability activists were arrested at another protest. All were released, but charges against three were still pending at year's end.

There was an increase in the number of prosecutions under the National Security Law of people accused of contact with or expressing support for the North Korean authorities. In March, a man was found guilty and given a one-year non-custodial sentence for posting comments online that were sympathetic to North Korea. The court ruled that the posts endangered the existence of the Republic of Korea and the liberal democratic order.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In March, the Central Military Commission decided that a soldier who died by suicide in 2021 could be buried in the national cemetery as she had died "in the line of duty". She died after being discharged from the military following gender-affirming surgery. The Commission's recognition overturned a previous decision that Sergeant Byun Hui-su's gender reassignment was a "disability" and that her discharge from the military was therefore lawful and unrelated to her death.

In July, the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples are entitled to the same health insurance benefits as heterosexual couples. The ruling dismissed an appeal by the National Health Insurance Service against a previous court decision that it should provide health insurance coverage for Kim Yong-min, as a dependent of his same-sex partner.[2] Despite this limited administrative recognition of benefits for persons in same-sex relationships, the judgment failed to legally recognize same-sex marriages.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family remained under threat of abolition. The Minister, who resigned in February, had not been replaced by year's end.

Gender-based violence

In August, the President urged government officials to take measures to eradicate "deepfake" sexually explicit images and videos on social media. According to women's rights activists, the creation and sharing in chatrooms of sexually explicit, AI-generated "deepfake" content had reached the level of a "national emergency" and was part of deep-rooted sexism and misogyny in the country.

Social media companies failed to take effective measures in response to demands by survivors of technology-facilitated gender-based violence to establish a reporting system to trigger immediate removal of abusive content.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Increased reliance on migrant workers in the context of the declining working age population reinforced concerns about conditions for foreign workers. In July, 23 people, the majority of whom were migrant workers, died in a fire in a lithium battery factory in Hwaseong city. The factory owners were criticized for inadequate safety standards.

Women's rights and labour organizations raised concerns about the treatment of Filipino domestic workers who arrived during the year under a pilot programme established by the Seoul metropolitan government to recruit foreign workers. Their remuneration levels were initially set at below the minimum wage. The workers also complained about delays in payment, lack of rest facilities and the nighttime curfew imposed on them by the authorities.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In June, in its concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of the Republic of Korea, the CEDAW Committee raised concerns that the government had yet to implement a 2023 Seoul High Court decision to provide compensation to "comfort women" who were subjected to sexual slavery by the Japanese military before and during World War II. The Committee recommended that the government provide survivors with redress and reparations, including access to specialized medical, psychological and social support for the harms resulting from their trauma.

A report published by the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission in September documented evidence of the international adoption of tens of thousands of children between 1961 and 1987 without the consent of their parents. According to NGOs, at least 200,000 South Korean children were adopted abroad, many of them children of mothers detained in government-run welfare centres under the so-called "social purification" policy. The Commission recommended that the authorities issue a formal apology and compensate victims.

DEATH PENALTY

In November, 65 opposition lawmakers introduced a bill to the National Assembly to abolish the death penalty. The bill was not expected to be adopted but was regarded as an important symbolic step in increasing pressure on the government to abolish the punishment.

1. "South Korea: Climate case before South Korea's Constitutional Court could set human rights precedent", 20 May ↑
2. "South Korea: Supreme Court ruling a historic victory for same-sex couples", 18 July ↑

SOUTH SUDAN

Republic of South Sudan

The rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and movement were curtailed. Government critics and activists faced enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, and torture and other ill-treatment. The National Security Service operated with impunity, defying a court order to release a detained government critic. The UN reported numerous human rights violations including extrajudicial

executions, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and the recruitment and use of children by armed groups. Parliament passed two transitional justice bills to promote reconciliation and provide reparation to victims of the conflict that began in 2013. Food insecurity increased due to ongoing conflict, flooding, displacement and the rising cost of living. Three quarters of the population needed humanitarian assistance and protection. The government failed to introduce adequate preparedness and mitigation policies to address severe climate change-induced risks.

BACKGROUND

In September, parties to the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) agreed to extend the transitional period from February 2025 to February 2027, postponing elections scheduled for 2024 to December 2026.

In April the UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.

In May the UN Security Council extended the arms embargo on South Sudan until 30 May 2025.

In October, Akol Koor Kuc was dismissed from his position as director general of the National Security Service (NSS), a position he had held since South Sudan's independence in 2011. During his tenure the NSS was accused of committing numerous serious human rights violations and other crimes under international law.

The war in neighbouring Sudan gravely impacted the economy when damage to oil pipelines in March halted South Sudan's oil exports through Port Sudan, which had contributed more than 85% of government revenue.

According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, approximately 2 million people remained internally displaced. South Sudan hosted over 500,000 refugees, primarily from Sudan. Meanwhile, approximately 2.3 million South Sudanese people had sought refuge in neighbouring countries since the conflict began in 2013.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

On 3 July the Transitional National Legislative Assembly passed the National Security Service Act 2014 (Amendment) Bill 2024. It became law by default on 12 August, after President Salva Kiir Mayardit failed to sign it into law or return it to parliament for amendment. The law strengthened the NSS's already sweeping powers that allowed them to curtail the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, among other rights. According to local media, in September the NSS ordered medical professionals to halt their general assembly meeting in Juba, the capital, without providing explanation, and despite their having obtained security clearances and adhered to necessary protocol. It was reported to be the first such meeting to be held in eight years.

In January, Jonglei State's Ministry of Information and Communication issued a circular directing all government institutions, NGOs and private sector actors to obtain ministerial approval before making public announcements through broadcast media, public announcement systems (microphones) or posters. The ministry rescinded the circular a few days later following strong objections from the Jonglei chapter of the Union of Journalists of South Sudan and civil society activists.

In June, security forces repressed two peaceful protests held in response to the cost of living crisis, dispersing protesters and arresting at least two people in Jonglei State's capital, Bor.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

On the night of 30 March, Juba's ex-mayor Kalisto Lado was arbitrarily arrested at his home in Juba by officers believed to be from the NSS. He was subjected to enforced disappearance for three months. In June the government admitted to holding Kalisto Lado on accusations related to "conspiracy", "subverting constitutional government",

"supplying weapons to insurgents, bandits, saboteurs", "possession of dangerous weapons" and "publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the Republic of South Sudan". He was released without charge on 6 September. During detention, he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

On 2 January, Raphael Juma Zacharia, a student activist who had been arbitrarily arrested in December 2023 and detained at an NSS detention facility known as the Blue House in Juba, was released after writing a letter of apology to the NSS. He had been arrested in relation to a speech he gave at a student rally at the University of Upper Nile in November 2023 referencing allegations of corruption and impunity by the NSS and its leadership.

On 24 March, human rights activist Michael Wetnhialic was arbitrarily arrested by NSS officers travelling in vehicles without registration plates, while on his way to a meeting at the Nile Fortune Hotel in Juba around 8pm. According to reports, he was arrested on suspicion of running Facebook and WhatsApp accounts under fake names to leak sensitive information critical of the NSS and the government. On 7 November, he was released from NSS detention without charge.

Morris Mabior Awikjok Bak, a South Sudanese citizen and government critic, was released from detention on 8 November, three months after the Juba High Court granted him bail. He had been arbitrarily arrested in Nairobi, Kenya, in February 2023, from where he was forcibly returned to Juba. More than 14 months of his detention was spent at the Blue House, without investigation, trial or access to his lawyer. On 16 April, he appeared in court for the first time, escorted by NSS officers, and was charged with defamation in a case filed by the then-NSS director general.

Raphael Juma Zacharia, Michael Wetnhialic and Morris Mabior Awikjok Bak were each subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during their detention by the NSS.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Opposition (SPLM-IO) said that their leader, First Vice President Riek Machar, remained subject to restrictions which prevented him from leaving Juba. The government rejected the members' claims that they were responsible for the alleged restrictions. In 2019 the Council of Ministers of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (a regional body) had passed a resolution recommending that his travel restrictions be lifted.

On 25 September, according to media reports, the NSS prevented Oyet Nathaniel Pierino, parliament's first deputy speaker and deputy chairman of SPLM-IO, from boarding a flight to Uganda at Juba International Airport. The action prompted him to publicly criticize the lack of freedom of movement in the country.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

According to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), by October, at least 54 people, including a child, were subjected to extrajudicial executions by government authorities, including members of the security services.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS

Clashes between armed actors in some areas left hundreds dead, most of them civilians, according to UNMISS which documented 1,069 killings resulting from inter-communal and political violence.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Action Plan for the Armed Forces on Addressing Conflict-related Sexual Violence in South Sudan was renewed for three years (2024–2026) after expiring on 31 December 2023.

UNMISS documented 157 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 183 survivors (113 women, 66 girls and four men), who were aged between nine and 65.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

According to UNMISS, there were 84 grave violations in the context of the armed conflict

against 68 children (53 boys, nine girls and six whose sex was unknown). The violations included the killing of 12 and the maiming of two children (seven boys, one girl and six others whose sex was unknown). Among these children, 41 boys and three girls were recruited and used by armed groups; and five girls were raped. At least nine boys suffered multiple violations of both recruitment and use, and abduction by armed groups.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

The economic situation was characterized by the exorbitant cost of living, high inflation and a depreciating pound. The payment of civil servants' salaries was delayed for more than nine months, leading civil servants in Bor and employees from the Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile and Rumbek universities, among others, to hold protests.

According to OCHA, the food security situation deteriorated due to flooding, ongoing conflict, displacement and the high cost of living. The conflict in neighbouring Sudan continued to compound the already dire humanitarian situation. As of late December, more than 900,000 people, including returnees, refugees and asylum seekers, had fled Sudan and crossed into South Sudan.

Nine million people, or 75% of the population, required humanitarian and protection assistance. Approximately 7.1 million people (56.3%) were expected to face crisis-level or more severe food insecurity during the year. Malnutrition rates remained high, with more than 2.5 million children and women facing acute malnutrition. The UN's Humanitarian Response Plan 2024 had received only 68.5% of the requested USD 1.8 billion needed to support 6 million people with life-saving assistance and protection services.

Inadequate revenue generation led to reduced spending on public services, including health and education, and an increase in debt. Seventy per cent of children were temporarily out of school due to the economic situation.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 9 May in Nairobi, Kenya, the High-Level Mediation for South Sudan peace talks – also known as the Tumaini Initiative – began between the government and armed groups that did not sign the R-ARCSS. The Tumaini Initiative – which translates as "hope", put emphasis on fast-tracking the provisions of the 2018 agreement and establishing an environment conducive to its implementation.

On 11 November, President Kiir signed into law two transitional justice bills to address the legacy of the conflict which began in 2013 and provide reparations to victims. The Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing Act 2024 sought to establish a commission to promote peace, national reconciliation and healing. The Compensation and Reparation Authority Act 2024 aimed to identify persons eligible for reparations and to establish a fund for this purpose.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

South Sudan continued to face severe climate change-induced risks, for which the government failed to introduce adequate preparedness and mitigation policies. According to the Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre, it ranked as the second most vulnerable country to natural hazards globally.

In October the Council of Ministers approved the declaration of a state of emergency in flood-affected areas, after floods destroyed livelihoods, submerged critical infrastructure and displaced populations to higher grounds. According to OCHA, over 1.4 million people nationwide were affected, while about 379,000 people were flood-displaced in 22 counties.

SPAIN

Kingdom of Spain

Spain suspended new licences for arms transfers to Israel. Authorities failed to take

measures to ensure adequate housing in the Cañada Real neighbourhood. Two higher courts lodged appeals against the 2024 amnesty law, arguing it breached the constitution and EU law. The first court case in Spain regarding torture during the Franco era was rejected, with the judges applying the statute of limitations. Gender-based violence persisted. The rights of non-accompanied migrant children were not duly protected.

BACKGROUND

An agreement was reached to renew the Council of the Judiciary, the judiciary's governing body. It had been operating for five years with an expired mandate due to lack of such agreement between the main political parties.

August was the hottest month on record since 1961 (2^0C higher than the average from 1991-2020). At least 3,160 deaths were related to high temperatures.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

In May and November, the government refused to authorize the transit of three ships carrying arms destined for Israel. As a result, the US Federal Maritime Commission initiated an investigation against Spain.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Right to health

Data published by the Ministry of Health showed that both the national government and the autonomous governments failed to adequately protect the right to health, due to insufficient investment. The percentage of their budgets allocated to public and primary health had been decreasing since 2020.

In October a tribunal reopened proceedings for negligent homicide regarding the death of a woman in a care home during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the results of an investigation published in May, the Community of Madrid had issued orders not to refer elderly people with a moderate to severe physical disability and cognitive impairment to hospital.

Right to housing

Measures to suspend evictions for people in economically vulnerable situations remained in force. The Housing Law fell short of the protections required under international standards, with 20,581 evictions in the first nine months of 2024.

Only two autonomous communities applied the formula provided by the housing law to limit rental prices that commonly increased disproportionately compared to the average salary.

In September the European Committee of Social Rights considered that Spain had failed to ensure adequate housing for over 4,500 people, including 1,800 children, affected by power cuts in the neighbourhood of Cañada Real, in the capital, Madrid.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In September, an amendment to the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 increased the emissions reduction target to 32% compared to 1990, far short of the EU commitment of 55%.

On 29 October, torrential rains in the Valencia region, made more likely by human-induced climate change, caused overflows of several rivers and flash floods. Some 224 deaths were related to the floods in three autonomous communities. Around 190,000 people were estimated to have been affected, and homes and infrastructure were damaged. Despite several warnings issued by the meteorological agency during the morning, the mass alert message was not sent until after 8pm, when the situation had already been critical for some hours and evacuation was impossible for most residents.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

In April the National Court reopened an investigation into the use of Pegasus spyware to target the prime minister and other members of the government. There was no progress in proceedings on the use of Pegasus against pro-independence activists and politicians in Catalonia. The public prosecutor proposed closing the case against the former director of the National

Intelligence Centre for hacking the phone of the former president of Catalonia, concluding that there was judicial control.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The government approved an Action Plan on Democracy to strengthen transparency, pluralism and the right to information. It included reform of legislation that limited freedom of expression, including the criminal code, the gag law, and the 1968 Law on Classified Secrets.

The National Court admitted a complaint against two Palestinian solidarity activists on a charge of glorification of terrorism for their statements at a parliamentary event. An investigative judge closed proceedings against one of the activists, but this decision was appealed.

In September, five people were placed under criminal investigation for offending religious feelings for an artistic performance which simulated a religious procession.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The amnesty law introduced in 2024 was applied during the year, including with regard to cases of unlawful use of force by security forces during the 2017 referendum on Catalan independence. In July the Supreme Court questioned the law's constitutionality before the Constitutional Court, while the National Court raised its compatibility with EU law before the Court of Justice of the EU.

A court refused to investigate the case of an undercover agent infiltrating social movements in Barcelona, and parliament rejected a non-legislative initiative calling for an investigation into such cases of alleged infiltration.

In May a judge closed the investigation into the case of a woman who lost an eye after being hit by a foam projectile fired by police in February 2021, alleging that the victim had "put herself in danger" by attending the demonstration. Her appeal against this decision was rejected in October.

A protester started a prison sentence for participating in a demonstration in 2019, convicted for public disorder and assault on authority solely on the grounds of the police account of events.

Eight housing rights activists facing prison sentences of up to 38 months were still awaiting trial for the peaceful occupation of a bank branch in 2017.

Some 27 climate activists were being investigated for participating in a criminal organization for their involvement in non-violent direct actions.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The judiciary refused to investigate torture cases committed during the Franco era, following a Constitutional Court ruling from June which ruled again that Spain had no obligation under international law to open criminal investigations into these offences.

The government failed to fully implement the Democratic Memory Law, two years after it entered into force, while forensic work continued in the Valle de Cuelgamuros (former Valle de los Caídos) to return the remains of victims of Franco's regime to their families.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence persisted, with 47 women killed by partners and ex-partners during the year and five killed by other individuals in the first six months of the year. Since 2013, when records began, 62 children had been killed in the context of gender-based violence against their mothers. Nine children were killed in 2024.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The Constitutional Court dismissed an appeal against a 2022 amendment to the criminal code that prohibits anti-abortion groups harassing people seeking abortion services. The same court also dismissed an appeal against the abortion law and confirmed the removal of the three-day reflection period and the right to terminate pregnancy from the age of 16 without the consent of a parent or guardian.

In May, parliament voted against a proposal by the Socialist Party aimed at criminalizing various aspects of sex work that

could have jeopardized sex workers' human rights.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The rights of unaccompanied migrant children were compromised by overcrowded conditions in centres on the Canary Islands. The central government proposed a mandatory relocation of such children around the country, but this was rejected by most autonomous communities. In July, parliament voted against reforming the Aliens Law to allow the mandatory transfer of non-accompanied migrant children to other communities to help ensure the children's welfare.

In September, the Canary Islands' public prosecutor announced an investigation into allegations that unaccompanied migrant children had been ill-treated in reception centres on the islands.

Refugees and asylum seekers were held in appalling reception conditions at Madrid airport. In February, at least 400 people, mainly from Africa, including 100 women, some of them pregnant, and children, were crammed in rooms not built for this purpose and without natural light. They were held there in detention for several weeks. In September the government refused to allow entrance to activists from Western Sahara who were seeking protection on arrival at the airport.

DISCRIMINATION

In September the attorney general's annual report for 2023 revealed an increase of 300% in investigations related to hate crimes in comparison with the previous year. It also warned of the "excessive tension and polarization" present in political discourse, considering that it fuelled the dissemination of disinformation against migrants and other minorities.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In July the Constitutional Court admitted appeals by the government against several articles of the gender identity law (Law 3/2016) and the trans law (Law 2/2016) approved in 2023 by the Autonomous Community of Madrid. The court issued a precautionary suspension for the contested articles that allowed conversion therapies and children's compulsory assessment by a psychologist or psychiatrist before initiating a transition process.

MASS SURVEILLANCE

In July, Amnesty International requested information from the government after the national police confirmed they had been using facial recognition technology since at least August 2023. The police reportedly had 4.4 million detainee profiles in their database.

SRI LANKA

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The government continued its use of draconian legislation and crackdowns on freedom of expression and association. It passed new laws to stifle dissent, without adequate consultation and in contravention of international human rights laws and standards. Minorities, activists and civil society continued to be intimidated and harassed. The government failed to make meaningful progress on truth, justice and reparations for those affected by the internal armed conflict that ended in May 2009. Proposed legislative amendments to ensure the rights of LGBTI people and Muslim women and girls were not carried out.

BACKGROUND

Both presidential and general elections were held in the latter part of the year. Despite the extension of an International Monetary Fund facility providing access to a total of USD 1,333 million from 2023, the World Bank reported that the poverty rate was expected to remain above 22% until 2026.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Although the second phase of the social welfare scheme "Aswesuma", launched in February, increased the number of

beneficiaries, those without bank accounts were unable to receive monthly payments. The government was criticized for not adequately raising awareness about the scheme.

Malaiyaha Tamil tea plantation workers drew attention to the government's failure to adequately protect workers in smallholdings and privately owned estates in the Southern Province because of insufficient regulation and inspection. Abuses included forced labour, debt bondage and restricted freedom of movement, as well as failures to pay decent wages, grant leave entitlements and provide adequate housing.

Workers in free trade zones, including garment workers, were denied the right to freedom of association through excessively restrictive regulations. The authorities failed to protect unionized garment workers from harassment by factory managers. The government bypassed tripartite consultation mechanisms.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

On 24 January the Parliament passed the Online Safety Act (OSA). Despite amendments in August, there were fears that vaguely worded offences and the granting of expansive powers to authorities could be used to curb freedom of expression and suppress dissent. Civil society criticized the drafting process as it was not consultative or transparent. The OSA was passed without the 31 mandatory amendments required by a Supreme Court determination, and none of the amendments brought provisions in line with international laws and standards. OHCHR, the UN human rights office, reported in August that at least two criminal cases had already been filed against individuals and internet intermediaries.

In June a case was dropped against comedian Nathasha Edirisooriya. She had been arrested in May 2023 for making comments allegedly disrespectful of Buddhism during a stand-up comedy show.

The draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continued to be used against minorities, activists and critics of the government, despite the government pledging a moratorium on its use. According to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), between January 2023 and April 2024, authorities reported 46 cases of arrests and detention under the PTA.

The Anti-Terrorism Bill proposed in 2023 remained before Parliament. It seeks to grant broad powers to the police, the military and the executive, and creates new offences, such as seeking to make acts of civil disobedience a terror offence. The proposed offences are overly broad, vague and subjective, which make them ripe for arbitrary application and abuse. In July the government proposed a law to regulate NGOs. It provides broad discretion to authorities, including unlawful restrictions on the right to freedom of association.

Minority communities, particularly Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims in the Northern and Eastern provinces, reported continuing surveillance, intimidation and reprisals by the police and intelligence agencies. Families of the disappeared reported harassment, including late-night calls from state actors questioning them about their work and funding. Civil society members and journalists, particularly those working on land rights, enforced disappearances or with former combatants, were also subject to harassment and intimidation.

Parliament passed the Telecommunications Amendment Bill on 9 July, despite very little public consultation. Civil society and the Supreme Court raised concerns about the introduction of a vaguely defined offence related to telecommunications that could be used to infringe freedom of expression.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

The government launched the second phase of its abusive anti-drug initiative "Operation Yukthiya", despite reports from civil society of human rights violations and calls for the operation's cessation by the HRCSL and UN experts. Violations included arbitrary arrests, (predominantly of people from marginalized socio-economic groups) torture and other ill-treatment and the denial of due process and

fair trial rights. Between December 2023 and May 2024, 111,074 suspects were arrested; the police reported that 776 suspects were arrested in 780 raids on 6 August alone.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment by police and security forces remained a concern. A total of 2,845 cases of torture and 675 cases of degrading treatment were reported to the HRCSL between January 2023 and March 2024. Some reports of torture and other forms of ill-treatment by security forces were from Tamil people in the Northern province.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In May, police in the Eastern province arrested four Tamil people for serving "kanji" (rice porridge) ahead of a commemoration for people killed in the internal armed conflict. In August and September, courts in the cities of Trincomalee and Vavuniya respectively, issued orders preventing families of the disappeared from holding protests.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

On 22 August the government formally apologized for the implementation of the forced cremations policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had been contrary to Islamic beliefs.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 1 January the government gazetted a draft Bill for a new Commission for Truth, Unity and Reconciliation, which was later revised and re-published in August. Similarly, on 9 January the government passed the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation Act. Both pieces of legislation had been rejected by victims' groups and civil society due to the lack of meaningful consultation or trust-building efforts by the government. Recommendations from similar bodies went unimplemented. Groups cited the failure of domestic institutions, such as the Office for Reparations and the Office on Missing Persons, to achieve tangible results.

Mass graves continued to be discovered, most recently on 13 July at Colombo Port. However, almost no remains were identified and returned to families.

The HRCSL requested an independent investigation into a possible enforced disappearance of a man from Anuradhapura in March. No meaningful progress was evident in several high-profile cases of recent years and some suffered major setbacks. These included the killing of five Tamil students in Trincomalee in January 2006, the murder of Lasantha Wickrematunge in 2009, the enforced disappearance of Prageeth Eknaligoda in 2010, and prosecutions for the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings.

In October a resolution was passed at the UN Human Rights Council which extended the mandate of the OHCHR's Sri Lanka Accountability Project for only one year.[2]

The government opposed the OHCHR's role in evidence gathering, signalling a risk that deep-rooted impunity would continue. While the new government promised credible domestic systems, there has been no progress on these mechanisms so far.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In July, an amendment to the archaic Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, which governs the marriage and divorce of Sri Lankan Muslims, was sent to the Attorney General for approval. The Act has been criticized for its discriminatory provisions against women and girls, which permit child marriage and polygamy, among other issues. Civil society activists expressed concerns about the lack of transparency around amendments.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

On 9 May the government presented the Gender Equality Bill. Subsequently deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the Bill was required to be passed by a referendum or a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

The Private Members Bill to amend the Penal Code to repeal section 365 criminalizing same-sex sexual relations remained unadopted. Although originally presented in 2022, there was a continued lack of transparency around its status.

1. "Sri Lanka: Open Letter to the Government and Parliament of Sri Lanka on the Imminent Labour Law Reform", 27 May ↑
2. "Geneva: UN HRC resolution on Sri Lanka underscores continued need for international scrutiny", 10 October ↑

SUDAN

Republic of the Sudan

All parties to the conflict continued to commit serious violations and abuses of international human rights law, and violations of international humanitarian law, resulting in mass civilian casualties. States supplied weapons to the warring parties, including in Darfur, in violation of a UN Security Council arms embargo. Women and girls were subjected to widespread conflict-related sexual violence. Looting and destruction of civilian property violated economic, social and cultural rights. A near-total telecommunications blackout restricted the right to freedom of expression and the ability of humanitarian organizations to deliver aid. Impunity persisted for conflict-related violations and abuses. Millions of people were internally displaced or had sought refuge in neighbouring countries since April 2023 and lived in dire conditions. Egyptian authorities forcibly returned hundreds of Sudanese refugees to Sudan.

BACKGROUND

The armed conflict that erupted in April 2023 in the capital, Khartoum, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continued to spread to various parts of the country, including Gezira, Sennar and North Darfur states. During this period, armed groups and actors joined the conflict, aligning themselves either with the SAF or RSF.

Despite multiple political processes, fighting intensified throughout the year. The international community including the UN Security Council and the AU did not take adequate measures to protect civilians, end violations or disrupt the supply of weapons and other support to the warring sides.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Many civilians were caught in the crossfire as the SAF and RSF, along with other militias and armed groups, launched attacks in and from civilian populated areas, often using explosive weapons with wide-area effects. According to the UN by December, more than 27,000 people had been killed and over 33,000 injured since April 2023, the majority civilians, by air strikes, heavy artillery shelling, and ground attacks on their homes and villages.

Following the defection on 20 October to the SAF of Abu Aqla Keikel, a former RSF commander in Gezira state, the RSF launched retaliatory attacks on many towns and villages in eastern Gezira state, including Tamboul, Rufaa, Al-Hilaliya, Al-Seriha and Al-Uzibah. The RSF targeted people in their homes, in markets and on the streets. The UN reported that, between 20 and 26 October, at least 124 civilians were killed, dozens more were injured and about 119,400 were displaced from Gezira state; there were at least 25 cases of sexual violence reported in several villages in east Gezira.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

In September the UN Security Council extended for another year an arms embargo in place since 2004 which applies only to the Darfur region. It failed to expand the embargo to the rest of Sudan. The existing arms embargo had been poorly implemented and frequently violated and was wholly inadequate to meet the needs of the current crisis.

The conflict continued to be fuelled by an almost unimpeded supply of weapons and ammunition to Sudan, including to Darfur, by states and corporate actors around the world. States and various armed groups in Sudan used neighbouring countries as supply lines for weapons transfers into and around the country.[1]

Large quantities of recently manufactured weapons and military equipment from China, Russia, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates, among other countries, were imported into Sudan, and diverted or otherwise smuggled to Darfur where there was a substantial risk of them being used for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Some companies in Russia and Türkiye exported variants of small arms, typically sold to the civilian market, to arms dealers with strong links to the SAF. In addition, hundreds of thousands of blank guns (less lethal weapons) were exported to Sudan by companies in Türkiye along with millions of blank cartridges for likely conversion into lethal weapons.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Women and girls continued to be subjected to conflict-related sexual violence. The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan (FFM) found that sexual and gender-based violence, in particular rape and gang rape, was widespread across Sudan. It also found that RSF members perpetrated sexual violence on a large scale during attacks on cities in the Darfur region and in Greater Khartoum.

In many instances the RSF raped and gang-raped women and girls in front of their family members, particularly in the Darfur region and in Gezira state. In one case, on 27 May, three RSF soldiers gang-raped a woman in the South Thoura neighbourhood of El Fasher city, North Darfur, in front of her husband and five-year-old son.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The escalating conflict proved increasingly devastating for civilians.

Over 11 million people were internally displaced, of whom 8.6 million had been displaced since April 2023, making Sudan the scene of the largest displacement crisis worldwide. Increasing numbers of people were forced to flee their homes during the year, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Since April 2023, more than 3.2 million people had fled to neighbouring Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan, where they lived in dire conditions.

Egypt's Border Guard Forces and police, operating under the defence and interior ministries respectively, carried out mass arbitrary arrests and held women, men and children in cruel and inhuman conditions pending their forced return to Sudan. Between January and March, Egyptian authorities forcibly returned an estimated 800 Sudanese nationals in 12 incidents without conducting individualized assessments or granting them their right to claim international protection or challenge deportation decisions (see Egypt entry). These returns coincided with the spread of the conflict to Gezira and Sennar states, and other areas, forcing many returnees to flee again to Egypt or elsewhere.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The UN reported famine conditions in Zamzam IDP (internally displaced people) camp in North Darfur which hosted more than 400,000 people. Acute food insecurity reached record levels across Sudan, affecting 25.6 million people, more than half the population. This was exacerbated by rising food prices, especially in areas where famine conditions were reported. In El Fasher locality, prices of sorghum and millet had more than tripled since 2023, while wheat prices more than doubled.

The FFM reported that looting and destruction of property, mainly by the RSF and its allies, affected non-Arab communities, particularly the Masalit. The livelihoods of these communities were undermined as was civilian infrastructure, including shelters, food and water sources, health systems, water stations, and public offices and facilities. The FFM concluded that these acts violated the economic, social and cultural rights of the civilian population, particularly their rights to physical and mental health, and to food, water and housing.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

A near-total communication blackout following a telecommunications shutdown in early February restricted the right to freedom of expression and posed serious risks to the coordination of emergency assistance and humanitarian services to millions of people caught up in the conflict. According to the NGO Access Now, prior to the shutdown the RSF had gained control of internet service providers' data centres in Khartoum.

On 7 February the NGO Netblocks reported that Zain, the main mobile telephone operator, fell "largely offline". Internet disruptions continued throughout the year in many regions. The disruption left human rights monitors and defenders unable to document human rights abuses and violations.

Meanwhile, Sudanese people in the diaspora and those coordinating emergency responses on the ground were unable to send or transfer money to and within Sudan via mobile banking applications – one of the few remaining means of transferring funds. Sometimes, when money was transferred, recipients were unable to access the funds.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Impunity persisted for conflict-related violations and abuses. Three men facing ICC charges, including former president Omar al-Bashir, were yet to be handed over to the ICC for trial.

In August the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights passed a resolution to establish a joint fact-finding mission with the AU Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security into the human rights situation in Sudan and to publish its findings within three months. No findings or recommendations were released by the end of the year.

The FFM's first report, published in September, found that the SAF and RSF committed war crimes and that the RSF had also committed crimes against humanity. The report proposed recommendations for accountability and access to justice for victims, including: expanding the ICC's jurisdiction beyond Darfur to the entire country, establishing an international judicial mechanism, increasing the use by states of universal jurisdiction, and the establishment of a truth commission and a victim support and reparations office. In October a UN Human Rights Council resolution extended the FFM's mandate for another year.

1. *New Weapons Fuelling the Sudan Conflict*, 25 July 1

SWEDEN

Kingdom of Sweden

Legislative proposals imposed disproportionate restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly. International bodies criticized the inadequate protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights. The government continued to introduce criminal justice measures that risked systemic racial discrimination. A government proposal would require civil servants to report anyone without legal residency, including children. A new gender recognition act fell short on self-determination. Concerns persisted over effective access to justice for victims and survivors of rape.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Proposed amendments to the Public Order Act risked disproportionately restricting freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly. They included greater powers for the police to cancel planned demonstrations in advance and control the manner and content of demonstrations if deemed threatening to national security.

People demonstrating in solidarity with Palestinians faced harassment, violence and prosecution. Climate activists continued to face repression for carrying out acts of civil disobedience.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In February and March respectively, the Council of Europe and the UN's Committee

on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) criticized Sweden's inadequate protection of the rights of the Sámi People. The National Council for Crime Prevention noted that hate crimes against the Sámi occurred in a range of contexts, including through the killing of reindeer.

The Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the government's decision to grant a mining concession for the extraction of iron ore in Gállok in 2022 did not contravene Swedish law, despite earlier heavy criticism from the UN Special Rapporteurs on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and on the human right to a healthy environment, and CERD.

DISCRIMINATION

Despite criticism from the CESCR, the government continued to introduce measures that risked racially discriminatory policing and systemic racial discrimination, including legislation adopted in April on so-called "security zones". The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief strongly recommended that Sweden confront discriminatory anti-migrant and racist rhetoric that was marring politics and the media.

An investigation into risk-profiling in the automated state welfare system found discriminatory practices.[1]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

There were concerns that several legislative proposals initiated by the government with the aim of reducing the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants would result in breaches of multiple human rights, including non-discrimination, the right to a fair and secure asylum procedure and the right to family reunification.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

A gender recognition act, passed in April and entering into force in 2025, fell short of allowing legal gender recognition based on self-determination. Although the approval of the National Board of Health and Welfare is no longer needed to access gender-affirming genital surgery, a medical certificate is still required to legally change gender.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Concerns persisted over effective access to justice for victims and survivors of rape, who also continued to face difficulties in accessing psychological counselling, trauma care and social support.

1. "Sweden: Authorities must discontinue discriminatory AI systems used by welfare agency", 27 November ↑

SWITZERLAND

Swiss Confederation

The new Criminal Code definition of rape entered into force. A popular initiative was handed in to the federal government, seeking to strengthen constitutional protections for people with disabilities. Landmark rulings on racial profiling and on climate justice were delivered by the European Court of Human Rights. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly was threatened by new cantonal laws and restrictions at universities.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

On 1 July an amendment to the Criminal Code entered into force, recognizing that "sex against the will of another person" is rape, marking the end of the outdated definition of rape that required the use of physical force, threat or coercion, and considered only women as victims.[1]

In June, parliament amended the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act to better protect foreign victims of domestic violence.

DISCRIMINATION

In a landmark judgment by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on *Wa Baile v. Switzerland*, Switzerland was convicted of racial profiling in the searching and fining of a Black Swiss citizen.[2]

Parliament tasked the government with developing an action plan to combat racism and antisemitism.

In September the lower house of parliament voted to cut all future funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It asked the government to take steps within the UN to replace the agency entirely, reflecting the anti-Palestinian sentiment present in parliament. The upper house postponed a decision on the issue until 2025.

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In September, 108,000 Swiss citizens signed the "Inclusion Initiative" to enshrine equality for people with disabilities in the constitution. It was expected to be put to a popular vote within the next three years.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

The right to protest was restricted in several cantons. In March, residents of the canton of Zurich, rejecting an even more extreme proposal, voted for a law that would require prior authorization for public demonstrations and would instruct the police to charge the organizers of demonstrations for the cost of policing them. In April a draft law was proposed that would ban demonstrations in parts of Geneva city centre.

In May, academic institutions imposed restrictions on student protests in support of Palestinians, including bans, demands that the police disperse protests, and threatening and taking legal action against students. Politicians called for more restrictive laws to prevent future protests at universities and for the criminal prosecution of protesters. The start of the academic year saw renewed attempts at protests and events in support of Palestinian and Lebanese victims of Israeli attacks.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In April the ECtHR found a violation of Articles 6 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights in the landmark case of *KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland*. According to the ruling, Switzerland had failed to consider the best available science to limit global heating to 1.5°C, and had not effectively devised and enacted mitigation measures.[3] Parliament and the government criticized the judgment, claiming that Switzerland had already implemented sufficient measures and arguing that the ECtHR had overstepped its mandate.[4] Motions in parliament to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights were rejected. In spite of its objections, Switzerland submitted a national action plan to the Council of Europe on how to implement the court's ruling.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

New cases came to light of abuses against children, including physical violence, in federal asylum centres in 2023.[5] The government presented proposals to amend the law on family reunification, and a new law allowing for the detention of children in federal asylum centres without proper safeguards was pending in parliament.

1. "Switzerland: New sexual criminal law comes into force: An important step forward, but still not enough", 27 June (French and German only) ↑
2. "Switzerland: Mohamed Wa Baile wins ethnic profiling case as the European Court of Human Rights unanimously condemns racial discrimination", 4 March ↑
3. "Switzerland: Parliament must respect landmark climate case", 4 June ↑
4. "Europe: New Amnesty briefing analyzes landmark climate judgments of the European Court of Human Rights", 21 August ↑
5. "Switzerland: Federal asylum centres: Improve the protection of children's rights", 22 October (French and German only) ↑

SYRIA

Syrian Arab Republic

President Bashar al-Assad was ousted from power in December, following decades of rule by the al-Assad family characterized by repression and grave human rights violations, raising hopes for long overdue justice and reparation for victims. Throughout the year, all parties to the conflict and their allies conducted unlawful attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. President Assad's

government, Turkish border guards and factions of the Syrian National Army and the Syrian Democratic Forces were responsible for unlawful killings and torture and other ill-treatment. Tens of thousands of people remained arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared. More than 56,000 people continued to be subjected to human rights violations in the custody of the autonomous authorities in north-eastern Syria. Following the overthrow of President Assad's government, opposition groups freed detainees held in the former government's detention facilities across Syria. Many of the detainees had been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment; thousands more remained missing. Throughout the year, Syria's humanitarian situation remained bleak; millions were living in poverty and depended on humanitarian aid to survive.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the fall of President Bashar al-Assad's government in December, people in government-controlled areas faced deteriorating socio-economic conditions, violence and the risk of arbitrary detention. Between January and June in Sweida, a Druze-majority city in south-western Syria, people protested against the deteriorating economic conditions and demanded political reforms. Air strikes attributed to the Jordanian Air Force in border areas in Sweida, allegedly to counter drug and weapons smuggling, resulted in several casualties. Dara'a in south-western Syria witnessed multiple attacks by pro-government forces and opposition armed groups, resulting in civilian casualties, according to the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (CoI).

Israeli forces increased their military operations in Syria in the context of the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. On 1 April an Israeli air strike hit the Iranian consulate in the Syrian capital, Damascus. According to media reports, 16 people were killed, including several senior Iranian military advisers.

Between February and July, north-western Syria saw unprecedentedly large protests against the armed group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Protesters called for the release of political detainees, socio-economic reforms and the removal of HTS's leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa (also known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani).

In August a significant escalation in hostilities was reported in the Deir ez-Zor governorate in north-eastern Syria, killing at least 25 civilians, according to OCHA. The hostilities resulted in a dire humanitarian situation, with OCHA reporting shortages of water, food, medicine and other basic supplies.

On 8 December, opposition forces led by HTS seized Damascus, toppling President Assad's government and ending his family's five-decade rule of Syria.[1] Following President Assad's ousting, the Israeli military launched hundreds of air strikes in Syria, claiming it was targeting weapons stockpiles and military infrastructure abandoned by the former Syrian government's forces to ensure they did not fall into rebel hands. Israel also deployed troops across the border of the Israeli occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS

All parties to the conflict and their allies continued to conduct unlawful attacks on civilians and civilian objects in northern Syria, killing and injuring scores of civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure.

President Assad's government and Russia

In the first half of the year, President Assad's government, supported by Russia, continued to escalate attacks, begun in late 2023, on areas of north-western Syria under the control of armed opposition groups.

The CoI investigated 13 such attacks that caused civilian casualties – 12 by the Syrian army and one by Russian forces – and found that all likely violated international humanitarian law. The CoI found that some were likely direct attacks on civilians, such as an attack in the village of Kafr Nuran on 28 May in which government forces fired an anti-tank guided missile at an agricultural

vehicle, killing two children. Other attacks were likely indiscriminate, including a 1 April attack on the town of Sarmin using rocket fire that killed a woman and two girls and damaged homes, a school and a market.

The CoI and the Syrian Civil Defence (known as the White Helmets) accused the Syrian government of using cluster munitions in densely populated areas in the city of Idlib on 6 and 7 January.

As opposition groups began their advance to take territory held by President Assad's forces, the Syrian air force, supported by Russian government forces, intensified their air strikes on parts of northern Syria, especially Idlib and Aleppo governorates, killing and displacing civilians. According to OCHA, at least 75 civilians, including 28 children, were killed and 282 injured in north-western Syria between 26 November and 8 December.

Türkiye

Türkiye continued to conduct unlawful aerial attacks on civilians and civilian objects in north-eastern Syria, which remained under the control of the Kurdish-led Democratic Autonomous Administration for North and East Syria (DAANES), a staunch opponent of Türkiye and the Syrian National Army (SNA), a coalition of Türkiye-backed armed groups. After the overthrow of President Assad, Türkiye pushed its offensive against Kurdish groups in this area.

In January, NES NGO Forum, a coalition of international organizations, said that more than 1 million people were without electricity and more than 2 million people had limited access to safe water in north-eastern Syria. Türkiye conducted at least 345 air strikes on north-eastern Syria in the first half of the year, destroying dozens of facilities including health centres, power transfer stations and oil and gas fields, according to Synergy-Hevdesti, a victims' advocacy group.

In October, Turkish forces carried out military operations in northern and eastern Syria, in what they said was retaliation for an attack on the Kahramankazan facilities of Turkish Aerospace Industries in Türkiye's Ankara province. The armed wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the People's Defence Forces, claimed responsibility for the attack. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led armed group, said that the strikes by Türkiye in Syria killed 12 civilians, including two children, and wounded 25 people.

According to a journalists' association, on 19 December two journalists working for Kurdish media outlets were killed, reportedly by a Turkish drone, while reporting on the fighting between Türkiye-backed SNA factions and Kurdish groups. The next day, Kurdish forces said that a Turkish drone strike targeting a car in Hasakeh governorate killed three civilians.

Armed groups

Attacks by the armed group Islamic State increased significantly, according to the CoI.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS AND TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

President Assad's government

Between January and October, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented the arrest by Syrian authorities of at least 208 refugees forcibly deported from Lebanon. In six cases recorded by SNHR, returnees were subjected to torture upon their return and died in custody.

After the ousting of President Assad, Amnesty International researchers visited many of the former government's detention centres in Damascus, finding evidence of the torture that survivors had previously described. Recently freed detainees also described torture and other ill-treatment, extrajudicial executions and inhumane conditions of detention in these facilities.

Syrian National Army

Human Rights Watch documented atrocities including abductions, unlawful detentions, sexual violence and torture committed by various factions of the SNA. In March the CoI stated that SNA factions continued to arbitrarily detain civilians and subject some to torture and other ill-treatment in several detention facilities.

Syrian Democratic Forces

On 25 April the SDF arrested Khirou Ra'fat al-Shlash in Aleppo governorate. He was severely beaten, shot in the back and then taken to al-Maliya prison on charges of alleged ties with the Syrian government. On 27 April his family was informed of his death in custody. He had been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during his detention, according to SNHR.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

According to SNHR, at least 2,623 arbitrary detentions were documented during the year, the vast majority by Syrian government forces. Of these, 1,084 were subsequently classified as enforced disappearances.

President Assad's government

In December, opposition groups freed detainees held in the former government's detention facilities and prisons across Syria. According to SNHR, 24,200 detainees were released; a fraction of the more than 100,000 people thought to be missing in such facilities, prompting questions about the fate of those disappeared (see below, Right to truth, justice and reparation).

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

In Idlib governorate, HTS repressed freedom of expression by subjecting journalists, activists or anyone who criticized their rule to arbitrary detention without access to a lawyer or family members.

Syrian National Army

From January to June, Synergy-Hevdesti documented the arbitrary arrest of 338 individuals by SNA's factions in northern Syria. In July, they reported that 231 individuals remained forcibly disappeared in SNA prisons.

On 26 August, journalists Bakr al-Qassem and Nabiha Taha were detained by SNA military police at a checkpoint in al-Bab. Nabiha Taha was released later that day. Bakr al-Qassem was released on 2 September without charge.

Autonomous authorities / DAANES

The autonomous authorities in northern and eastern Syria were responsible for the large-scale violation of the rights of more than 56,000 people in their custody because of their perceived affiliation with Islamic State. Victims included an estimated 30,000 children, 14,500 women and 11,500 men held in at least 27 detention facilities and two detention camps – Al-Hol and Roj. Many had been detained since 2019.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

European countries continued to investigate and prosecute individuals suspected of committing crimes under international law in Syria through their national courts, including under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

For example, on 17 January, the French Supreme Court confirmed its ruling of September 2021 on charges of complicity in crimes against humanity and financing of terrorism against the French cement company Lafarge.

On 11 March the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland referred Rifaat al-Assad, uncle of Bashar al-Assad and a former military commander, to the Federal Criminal Court for trial on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Syrian city of Hama in 1982.

On 24 May the Paris Judicial Court sentenced in their absence senior Syrian officials Ali Mamlouk, Jamil Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud for complicity in crimes against humanity and one offence that constituted a war crime.

On 26 June the Paris Court of Appeal upheld arrest warrants issued against Bashar al-Assad, his brother Maher al-Assad and two senior Syrian military officials on charges of complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes for the use of banned chemical weapons against civilians in Ghouta and Douma in August 2013.

Following the ousting of President Assad, an Amnesty International researcher observed first-hand that official records in detention centres and prisons were left

largely unprotected, with significant portions looted, destroyed, or taken by members of the public including families of detainees and some journalists. Witnesses reported that, in some cases, security and intelligence personnel burned documents before they fled, while armed groups who took control of the facilities and newly freed detainees also burned and looted documents. The documents may contain vital information about the structure of the Syrian state's security and intelligence apparatus, the identity of perpetrators of crimes under international law, and details about detainees and their fates.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Syria's humanitarian situation remained bleak. In August the UN reported that 16.7 million people required humanitarian aid to survive – the highest number since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011. At least 90% of the population lived in poverty and 12.9 million were food insecure.

The Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria remained alarmingly underfunded, according to OCHA. As of December, only 33.4% of the USD 4.07 billion needed had been secured.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Shortly after the ousting of President Assad, at least 21 European countries announced that they would review their asylum practices, mostly by considering or enacting a suspension of pending asylum applications by Syrians.

At the end of the year, credible information about the security situation in Syria remained scarce. It remained unclear which armed groups controlled various towns and cities and how they intended to govern. Reported attacks in Syria by Israel, the USA and Türkiye, as well as fighting between armed groups, risked further endangering civilians. As a result, in December, Amnesty International called on European states to continue processing Syrian asylum claims and reject calls to return Syrians or restrict family reunification.[2]

OCCUPIED GOLAN HEIGHTS

The Golan Heights remained under Israel's occupation and illegal annexation. Following the ousting of President Assad, the Israeli military moved troops into the UN-defined demilitarized buffer zone.

The office of the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said its government had unanimously approved a USD 11 million plan to encourage demographic growth, signalling an expansion of illegal Israeli settlement in the Golan Heights.

On 26 July a rocket strike hit the town of Majdal Shams in the north of the Golan Heights, killing 12 children and young people from the Druze community.

1. "Syria: Historic opportunity to end and redress decades of grave human rights violations under President Assad must be seized", 8 December ↑
2. "Europe: Safety of Syrians in Europe must not be sacrificed to political interests", 10 December ↑

TAIWAN

Taiwan

A Constitutional Court ruling limited the use of the death penalty but upheld its retention. Anti-discrimination legislation was drafted but not adopted. Legal reforms granted greater recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights, but restrictions remained. Victims of a toxic chemical spill by a Taiwanese company remained uncompensated.

BACKGROUND

A bill to expand the powers of the legislature was adopted by parliament in May, despite mass protests. In October, the Constitutional Court ruled that many articles contained in the bill were unconstitutional.

DEATH PENALTY

A Constitutional Court ruling in September upheld the constitutionality of the death penalty but limited its use. The ruling

introduced new procedural safeguards and required existing safeguards to be more strictly observed in death penalty cases, including those involving defendants with mental disabilities.[1]

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Despite commitments under the 2022-2024 National Human Rights Action Plan, the government failed to progress legislation to establish an asylum system.

During the year, the authorities deported to third countries Chinese asylum seekers who were transiting in Taiwan. Individuals risked subsequent transfer from these countries to the People's Republic of China where they could be in danger of human rights violations.

Incidents of human trafficking were reported, and concerns about poor working and living conditions of migrant workers on fishing vessels persisted. In August the Fisheries Agency intervened in the case of nine Indonesian fishermen who had been working on a fishing vessel for 15 months without pay or access to Wi-Fi to enable contact with the outside world.[2]

DISCRIMINATION

In May, the government published a draft anti-discrimination act. This followed recommendations by the International Review Committee, the body responsible for reviewing Taiwan's implementation of the CERD, for the government to take measures to tackle systemic discrimination including by enshrining protections in law. The act had not been adopted by year's end.

Six separate administrative court decisions affirmed the right of transgender people to legally change their gender without undergoing surgery. In September, the government announced that same-sex marriages between partners from Taiwan and the People's Republic of China that take place in a third country will be recognized in Taiwan.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In March, the Supreme Court overturned the 2015 conviction of an Indigenous man, Wang Guanglu, for illegal hunting. However, laws limiting the hunting rights of Indigenous Peoples remained in place. In May an amendment to the Name Act removed the requirement for Indigenous Peoples to use Mandarin names, thereby allowing them to use only their Indigenous names in official documents.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

The government published draft Guidelines on Respecting Human Rights in Taiwanese Enterprises' Supply Chain and an updated draft National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. Neither of these included adequate measures to address the negative human rights impacts of businesses. In May, eight UN experts wrote to representatives of Formosa Plastic Corporation. They raised concern about its failure to compensate victims of a toxic chemical waste spill off the Viet Nam coast in 2016 by its subsidiary, Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, which destroyed the livelihoods of local fishing communities.

1. "Taiwan: Constitutional Court recognizes fundamental flaws in death penalty but fails to abolish it", 20 September ↑
2. "Taiwan, Trafficking - The Rights and Interests of Migrant Workers Are Not Secure", 28 August (Chinese only) ↑

TAJIKISTAN

Republic of Tajikistan

Persecution of all dissent continued, with activists, government critics and independent journalists, including those in exile, targeted through intimidation and politically motivated prosecutions. Rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly were suppressed. Discrimination against women and the Pamiri minority persisted. Domestic violence remained widespread. Torture and other ill-treatment continued to be pervasive. Food poverty affected the majority of children. The corporal punishment of children was

expressly banned. Road traffic, coal burning and construction caused high air pollution.

BACKGROUND

Economic difficulties escalated and were compounded by the Russian authorities' campaign to reduce the number of Tajikistani migrant workers – the source of significant remittances.

After border tensions with Kyrgyzstan in previous years, bilateral relations visibly improved allowing for successful negotiations and border demarcation.

Human rights information gathering, including by international organizations, remained greatly constrained.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

New arrests and closed trials were reported, including under politically motivated charges of terrorism and extremism against members of the arbitrarily banned opposition movement Group 24. Bilol Kurbonaliyev, who was deported from Germany in 2023, was given a 10-year sentence in February for alleged membership of Group 24. Sulaimon Jobirov was forcibly returned from Russia in April and by August he had been convicted and sentenced to six years' imprisonment on similar charges.

In June and July, several high-ranking politicians and former officials were detained for allegedly conspiring to "violently seize power". They included the former leader of the government-aligned Democratic Party of Tajikistan Saidjafar Usmonzoda, former foreign minister Khamrokhon Zarifi and former supreme council chairman Akbarsho Iskandarov, journalist and politician Akhmadshokh Komilzoda and politician Shokirjon Khakimov. The authorities had provided no proof of any conspiracy, let alone of any role played by the detainees in it, by year's end.

In January, reporting on her 2022 visit, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders called on the authorities to ensure the independence and impartiality of the judiciary and protect lawyers from retaliation and harassment.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In her January report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders called on the authorities to drop criminal charges and proceedings against those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. However, civil and political activists, lawyers, government critics and independent journalists, including those in exile, as well as their close relatives, continued to be targeted through intimidation and unfounded prosecution.

In January a court sentenced Shakhboz Sharifbek to five years' imprisonment for an online video in which he had complained about military officials who had drafted his brother and beaten his relatives.

In August, authorities arrested Akhmad Ibrohim, editor-in-chief of Paik magazine, accusing him of offering a bribe to an official so the media outlet would not be shut down. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a media watchdog, called for him to be released and the charges dropped.

Authorities continued reprisals against exiled opposition activists and other critics by targeting their families. In February, officials summoned the mother of exiled Pamiri journalist Anora Sarkorova and told her that her daughter and her son-in-law Rustam Joni, also a journalist, were under investigation for extremism-related offences, but that they could be amnestied if they returned and asked forgiveness.

In March the exiled opposition National Alliance reported that authorities had been pressuring families to tell their exiled relatives not to participate in protests abroad.

In June a new law prohibited wearing and promoting unspecified clothing that was "alien to national culture". The law also banned the celebration of *Idgardak*, a traditional children's holiday that authorities considered not in compliance with Islam.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In February a group of UN Special Rapporteurs sent a communication to the authorities, expressing concerns over the dissolution of 700 NGOs in the country in

recent years. The government did not make public its response and continued to close NGOs.

DISCRIMINATION

Persecution and systemic discrimination of the Pamiri minority continued, with their native Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast affected by further securitization and economic and population decline.[1]

By February, at least 222 Pamiris had been convicted in unfair, closed trials in connection with the violent dispersal of local protests in 2021.

In March the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called on Tajikistan to release immediately the imprisoned Pamiri human rights defenders Faromuz Irgashev, Manuchehr Kholiknazarov and Khursand Mamadshoev, considering their detention to be arbitrary.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In January the official list of occupations banned for women was reduced from 334 to 194, ostensibly due to "improved working conditions". In February the CEDAW Committee reiterated its call for the authorities to abolish the list altogether.

A joint report published in March by the International Partnership for Human Rights and three Tajikistani NGOs concluded that domestic violence remained pervasive while societal tolerance of it was increasing.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained widespread, while impunity prevailed.

In his annual report published in June, the Tajikistani Human Rights Commissioner focused on persistent prison overcrowding, including the failure to ensure 4m² of floor space per inmate, as mandated by national law, and the high incidence of HIV and tuberculosis.

Official complaints from inmates of being tortured remained infrequent, due to lack of trust in the system and well-documented reprisals.

In August, police claimed Damir Obidov had committed suicide two days after his arrest for alleged hooliganism. His family were not able to see him during his detention and were then denied permission to examine his body during a funeral organized by the authorities. An investigation was opened but no conclusions had been reported by year's end.

The health of wrongfully imprisoned Pamiri human rights defender Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov, serving a 16-year sentence, was reported to have deteriorated seriously. However, the authorities ignored international calls for his release and the provision of adequate medical treatment.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The new law on the education of children, enacted in June, expressly banned corporal punishment.

According to a UNICEF report published in June, 78% of Tajikistani children were living in food poverty from 2016 to 2022, including 34% in severe poverty, with very little improvement since 2012. Inadequate nutrition might endanger children's development and put their lives at risk.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In May, Tajikistan signed the UN Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action. However, the authorities did not encourage public participation in addressing climate and other environmental issues, meaning that climate policies did not necessarily meet the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. The lack of public participation also undermined Tajikistan's efforts to adapt to climate change.

Air pollution from road traffic, coal burning and construction in the capital city Dushanbe regularly and dangerously exceeded the WHO-recommended safe limit, according to the IQAir air quality platform.

1. *Tajikistan: Reprisals Against Pamiri Minority: Suppression of Local Identity, Clampdown on All Dissent,* 11 September 1

TANZANIA

United Republic of Tanzania

Four government critics were forcibly disappeared and one was killed. The police prevented opposition members from holding meetings and other political gatherings, subjecting them to mass arrest, arbitrary detention and unlawful force. Journalists and others were denied their right to freedom of expression. The government continued to violate the rights of the Maasai Indigenous People, including by subjecting them to forced eviction. A court ruling suspended plans that would have denied the Maasai rights to political participation and representation. The authorities failed to protect LGBTI people from violence. The launch of the second National Plan of Action to End Violence against Women and Children provided an opportunity to enhance the protection of women and girls. The East African Crude Oil Pipeline project undermined Tanzania's commitments to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

BACKGROUND

On 24 January the main opposition Party for Democracy and Progress (Chadema) held a major protest in the capital, Dar es Salaam; the first in almost eight years. It was attended by hundreds of supporters and members calling for constitutional and electoral reforms. In 2023, President Samia Suluhu Hassan had lifted a blanket ban on political rallies, imposed by her predecessor in 2016.

The Independent National Electoral Commission Act No 2 of 2024 was one of four election-related bills signed into law by the president on 2 April. This was in response to opposition leaders' calls for improvements in the effectiveness and transparency of electoral processes and other electoral reforms.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

The fate of four government critics subjected to enforced disappearance by suspected state agents remained unknown. Dioniz Kipanya, a Chadema party official, disappeared on 26 July when he left home following a telephone conversation with an unidentified person. Deusdedith Soka and Jacob Godwin Mlay, both Chadema youth activists, and Frank Mbise, a motorcycle taxi driver, were abducted by a group of men suspected to be police officers on 18 August.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

The body of Ali Mohamed Kibao, a senior Chadema member, was found on 8 September. Suspected security agents had abducted him from a bus on 6 September while he was travelling home to Tanga from Dar es Salaam. According to a post-mortem his body had been soaked in acid and bore signs of a beating.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

On 11 August, police arrested Chadema party members, including Tundu Lissu, vice chairperson and former presidential candidate, John Mnyika, secretary general, Joseph Mbilinyi, a central committee member, more than 500 youth supporters, and five journalists. They were arrested at, or on their way to, a meeting in Chadema's Nyasa office in Mbeya, in south-western Tanzania, ahead of International Youth Day on 12 August. They were accused of violating a ban on a youth conference and planning a violent demonstration. The next day, police arrested party leaders Freeman Mbowe and John Pambalu after they went to Mbeya in response to the arrests. All party leaders were released on bail on 13 August; the others were bailed in the following days.

On 13 September the police announced a ban on all Chadema protests and on 23 September arrested Freeman Mbowe, Tundu Lissu and six other party officials in Dar es Salaam before planned protests against killings and abductions of government critics. They were released on bail the same day. Three journalists from Mwananchi Communications Ltd and East Africa TV were arrested while covering protests and released unconditionally the same day.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 28 September, the National Arts Council (Basata), an official body, interrogated musician Emmanuel Elibariki (also known as Nay Wa Mitego). It accused him of releasing a record entitled "Nitasema" ("I shall speak") without a Basata licence; inciting violence by singing about state abductions; misleading the public by claiming that the president had failed in her development agenda; and defaming other countries by claiming in the song that there is no peace in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On 3 October the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) suspended for 30 days the digital platforms of Mwananchi, including The Citizen. TRCA claimed that the platforms had published material that disrupted "national unity and social peace" in connection with a video that expressed relatives' concerns about their missing or murdered relatives.

On 6 October the deputy minister of minerals warned international NGOs against "sneaking" into Tanzania to conduct human rights interviews. He was responding to a statement by OHCHR, the UN human rights office, concerning a Human Rights Watch report stating that six people were killed by police in clashes at North Mara mine between February and June. The remark was made during a meeting with the president, also chief executive, of the mining company Barrick.

On 9 October, TCRA filed a lawsuit against Jambo Online TV claiming it violated communications regulations by airing allegations from Tundu Lissu and journalist Erick Kabendera that government officials, aided by mobile telephone operator Tigo Tanzania, were involved in a plot to assassinate Tundu Lissu in 2017.

FORCED EVICTIONS

Eight members of the Indigenous Maasai People continued their legal battle against their forced eviction in June 2022 from 1,500km^2 (of a total 4,000km^2) of land in Ngorongoro district's Loliondo division. Their case was scheduled before the High Court in October, having been postponed in August when the government lawyer failed to attend the hearing. They were challenging Government Notice No 604 of 2022, issued by the president. The notice declared their village to be in the Pololeti Game Controlled Area and was a measure used to justify the forced evictions.

Meanwhile, in Ngorongoro division in the same district, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority (NCAA) continued to violate a 2023 High Court order that directed them to allow the Maasai access to a disputed area in Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) pending final determination. Among other things, the authorities impounded livestock belonging to the Maasai that wandered into the conservation area. The Maasai accused the NCAA of using laws inapplicable to the area and seizing livestock to pressure them to relocate from the NCA. The seizure by the authorities of the Maasai's livestock denied them their rights to fully participate in economic, social, political and cultural life.

In May, Ngotieti Kokoyo from Endulen, a village in Ngorongoro district, filed a case at the High Court challenging the illegal seizure of his livestock. The NCAA released his impounded livestock after he paid them a fine. The livestock was seized for crossing the Eyasi/Endamaga Gate, despite NCA laws and the 2023 High Court ruling (see above) that allow the animals to graze in the NCA.

In July the government seized more than 130 animals from a Maasai family in Endulen.

DISCRIMINATION

Indigenous Peoples

In September a government decision to dissolve several administrative areas, including in Ngorongoro district, was reversed after the High Court ruled to suspend the plans. If implemented, it would have barred more than 100,000 Maasais from political participation and representation during elections in November 2024 and October 2025.

LGBTI people

Violence, discrimination and crackdowns against LGBTI people continued. On 7 June, a transgender woman and activist, Mauzinde (also known as Hussein Abdala) was found abandoned in a forest in Zanzibar. Her ears had been severed and she had been beaten. The OHCHR said she was "tortured and sexually assaulted by 12 men" and called for "bold action to combat discrimination against #LGBTIQ+ people and other minorities".

LGBTI websites were frequently blocked, a measure that correlated with rising levels of discrimination and crackdowns against LGBTI people, according to the Open Observatory of Network Interference.

Persons with albinism

On 24 April, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities raised concerns over the government's "unwillingness to follow up on three petitions filed to the Committee concerning the mutilation of people with albinism and the lack of accountability for such abuses".

Women and girls

In May, Tanzania launched its second National Plan of Action to End Violence against Women and Children (2024/2025-2028/2029) which provided the government with an opportunity to recommit itself to the protection of women and children.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

An appeal filed by four East African NGOs in relation to the construction of the 1,443km-long underground fossil fuel pipeline project by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) Ltd went to hearing in February at the East African Court of Justice (EACJ). It was prompted by an earlier EACJ decision that the NGOs' case was inadmissible.

EACOP Ltd, funded by French carbon major Total Energies, entered a land lease agreement with the Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation following the completion of a process of land acquisition and compensation for affected local communities. The pipeline, which risks causing serious environmental degradation, will transport oil from Uganda to Tanga Port in Tanzania where it will be sold onwards to international markets (see Uganda entry). Its construction led to displacements. The pipeline project is contrary to Tanzania's NDC commitments and its Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy, currently in development.

THAILAND

Kingdom of Thailand

Parliament passed a law to legalize marriage equality for LGBTI couples. Authorities continued the crackdown on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Peaceful protesters and government critics were prosecuted and a leading pro-democracy political party banned. Women and LGBTI human rights defenders were targeted for surveillance and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Impunity was further entrenched by the expiry of the statute of limitations in the emblematic case of unlawful killings in 2004 in Tak Bai district. The rights of Indigenous Peoples were threatened by a proposed law on climate change.

BACKGROUND

In August, the Constitutional Court ordered the dismissal of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and his cabinet for "a serious violation of or failure to comply with ethical standards". The order followed the appointment to the cabinet by the Prime Minister of an individual who was previously imprisoned in relation to allegations of bribery.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

On 18 June, lawmakers passed the Marriage Equality Act making Thailand the first country in South-East Asia to legalize marriage for LGBTI couples.[1]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Authorities continued the crackdown on peaceful protesters and government critics. Trials of people charged in relation to the overwhelmingly peaceful pro-democracy protests that took place between 2020 and 2023 continued. At least 22 people faced new charges during the year for their online and offline political activism. The trials of 1,256 people were ongoing at year's end. Most were charged with lese-majesty (defaming, insulting or threatening the monarch), sedition under the Criminal Code, provisions of the Computer Crimes Act, and an emergency decree banning public gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic (which was lifted in late 2022).

At least 33 people remained in detention at year's end, including one person in juvenile detention. They had been found guilty of or awaiting trial on protest-related charges or for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

According to local NGO Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), at least 1,960 people had been charged since 2020 in relation to their participation in protests, or for otherwise criticizing the government.

In January, an appeals court sentenced political activist Mongkol Thirakhot to 22 years in prison for lese-majesty, adding to the 28 years' imprisonment handed down to him by a lower court in 2023 for the same crime. In March, three UN experts wrote to the government to raise concern that the lengthy prison sentence, the longest ever imposed for lese-majesty, appeared to be in retaliation for Mongkol Thirakhot's political activism and his criticism of the monarchy. Nevertheless, in September the Court of Appeal sentenced him to an additional four years and six months' imprisonment, also for lese-majesty.

On 14 May, pro-democracy activist Netiporn "Bung" Sanesangkhom died in a prison hospital following a 110-day hunger strike in protest against her arbitrary detention and that of others. The 28-year-old was charged with lese-majesty and sedition in 2022 for conducting an opinion poll about road traffic controls imposed during royal motorcades. Netiporn Sanesangkhom's trial was ongoing at time of her death.[2]

Prominent human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa was found guilty by the Bangkok Criminal Court of lese-majesty in five separate trials during the year. He was sentenced to 14 years and eight months' imprisonment, adding to the four years and two months which he was already serving for previous convictions of lese-majesty. Arnon Nampa faced another 37 lese-majesty and other charges relating to his political activity.

On 7 August, the Constitutional Court ordered the dissolution of the pro-democracy Move Forward Party and banned 11 of its executives from running for political office. The Court found that the party's campaign to reform the lese-majesty law posed a threat to Thailand's constitutional monarchy.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders faced intimidation and unlawful surveillance. Amnesty International research revealed patterns of technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women and LGBTI human rights defenders, including targeted digital surveillance and online harassment, by state officials and non-state actors.[3]

In June, five UN experts wrote to the government expressing concern about surveillance by Internal Security Operations Command agents of human rights defenders Angkhana Neelapaijit and Pranom Somwong. The concern related to an event in March to commemorate victims of enforced disappearance.

In November, the Bangkok Civil Court dismissed a case brought by pro-democracy activist Jatupat Boonpattararaksa against NSO Group Technologies for its failure to prevent its Pegasus spyware being used to hack his mobile phone.[4] The court found insufficient evidence to prove that Jatupat Boonpattararaksa's mobile phone was infected with the spyware, contrary to the findings of forensic investigations by the research institute Citizen Lab and Amnesty International.[5]

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

On 25 June, Roning Dolah was shot and killed by two unidentified men in Yarang district, in the southern province of Pattani. Roning Dolah worked for an NGO supporting victims of torture.[6] There was no progress in investigations into his killing by the end of the year.

IMPUNITY

Authorities failed to present suspects for trial in the "Tak Bai" case before the statute of limitations expired on 25 October. Eighty-five people died during and after protests in Tak Bai district, Narathiwat province in 2004. Arrest warrants had been issued earlier in October 2024 against 15 officials, including military, police and administrative officers. The failure to bring the case to trial risked further entrenching impunity.[7]

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In November, the UN Committee against Torture launched its concluding observations on Thailand's second periodic report. It expressed concerns about the inconsistency of provisions under the 2022 Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act with international standards. The Committee also raised concerns about excessive use of force against peaceful protesters, as well as physical and digital violence against human rights defenders.

In February, eight UN experts wrote to the government to raise concerns that detention conditions of 43 ethnic Uyghur asylum seekers in Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or possibly torture. The 43 were among a group of Uyghurs from China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region who had been detained since they arrived in Thailand in 2014. At least five of the detainees, including two children, were reported to have died since then.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

There were concerns about the role of Thai authorities in identifying and forcibly repatriating Montagnard refugees to Viet Nam where they were at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. On 11 June, Thai police arrested Y Quynh Bdap, a Montagnard human rights defender, from his home in the capital, Bangkok, following a request for his extradition by the Vietnamese authorities. In January, Y Quynh Bdap, a UNHCR-recognized refugee, was found guilty of terrorism in his absence by a court in Viet Nam.[8] He remained in detention in Thailand at year's end.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In February, the government began public consultations on the Climate Change Bill which set out legally binding measures to achieve Thailand's climate goals under the Paris Agreement. Civil society groups opposed the bill, including because it would enable polluting businesses to buy carbon credits in reforestation or conservation projects. There were fears this could lead to forced evictions of Indigenous and other communities living in areas designated for such projects. The law had not been adopted by year's end.

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1. "Thailand: Passing of marriage equality bill a triumphant moment for LGBTI rights", 18 June ↑
2. "Thailand: Tragic death of detained activist must be 'wake-up call'", 14 May ↑
3. *Thailand: "Being ourselves is too dangerous": Digital violence and the silencing of women and LGBTI activists in Thailand*, 16 May ↑
4. *Thailand: Amicus curiae submitted by Amnesty International to the Bangkok Civil Court in the case of Jatupat Boonpattararaksa vs. NSO Group Technologies Ltd, 3 September* ↑
5. "Thailand: Dismissal of landmark case a critical and alarming setback in fight against unlawful use of spyware", 21 November ↑
6. "Thailand: Killing of Malay Muslim human rights defender must be investigated", 26 June ↑
7. "Thailand: Authorities must urgently enforce arrest warrants for Tak Bai suspects", 18 October ↑
8. "Thailand: Montagnard Indigenous activist must not be extradited to face torture in Viet Nam", 10 July ↑

TOGO

Republic of Togo

The authorities brutally repressed the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Multiple protests against changes to the constitution were unduly banned. Newspapers were suspended and political activists and members of NGOs were arbitrarily arrested. Measures were taken to improve healthcare provision.

BACKGROUND

On 19 April the parliament adopted a new constitution transforming the presidential system into a parliamentary one, sparking fears that it was designed to keep President Gnassingbe – already in his fourth term – in power. A state of emergency was maintained in the northern Savanes region, neighbouring Burkina Faso, where attacks by armed groups continued.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Reporters Without Borders revealed in January that Togolese authorities had repeatedly used spyware on the mobile phones of two journalists who were charged with defamation.

Journalist Apollinaire Mewenemesse, editor-in-chief of *La Dépêche* newspaper, was arrested and detained on 26 March after publishing an article that raised questions about the assassination of an army officer in 2020. On 9 April a court in the capital, Lomé released him provisionally, placing him under judicial supervision and confiscating his passport. He was charged with seven counts, including "conceiving and publishing false news with the aim of inciting the population or the army to rise up against the State" and "undermining the honour, dignity and consideration of the President of the Republic".

On 15 April the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC) suspended the accreditations of all foreign journalists for the coverage of the April legislative and regional elections, citing "problems" linked to the arrival of one French journalist and "serious failings" in political reporting about Togo by French media. The journalist was deported the following day after receiving a six-month suspended prison sentence for "illegal entry" into Togo.

In May, two young people received six-month suspended prison sentences for posting on TikTok to express concern over the change to the constitution.

Also in May the HAAC threatened to suspend Radio France Internationale (RFI) from broadcasting due to "unfair treatment of information and broadcasting of false news about Togo." In June the French news channel France 24 received a "final warning" on the same grounds after it reported on staff shortages and other problems at the Sylvanus Olympio University Hospital Center in Lomé.

In July the HAAC suspended the "Auditeur-Actualité" programme on Victoire FM radio for three months after comments made by lawyer and politician François Boko, vice-president of the Freedom Togo-MLN movement, about the security situation in the country.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTION

In April, nine members of the opposition coalition Dynamique Monseigneur Kpodzro (DMK) were arbitrarily arrested on charges of "aggravated disturbance of public order". Four had been about to carry out a publicity action in protest at the constitutional change. The other five were attending a political meeting at the home of a DMK activist. They were all released on 9 April by a Lomé court.

In September, four members of the international NGO Tournons La Page ("Let's Turn the Page"), who had represented Togo and Benin at the third West African Citizens' Summit on good governance, alternation and democracy held in Ghana, were arrested on their return to Lomé by plainclothes men claiming to be from the gendarmerie. They were taken to an unknown location but freed hours later without charge.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

On 27 March, at least three planned press conferences and meetings bringing together political parties and civil society organizations to discuss their concerns over the constitutional change were banned in Lomé and Tsévié and dispersed by security forces. The Ministry of Territorial Administration banned three demonstrations against the reforms planned for 11, 12 and 13 April. The same ministry sent a letter to two representatives of the DMK coalition notifying them that their planned sit-in on 25 April was banned on the grounds that the request had been "signed by two people instead of three".[1]

In September the Ministry of Territorial Administration banned a gathering by the campaign coalition "Don't Touch my Constitution" in support of detainees, citing public order concerns.

Also in September a conference organized by the opposition African Peoples' Democratic Convention and attended by a Senegalese member of the ECOWAS parliament was violently disrupted by a group of people throwing objects at the audience and podium. According to witnesses, security forces who were present failed to intervene.[2]

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled in July that Togo must pay damages to teachers unduly dismissed or suspended in 2022 for taking part in strike action.

Right to health

Some 60 health centres redeveloped or built in Savanes region were officially operational in January. The authorities recruited at least 2,500 health professionals. They also awarded a special bonus to paramedical staff in June following a broadcast by France 24 on problems in the maternal health department of Lomé University Hospital.

1. "Togo: Elections against a backdrop of muzzling dissenting voices", 29 April ↑
2. "Togo: Security forces' failure to protect participants at opposition party conference must be investigated", 3 October ↑

TUNISIA

Republic of Tunisia

Authorities escalated their crackdown on freedom of expression and all forms of dissent, using repressive laws and unfounded charges to prosecute and arbitrarily detain political opponents, journalists, trade unionists, human rights defenders, lawyers and critics. Prior to the October presidential election, authorities intensified their harassment of political opponents, imposed further restrictions on the work of journalists, human rights defenders and NGOs, and took steps to further undermine judicial independence and the rule of law. Authorities increased interceptions at sea and conducted unlawful collective mass expulsions of thousands of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to the borders with Algeria and Libya. Authorities initiated investigations against at least 14 civil society organizations working on refugees' and migrants' rights, undermining foreign nationals' access to asylum procedures and essential services. LGBTI people faced arbitrary arrests and prosecution.

BACKGROUND

The first elections of the National Council of Regions and Districts took place on 28-29 March resulting in the election of 77 members of the upper house of Parliament.

President Kais Saied was re-elected for a second term on 6 October with 90.69% of the vote, on a turnout of 28%. Most genuine opposition candidates were excluded from running for president through bureaucratic obstacles, judicial harassment or arbitrary detention. Despite the administrative court issuing a decision to reinstate three opposition candidates in the presidential election, the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) refused to implement the

decision and only approved three candidates including President Saied.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

Secretary-general of the opposition Ennahdha party, Ajmi Lourimi, and two other party members were arrested on 13 July during a routine police check and remained arbitrarily detained without charge at the end of the year.

Human rights defender and former president of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD), Sihem Bensedrine, was arrested and detained on 1 August under charges of "fraud" and "abuse of official capacity" for allegedly falsifying a report denouncing corruption in the banking sector. Her prosecution appeared to be in retaliation for her role in exposing human rights violations as head of the IVD.

Other high-profile opposition figures remained in pretrial detention or were serving prison sentences in relation to politically motivated charges including "terrorism" and "conspiracy against state security". In the so-called "conspiracy case", six opposition politicians arrested in February 2023 remained in arbitrary detention charged with "conspiracy against state security" beyond the expiration in April of their pretrial detention period according to national law.

Opposition party leader Abir Moussi was sentenced on 5 August to two years' imprisonment under Decree-Law 54 on Cybercrimes following a complaint filed against her by the ISIE after she criticized the legislative elections process of 2023. She had been arbitrarily detained since 3 October 2023 in a separate case under charges of "spreading false news" and "attempting to change the form of government" under Decree-Law 54 and Article 72 of the Penal Code in relation to the exercise of her freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

On 18 October the Criminal Chamber of the Court of First Instance in the capital, Tunis, sentenced the Ennahda leader and former minister of justice, Noureddine Bhiri, to 10 years in prison for a social media post which he denied writing. He was convicted of "trying to change the form of the government and inciting people against each other" under Article 72 of the Penal Code. He had been arbitrarily detained since February 2023.

In the run-up to the presidential elections, authorities increased their crackdown against opposition groups and political opponents. At least 97 members of Ennahda were arrested between 12 and 13 September.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In January the Monsatir Court of Appeals confirmed the sentencing of artist Rached Tamboura to two years' imprisonment for graffiti denouncing President Saied's racist remarks about sub-Saharan refugees and migrants. Rached Tamboura was convicted of "committing an offensive act against the president" under Article 67 of the Penal Code and "producing and promoting false news" under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54 on Cybercrimes.

On 11 May security forces arbitrarily arrested lawyer and media figure Sonia Dahmani. On 6 July she was sentenced to one year in prison under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54 for her critical comments on the situation facing migrants in Tunisia. On 10 September the Tunis Court of Appeals reduced her sentence to eight months' imprisonment. On 24 October the Tunis Court of First Instance convicted and sentenced her to two years' imprisonment in a separate case under Decree-Law 54. Her prosecution and conviction were based on remarks she made on television denouncing racism against Black people in Tunisia.

On 11 May, security forces arrested and detained journalists Mourad Zeghidi and Borhen Bsaies. On 22 May the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced both men to one year in prison under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54 for "intentionally using communication systems to produce and promote false news to harm public security or national defence or spread terror" solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. In July the Tunis Court of Appeals reduced their sentences to eight months' imprisonment.

In June the Tunis Court of Appeals overturned the initial acquittal of lawyer Abdelaziz Essid and convicted and sentenced him to a nine-month suspended prison sentence for "offending others through telecommunications networks" and "accusing public officials of illegal acts without proof," under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code and Article 128 of the Criminal Code respectively. The charges were based on a complaint by the minister of justice over claims made by Abdelaziz Essid that authorities tampered with his clients' case file.

The Electoral Commission filed criminal complaints against political opposition members and critics under Decree-Law 54 for "spreading false information." According to the National Union of Tunisian Journalists, four private radio stations received written warnings from the Electoral Commission between July and September relating to reports and comments aired on their stations about the electoral process.

Tunisian authorities banned the distribution in Tunisia of the September issue of the magazine Jeune Afrique, which featured an article criticizing President Saied.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

President Saied continued to publicly accuse civil society organizations of corruption and interfering in Tunisia's internal affairs, often referring to organizations' receipt of foreign funding.

In May, authorities intimidated, arrested, summoned and investigated representatives, former staff and members of at least 14 organizations defending the rights of and providing essential services to refugees and migrants. They faced vague accusations including "financial crimes" and "helping undocumented migrants". At the end of the year, at least six organizations remained under investigation and seven individuals were in pretrial detention.

On 14 May, Prime Minister Ahmed Hachani announced that a new draft law on associations would be submitted for approval to the next ministerial council, amid concerns over the authorities' plans to introduce draconian legislation further stifling civil society.

On 9 September the ISIE denied requests for accreditation for election monitoring from two Tunisian NGOs, IWatch and Mourakiboun, stating that the decision related to the organizations receiving "suspicious foreign funding".

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Authorities repeatedly used baseless "obstruction" charges, a provision lacking legal clarity, to arbitrarily detain, prosecute and convict individuals simply for exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, including the rights to form and join a union and to organize and participate in a strike.

On 20 June, police in the city of Tabarka summoned environmental and human rights defender Rania Mechergui for questioning in relation to a peaceful protest held on 11 June to demand access to water. Between 12 and 16 August, police in the L'Aouina neighbourhood of Tunis summoned for questioning 23 trades unionists and workers in relation to a series of peaceful demonstrations organized between 5 June and 9 August. The demonstrations related to workers' status, salaries and access to social security.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

According to the Tunisian Judges' Association, the minister of justice ordered the appointment, transfer or suspension of at least 105 judges and prosecutors through executive memoranda without due process between August 2023 and June 2024.

Judges and prosecutors who had been summarily dismissed by presidential decree in June 2022 continued to be denied reparation and to suffer professional, economic and reputational harm. No judicial action was taken following individual complaints filed on 23 January 2023 by 37 of the dismissed judges against the minister of justice. The complaints contested the minister's failure to implement a court order to reinstate 49 of the 57 dismissed judges and prosecutors.

Lawyers representing members of political opposition groups were targeted with criminal investigations under bogus charges such as "offending others" and "spreading false information".

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Human rights violations against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees increased in frequency and severity, most notably against those who were Black and from sub-Saharan Africa. Xenophobic and racist public advocacy of hatred, including by officials, continued to be widespread.

Life-threatening collective and summary expulsions of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to neighbouring Algeria and Libya remained routine, violating the principle of non-refoulement and leaving people in deserted areas without access to food or water. These expulsions often followed violent or reckless interceptions at sea by Tunisian authorities, or racially targeted and arbitrary arrests. Between June 2023 and May 2024, authorities collectively expelled at least 10,000 migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to Algeria and Libya, including children and pregnant women.

Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees reported torture and other ill-treatment, including rape, violent or abusive body searches, beatings and detention under cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions by Tunisian security forces.

Authorities also carried out multiple forced evictions using unnecessary and disproportionate force and arrested and convicted landlords for housing people who were undocumented. According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, arrests and investigations launched against human rights defenders and organizations working with refugees and migrants from May onwards critically disrupted access to asylum procedures and essential services.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI groups reported an increase in prosecutions for consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults under Article 230 of the Penal Code as well as other articles pertaining to "good morals" or "public decency". The authorities carried out anal examinations on men accused of engaging in same-sex sexual relations, a practice that amounts to torture. At least 41 trials of gay and trans people began during the year across Tunisia. Between 26 September and 2 October at least 27 LGBTI people were arrested in Tunis, Sousse and Hammamet.

Authorities harassed queer activists and members and staff of LGBTI rights associations. On 18 September, trans activist Mira Ben Salah, coordinator at the association DAMJ, received a summons to appear on 10 October before the criminal police brigade in Sfax without any further information. Police investigations were subsequently opened against four activists from other LGBTI rights associations, who also received summonses for questioning at different judicial brigades.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The political participation of women continued to decline, with only 10 women elected in March to the 77-member upper house of parliament.

Women's rights groups continued to denounce the culture of impunity for violence against women and the lack of effective implementation of Law 58 of 2017 to protect women from gender-based violence. At least 15 femicides were reported by women's rights organizations between January and August.

The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women recorded a rise in requests for assistance from women facing online violence. UN Women documented that 19% of women in Tunisia had faced online violence.

RIGHT TO FOOD

According to the National Institute of Statistics, the cost of food in Tunisia increased by 9.2% between January and September. Shortages of staple foods continued. Authorities were not transparent about the causes of the persistent shortages or their policies to address the problem.

TÜRKIYE

Republic of Türkiye

The executive's interference with the judiciary deepened. Binding Constitutional Court rulings were ignored despite jurisprudence, and European Court of Human Rights judgments were not implemented in several emblematic cases. Baseless investigations, prosecutions and convictions of human rights defenders, journalists, opposition politicians and others persisted. The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association were unlawfully restricted. Violence against women and girls remained widespread. The country continued to host large numbers of refugees and migrants; some remained at risk of unlawful return. Victims of human rights violations by state officials continued to face a culture of impunity. Türkiye's overall climate policies were assessed as "critically insufficient".

BACKGROUND

Türkiye faced a growing cost of living crisis with general inflation running at over 44% and food inflation over 43% by the end of year.

Local elections saw the main opposition party achieving significant gains while in some districts the official election results were flouted by officials, resulting in mass protests. Similar widespread demonstrations were sparked when the Ministry of Interior dismissed elected mayors in a number of provinces and districts, on terrorism-related charges, and appointed trustees from the ruling party in their place.

Several attacks by armed groups took place, in which a total of seven people and four attackers were killed at Santa Maria Church, outside the Istanbul Justice Palace in Istanbul province, and at the Kahramankazan facilities of Turkish Aerospace Industries in Ankara province.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

The authorities continued to ignore binding court rulings on fair trial issues.

In January, imprisoned human rights defender Osman Kavala submitted a new application to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning continuing and fresh violations of the European Convention on Human Rights since the Court's 2019 ruling to release him. This ruling remained unimplemented despite infringement proceedings against Türkiye initiated by the Council of Europe in 2022. Two Constitutional Court applications challenging Osman Kavala's 2022 conviction, and the Court of Cassation's 2023 decision upholding his conviction, remained pending.

Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, the former leaders of the People's Democratic Party, also remained in prison.

Lawyer and prisoner of conscience Can Atalay remained in prison with his status as an MP revoked despite three consecutive Constitutional Court decisions to release him.

New legislation commonly known as the "8th Judicial Package" adopted in March failed to adequately implement the Constitutional Court ruling on Article 220/6 of the Turkish Penal Code ("committing a crime in the name of an organization"). This ruling found the provision unconstitutional as it violated the principle of legality to prevent arbitrary applications by the authorities.[1]

In September, Yüksel Yalçınkaya, a teacher who had first been found guilty of "membership of an armed terrorist organization" in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt, was retried and again convicted. The retrial failed to consider the 2023 ECtHR judgment that found violations of the rights to a fair trial, no punishment without law, and freedom of assembly and association. Yüksel Yalçınkaya's appeal against the decision was pending at year's end.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

In response to the armed attack outside the Istanbul Justice Palace in February, the authorities carried out raids in which 96

people, including four lawyers from the People's Law Bureau, were arbitrarily detained in Istanbul.[2] Three of the four lawyers, Didem Baydar Ünsal, Seda Şaraldı and Betül Vangölü Kozağaçlı, were indicted for alleged "membership of an armed terrorist organization" without any evidence of their involvement in that crime. Didem Baydar Ünsal was released in June pending trial, while the other two lawyers remained in prison at year's end.

In May, 24 Kurdish politicians were sentenced to between nine and 42 years' imprisonment on politically trumped-up charges, including "membership of an armed terrorist organization", in the so-called Kobani trial. This centred on social media posts and speeches by the politicians calling on their supporters to protest the siege of Kobani by the Islamic State in Syria in October 2014. Twelve others were acquitted.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In July the Beyoğlu district governorate banned an exhibition entitled "Turn and Look Back: Revisiting Trans Revolutions in Turkey", organized by the 10th Trans Pride Week Exhibition Collective. Depo, the venue where the exhibition was held, launched a legal challenge to overturn the ban.

In October the Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) cancelled the terrestrial broadcast licence of Açık Radyo, an independent radio station based in Istanbul. RTÜK had previously issued an administrative fine and ordered the station to suspend its morning news programme for five days because of a guest's comments referring to the "Armenian Genocide" during the show aired on 24 April, the date the 1915 massacres of Armenians is marked each year. Açık Radyo had paid the fine but had not adhered to the five-day broadcast suspension. At year's end, the station's legal challenge to the decision was pending.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In January the Istanbul regional appeals court overturned a decision by the Istanbul and Beyoğlu district governorates to ban the 8 March 2022 Feminist Night March. It ruled that the ban violated the right to peaceful assembly, which includes the right of the organizers to choose the location that best serves the purpose of the protest.

Authorities announced a two-week blanket ban on protests in the cities of Van and Bitlis after the decision to overturn the election of the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party candidate for Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Van in April. In Van, 264 people, including 10 lawyers and 15 children were detained, and 27 people were arbitrarily remanded in pretrial detention, on charges including "membership of an armed terrorist organization".

Authorities banned the May Day solidarity demonstration in Istanbul's Taksim Square, preventing people from gathering and detaining at least 82 people. This was despite the 2023 Constitutional Court ruling that the bans and forceful dispersals of protesters by law enforcement officials during the 2014 and 2015 May Day celebrations had violated the right to peaceful assembly of the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Trade Unions.[3]

The Saturday Mothers/People, a group of human rights defenders including relatives of victims of enforced disappearances, continued to face restrictions on their weekly vigils. These included limiting the number of participants to 10. The restrictions were lifted only for the group's 1,000th vigil in May. In October a first instance court acquitted 20 members of the group who had been arbitrarily detained and prosecuted for "violating the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations" during the 950th vigil.

Türkiye continued to unlawfully ban LGBTI pride marches and law enforcement officials used excessive force against protesters. A total of 27 people were arbitrarily detained during the pride marches in Istanbul, Antalya and Eskişehir.[4]

Mass protests in solidarity with Palestinians took place across the country, largely free of undue restrictions. However, law enforcement officials prevented protests calling on the Turkish authorities to end trade with Israel. On 6 April, law enforcement

officials used unlawful force and arbitrarily detained 43 members of the Youth Movement for Free Palestine, which had organized a protest in front of the Provincial Directorate of Trade in Istanbul, for "violating the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations". On 29 November, nine people were arbitrarily detained and held in pretrial detention for 10 days on the same charge, as well as for allegedly "insulting the president". They were detained after a peaceful protest during the TRT World Forum where President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke at the Istanbul Congress Center.

The Istanbul governorship banned a night march to commemorate the 25 November International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Law enforcement officials used unnecessary force against those who gathered despite the ban, and arbitrarily detained at least 169 people, including two protest observers, three foreign citizens and bystanders.

On 21 December, authorities prevented journalists and others from reading out a press statement in Istanbul after the reports of a drone strike attack killing two Kurdish journalists from Türkiye in north-east Syria. Nine people including seven journalists were remanded in pretrial detention for allegedly "making propaganda for a terrorist organization."[5]

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In June the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) removed Türkiye from the "grey list" for being largely compliant with its recommendations to combat terrorism financing and money laundering. However, non-profit organizations continued to face disproportionate sanctions and intensified audits under Law no.7262 adopted in 2020 to comply with FATF recommendations.

In February Istanbul Heavy Penal Court No. 26 acquitted 24 members of the Migration Monitoring Association, prosecuted for "membership of an armed terrorist organization". In December, Bakırköy Civil Court of First Instance No. 15 ruled to close the organization for allegedly "operating in line with the goals and objectives of an armed terrorist organization". The decision by the Minister of Treasury and Finance and the Minister of Interior to freeze the association's assets for alleged connections to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), under the Prevention of the Financing of Terrorism Law (Law No. 6415), was published in the Official Gazette in August. The organization appealed both decisions.

In October the Beyoğlu district governorate sealed the office of the Tarlabaşı Community Center (TTM), a civil society organization supporting marginalized people in the neighbourhood for "operating without a licence". Separate administrative proceedings to close the TTM continued. However, the Istanbul Civil Court of Peace No. 8 ruled in favour of the TTM in a case initiated by the Governorate of Istanbul which sought to have the organization declared defunct.

A new penalty under the espionage laws, criminalizing acts that are "against the security or domestic or foreign political interests of the State in line with the strategic interests or instructions of a foreign state or organization", was included in a legislative package in October but subsequently withdrawn because of widespread opposition. The proposed law was overly broad and vague and would have undermined civil society.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The retrial of Hakan Altınay, Yiğit Ekmekçi and Mücella Yapıcı on charges under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations continued. This followed a ruling in 2023 by the Court of Cassation which overturned their 2022 convictions for "assisting in the attempted overthrow of the government" in connection with the Gezi Park protests of 2013.

In October, Hatice Onaran, a member of Istanbul Human Rights Association's Prison Commission, was sentenced to four years and two months' imprisonment under Law No. 6415 for transferring small amounts of money for their expenses to eight prisoners convicted for "terrorism" related charges.

In October a first instance civil court in Ankara ruled in favour of a moral compensation claim brought by the Ministry of National Defence against Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı. She was ordered to pay TRY 50,000 (approximately EUR 1,350) for her 2022 broadcast comments in which she called for an independent investigation into allegations that the Turkish army used chemical weapons in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Professor Fincancı had also been convicted in 2023 of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" in a criminal trial and sentenced to two years, eight months and 15 days' imprisonment, for the same comments. Her conviction and sentence were pending appeal at the Court of Cassation at year's end.

Human rights defender Nimet Tanrıkulu was detained on 26 November, remanded in prison and indicted in December for "membership of a terrorist organization". The charge was based on historic travel, participation in civil society events relating to Kurdish human rights issues, mobile phone signals from the same base station as other individuals and witness statements.[6]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

According to the We Will Stop Femicides Platform, in 2024 men killed 394 women and 259 women were found dead in suspicious circumstances.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Refugees and migrants continued to be unlawfully returned to Syria and Afghanistan where they would be at real risk of serious human rights violations. As of September, it was reported that around 300 Eritreans detained without adequate access to communication or legal support were deported to Eritrea, while more were at risk of return.[7]

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In August the UN Committee Against Torture raised concerns about increased allegations of torture and other ill-treatment since the attempted coup in 2016, in the aftermath of the earthquakes in the south-east of the country in February 2023, and in the context of counterterrorism operations.

IMPUNITY

In May a regional appeals court upheld the acquittal of army officials and village guards in the Mardin Dargeçit JİTEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter Terrorism) prosecution regarding the 1995-1996 enforced disappearances of eight people, including three children. The decision was pending appeal at the Court of Cassation at year's end.

In June the Diyarbakır Heavy Penal Court No. 10 acquitted three police officers accused of "causing death by culpable negligence" in the killing of human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi in 2015. The court ruled that it had not been established that they committed the offence.[8]

In October the Court of Cassation upheld the acquittal of 16 people, including former state officials, for "intentional killing as part of the activities of an armed organization established for the purpose of committing a crime" in the Ankara JİTEM case. This was related to enforced disappearances or extrajudicial executions conducted between 1993 and 1996.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The Climate Action Tracker rated Türkiye's overall climate policies and targets as "critically insufficient" to meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature goal.

1. "Türkiye: New judicial package leaves people at continued risk of human rights violations", 29 February ↑
2. "Türkiye: Uphold human rights in responding to the armed attack outside Istanbul's courthouse", 14 February ↑
3. "Türkiye: Unlawful ban on May Day celebrations in Istanbul must be lifted", 30 April ↑
4. "Türkiye: Activists remain defiant despite chilling effect of unlawful bans of Prides", 19 December ↑
5. "Türkiye: Stop the crackdown on peaceful dissent", 26 December ↑
6. "Türkiye: Human rights defender imprisoned: Nimet Tanrıkulu", 18 December ↑
7. "Türkiye: Eritreans at imminent risk of forced return", 6 September ↑

8. "Türkiye: Acquittal of three police officers for involvement in killing of human rights lawyer a huge blow to justice", 12 June ↑

TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan

The rights to freedom of expression and association remained severely curtailed as the authorities sought to control the flow of information, suffocate civil society and punish all forms of peaceful dissent at home and abroad. Women, girls and LGBTI people faced arbitrary restrictions to their rights, freedoms and bodily autonomy. Reports continued of state-imposed forced labour in the cotton harvest. There was no meaningful action to combat climate change.

BACKGROUND

The country remained de facto closed to international human rights NGOs, UN special mechanisms and independent media which, together with internal censorship, greatly constrained international oversight and information gathering.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The state controlled the flow of information, censoring reports of negative developments such as economic hardship and strictly limiting access to the internet. Hundreds of thousands of domains, including news, business and social media sites, were blocked. Internet speed remained one of the slowest and most expensive in the world, and penetration was low by international standards, disadvantaging rural communities, in particular women.

Security services surveilled and regularly blocked the use of banned virtual private networks, and intimidated, fined or detained users who tried to circumvent state controls.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

Local civil society organizations and activists were unable to operate freely and independently. Those seeking to peacefully dissent or publicly express critical views, at home and abroad, faced reprisals including imprisonment. Human rights defender Mansur Mingelov and blogger Murat Dushemov continued to serve their sentences in prison colonies in the eastern Lebap region. The authorities still failed to investigate their allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in detention. They had been convicted of politically motivated charges and sentenced to 22 and four years in prison respectively for exposing human rights violations.

On 6 October exiled activist Dursoltan Taganova was detained at her home in Türkiye by police who claimed that she had been identified as a threat to national security and that she would be deported to Turkmenistan. She was released after several hours, but remained at risk of forcible return.

The authorities continued to prevent civil society activists, independent journalists and their families from travelling abroad.

Security services detained independent lawyer Pygambergeldy Allaberdyev at the border with Iran, where he was intending to travel for medical treatment necessary after two years' imprisonment on politically motivated charges from 2020 to 2022. They informed him of a travel ban barring him from going abroad, including for medical treatment, but refused to show any documentary evidence.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Opposition activist Gulgeldy Annaniyazov was released after 16 years in detention, 11 of which were spent incommunicado. He had been detained in 2008 when he returned from Norway, where he had been granted asylum. However, no further information came to light on the fate and whereabouts of more than 100 individuals forcibly disappeared after their arrest. Some were imprisoned after an alleged assassination attempt on then president Saparmurat Niyazov in November 2002.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In February the CEDAW Committee noted the result of a national survey in 2022 which had

found that one in eight women were subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. The committee urged the authorities to adopt, "without further delay, legislation specifically defining and criminalizing all forms of gender-based violence against women, including domestic violence". The authorities, however, failed to make any significant progress in this regard.

Amendments to the Family Code published in March required courts to prioritize reconciliation of spouses in cases of divorce, even if domestic violence was involved.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The CEDAW Committee also expressed concern about the criminalization of abortions obtained after a gestational limit of five weeks – a point at which most people would not even know they were pregnant. The committee urged authorities to amend legislation to "legalize abortion and decriminalize it in all cases" in line with the 2022 WHO Abortion Care Guidelines.

In October the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that all adolescents should receive "confidential and child-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services, including access to contraceptives and safe abortion where appropriate."

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Consensual sexual relations between men remained criminalized. LGBTI persons continued to face pervasive discrimination, violence and abuse, with impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. The authorities refused to expressly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and insisted to the CEDAW Committee that all persons were "equally protected under law against violence, blackmail and similar acts, regardless of their sexual orientation, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons."

The release abroad of a documentary film on human rights violations against LGBTI persons in Turkmenistan, on 3 July, was followed by reported police raids targeting suspected LGBTI people and those in contact with LGBTI activists abroad.

FORCED LABOUR

Forced labour in the cotton harvest continued to be reported, despite the government being more open to cooperation with the ILO in recent years, including allowing it regular visits. An ILO report published in July expressed deep concern about evidence of the continued use of forced labour, including child labour, found during an ILO visit in 2023.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Despite having signed the Global Methane Pledge at COP28 in December 2023 and agreeing to cooperate with the US government on methane mitigation, the government provided no compelling evidence that it had implemented effective measures to improve leak detection and accelerate remedial action. According to the International Energy Agency's Global Methane Tracker 2024, Turkmengaz, one of the largest oil and gas companies in the world, failed to make any public commitments to reduce methane emissions.

UGANDA

Republic of Uganda

Uganda Wildlife Authority officers used excessive and unnecessary force against the Indigenous Benet People, killing two children. Authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained government critics. Amendments to the NGO law threatened to impose excessive governmental control over the work of NGOs. The court upheld provisions that would discriminate against LGBTI people and which carried the death penalty and other excessive penalties for certain acts. Authorities failed to account for at least 500 children who were taken from the Katwe slums by Kampala Capital City Authority officials. Uganda's support for nearly 1.8 million refugees and asylum

seekers remained severely underfunded. The construction of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline ran counter to global efforts to cut carbon emissions.

BACKGROUND

The USA removed Uganda from its African Growth and Opportunity Act due to "gross violations of internationally recognized human rights". In April and June respectively, the UK and US governments sanctioned Uganda's parliamentary speaker, her husband and several other officials over allegations of corruption and serious human rights abuses. On 21 September, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, son of President Yoweri Museveni and the head of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF), announced that he would not run in the 2026 presidential elections.

EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE

The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) continued to use excessive and unnecessary force to prevent the Benet Indigenous People from accessing their ancestral land in the Mount Elgon forest.

UWA officers shot at least three Benet People in the Bukwo district, killing two children. On 28 May, Kibet Silas Rukut was shot in the leg at his home because, according to him, he had refused to remove his cows from his compound when the UWA officer claimed the cattle were in the Mount Elgon National Park (a disputed area). Kibet Silas Rukut reported the incident to Bukwo police station.

According to community leaders, 16-year-old Marko Kipsang was shot dead on 4 June as he harvested grass inside the forest. The community marched to the Resident District Commissioner's office in protest but were told to await investigations into the incident.

On 6 September an officer shot dead 13-year-old Sukuku Emmanuel Joshua. Community leaders reported that the boy was killed in his village, not inside the forest as UWA officials claimed. A post-mortem at Bukwo General Hospital recovered the bullet from his body, and the UWA paid his family UGX 5 million (about USD 1,350) for burial expenses.

The authorities did not disclose information about investigations into these incidents.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

On 16 November, Ugandan state agents abducted Kizza Besigye, Ugandan opposition politician and former presidential candidate for the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), in Nairobi, Kenya. Kizza Besigye was arraigned in a military court in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, on 20 November and charged with offences relating to security and the unlawful possession of firearms and ammunition, despite a 2022 Constitutional Court decision that military courts lack jurisdiction to try civilians. Earlier, on 23 July, 36 members of the FDC had been arrested in Kisumu, Kenya, and forcibly deported to Uganda where they were charged with terrorism offences despite lawfully entering Kenya with the necessary immigration permissions.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 19 February, police arrested and charged Ibrahim Musana, a social media activist also known as "Pressure Pressure", with defamation, promoting hate speech and incitement to violence. They accused him of spreading malicious information and using his social media platforms to attack the Kabaka (the king of the Kingdom of Buganda, a constitutional kingdom in Uganda) and other officials, including the prime minister, of Buganda. He was released from prison by a court on cash bail of UGX 2 million (about USD 542) on 29 April and barred from mentioning on social media the Kabaka, President Museveni, the parliamentary speaker or the government minister Joyce Sebugwawo while the case was pending.

On 6 April the Special Forces Command, a component of the UPDF tasked with carrying out emergency military responses, arrested eight musicians who were overheard during a public event complaining that a speech by the president was too long. They were taken

to Kampala Central Police Station and charged with "insulting" the president and released on bail two days later.

On 10 July a court in Mukono, central Uganda, jailed Edward Awebwa for six years under the Computer Misuse Act, 2011 for spreading "malicious information" and "hate speech" against President Museveni, the First Lady and Muhoozi Kainerugaba. The Kampala Metropolitan Deputy Police Spokesperson stated that Edward Awebwa had shared videos between February and March that mocked the president. The language used in his posts did not appear to amount to hate speech.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

On 20 February, environmental activists Bintomkwanga Raymond, Kibuuka Azilu, Katiti Noah, Namara Hosea and Ndyamwesiga Desire protested next to parliament against the planned construction of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) which is set to pass through Bugoma, a protected forest area, (see below, Right to a healthy environment). They carried a banner saying "Save Bugoma Forest. Parliament must ask cabinet to release the Bugoma Demarcation Report, forests are lungs to the world". The police arrested them on charges of "common nuisance" and causing "unnecessary chaos and [a] breach of [the] peace by inconveniencing" MPs and other parliamentary staff.

On 23 July, President Museveni warned that anti-government protests would not be tolerated. The next day, police raided the headquarters of the National Unity Platform opposition party ahead of its planned protests, in what they called a "precautionary move".

Between 22 and 25 July, police arrested and detained 104 young protesters during anti-corruption protests in Kampala and other towns, following mounting allegations of widespread government corruption, especially against MPs, including the parliamentary speaker. They were released on police bond on various dates.

On 2 September, police arrested Norah Kobusingye, Praise Aloikin Opoloje and Kemitoma Kyenzibo as they approached parliament staging a nude protest against corruption. They were arraigned in Buganda Road Court, charged with "common nuisance contrary to section 148(1) of the Penal Code Act" and remanded until 12 September when the court freed them on non-cash bail.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

On 15 July, President Museveni signed the NGO (Amendment) Act, 2024 into law, paving the way for the dissolution of the NGO Bureau, a semi-autonomous body under the Ministry of Internal Affairs that regulated and oversaw NGO operations. The bureau was re-established as a department within the same ministry, signalling a move towards centralized decision making, control and increased government oversight of NGO affairs.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

On 3 April, the Constitutional Court failed to repeal the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023, opting only to revoke parts of the Act that contravened the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. The court nullified: Section 3(2)(c), that had imposed the death penalty on a convicted person where "the person against whom the offence is committed contracts a terminal illness as a result of the sexual act"; Section 9, where a person "knowingly [allows] any premises to be used… for purposes of homosexuality or to commit an offence under this Act… is liable, on conviction, to imprisonment for a period not exceeding seven years"; Section 11(2)(d) that carried a punishment of up to 20 years' imprisonment against a person who "knowingly leases or subleases, uses or allows another person to use any house, building or establishment for the purpose of undertaking activities that encourage homosexuality"; and Section 14, which obliged people "to report acts of homosexuality". The court upheld provisions in the law that discriminate against LGBTI people and carry harsh penalties, including the death penalty, for "aggravated homosexuality" and up to 20 years'

imprisonment for the "promotion of homosexuality". Twenty-two petitioners had appealed the ruling before the Supreme Court by the end of the year.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

On 12 January, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) officials, with the agreement of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and backed by police, conducted a night-time armed raid on the Katwe slums in Kampala, arresting 773 children and 142 women from the Indigenous Karamojong community. The children were taken to the Masulita Children's Village, a children's home run by the Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans in Wakiso district. According to KCCA, the raid was carried out to remove homeless people from Kampala's streets in preparation for the Group of 77 (G77) summit and another international conference, the Non-Aligned Movement summit. No alternative accommodation was provided for the families.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Some Karamojong parents reported to a local children's rights organization that their children suffered physical or mental harm from the raids and arrests in the Katwe slums in January (see above). The organization recorded the names of at least 500 children who were not traceable among the hundreds taken to the Masulita Children's Village, and who remained missing at the end of the year. It linked the arrests to child trafficking that it said was supported by the state.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, reported that Uganda hosted 1,796,609 refugees and asylum seekers by the end of 2024. New arrivals continued to enter the country during the year, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and South Sudan. As of 30 September, UNHCR had received only around 42% of its USD 363.4 million funding requirement for Uganda, leaving it with a deficit of more than USD 212 million.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

EACOP Ltd continued the construction of a 1,443km underground fossil fuel pipeline to be used to transport crude oil from Kabale town in the Hoima district of western Uganda to Tanzania's Tanga Port. The construction led to displacements and risked causing serious environmental degradation. The pipeline project counters global efforts to cut carbon emissions (see Tanzania entry). The pipeline will pass through human settlements and wildlife areas, agricultural land and water sources.

UKRAINE

Ukraine

Civilian casualties, including children and older people, increased, as Russian forces used indiscriminate weapons, damaged critical civilian infrastructure and appeared to deliberately target civilians. Executions, torture and other ill-treatment of civilian detainees and prisoners of war took place in the Russian-occupied territories, where the repression of non-Russian identities continued. Under martial law, the Ukrainian authorities restricted the rights to freedom of expression and religion. Prosecutions continued against conscientious objectors to compulsory military service. Ukraine's progress on gender-based violence and LGBTI people's rights remained limited.

BACKGROUND

Russia continued its war of aggression against Ukraine, despite sustaining considerable losses, and made territorial gains, notably in February occupying the town of Avdiivka which had been a Ukrainian stronghold since 2014. Russian advances in the Kharkiv region were largely contained by Ukrainian forces. In August, Ukraine launched a surprise offensive into Russia's Kursk region, occupying several hundred square kilometres of territory. To address manpower shortages, in April Ukraine passed

legislation lowering the mobilization age from 27 to 25.

Foreign military and financial aid to Ukraine continued, with concerns over its future sustainability, particularly after Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election. Ukraine's economy managed to grow throughout 2024, though severely damaged by labour shortages as well as recurrent, countrywide electricity blackouts caused by Russia's deliberate targeting of energy infrastructure.

In April, Ukraine notified the Council of Europe that it was reducing the scope of its derogations to fewer articles of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and dropping the derogations related to forced or compulsory labour, freedom of thought, conscience or religion, right to an effective remedy and prohibition of discrimination.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Unlawful attacks

Civilian casualties were higher than in 2023, and often occurred far from the active front line, as Russia continued to target population centres with missiles and drones. These attacks included one against Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in the capital, Kyiv, which was severely damaged after being struck with a cruise missile on 8 July – an apparent war crime.[1] Children from all over Ukraine were undergoing medical procedures, such as chemotherapy and reconstructive surgery, at the time. Two people were killed and over 100 wounded, including children. Like numerous other attacks over 2024, the strike on Okhmatdyt was part of a wider coordinated Russian attack; at least 43 civilians in the cities of Kyiv, Dnipro and Kryvyi Rih were killed on the same day.

Russia continued its systematic attacks against energy infrastructure. According to the International Energy Association, 70% of Ukraine's thermal energy generation capacity had been either destroyed or occupied as of May. The shortfall in electricity generation resulted in regular rolling blackouts, particularly in the hot summer months and in winter as the cumulative damage was the greatest and demand peaked.

Prisoners of war

Increasing evidence came to light of summary executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war by Russian forces. Numerous videos purporting to show such incidents circulated on social media, and the Ukrainian General Prosecutor's Office claimed that at least 147 Ukrainian prisoners had been executed since 2022, almost 90% (127) of them in 2024. While Russia typically ignored or rejected these reports, two significant political figures in Russia called for the execution of prisoners of war. In July, Deputy Chair of the Security Council Dmitri Medvedev called for "total executions" on his Telegram channel. In October, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov publicly claimed that he had given an order not to take Ukrainian soldiers alive. Three days later, however, he stated on Telegram that he had revoked this order.

Hundreds of Ukrainian prisoners of war were tried in Russia and in areas of Ukraine it occupied, often merely for participating in hostilities. The lack of due process in such trials also amounted to a war crime.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

On 21 August the Ukrainian parliament voted to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC but with a declaration under Article 124 that, for a period of seven years, Ukraine would "not accept the jurisdiction" of the ICC with respect to war crimes "when, likely, the crime was committed by its citizens." This created an ambiguity that could impede effective ICC investigations into crimes under international law committed in Ukraine.[2]

The ICC issued further arrest warrants for three high-ranking Russian military commanders and the then-minister of defence Sergei Shoigu. All four individuals stood accused of war crimes committed in Ukraine. These included directing attacks against the civilian population and causing excessive incidental harm to civilians or damage to civilian objects, as well as the crime against humanity of inhumane acts.

OLDER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Older people continued to be disproportionately affected by Russia's aggression. According to HelpAge International, older people and people with disabilities comprised between 20% and 50% of those living within 25km of the active front lines. This group, who were often unable to reach physically inaccessible shelters during air raid alerts due to disabilities, remained among the most at risk.

Older people, 80% of whom lived below the real poverty line due to extremely low pensions, also remained largely unable to access housing when displaced by the conflict. They were overrepresented in shelters for displaced persons because they lacked the income to find rental or other housing. These shelters were not physically accessible to older people with disabilities, which resulted in the placement of thousands of older people with disabilities in care institutions since the beginning of Russia's full-scale of invasion of Ukraine. In September, a Russian bomb struck a nursing home in Sumy, killing one person and injuring at least 12 others in facilities protected under international humanitarian law.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In April, Ukraine reduced the scope of its derogations from the ECHR but maintained that regarding Article 10, concerning the right to freedom of expression. A number of leading media organizations complained of pressure from Ukrainian authorities. In January, bihus.info journalists reported that they were under surveillance, including having their phones tapped. An investigation into these allegations was opened by the Security Service of Ukraine despite its members being suspected of the practice. Due to concerns over a conflict of interest, the State Bureau of Investigation took over the investigation; this was ongoing at year's end. In October the editorial board of leading newspaper Ukrainska Pravda alleged that the Office of the President was, among other things, pressuring businesses not to advertise with the newspaper in an attempt to force a change in its editorial policy. Authorities denied the allegations, and President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that pressure on journalists was "unacceptable".

Prosecution of individuals under Article 436-2 of the criminal code – "justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine" – continued. However, as of November, the number of criminal cases referred to court under this article fell by 29% compared to 2023.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

In August, a law came into force banning "religious organizations affiliated with centres of influence" when their headquarters were based "in a country that commits armed aggression against Ukraine."

The law referred to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which remained in disputed ecclesiastical subordination to the Russian Orthodox Church. The law required the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to break off that affiliation within nine months. Ukrainian authorities accused the church of working closely with Russian intelligence, and brought charges of justifying Russian aggression against its priests and parishioners.

DISCRIMINATION

As the authorities stepped up conscription efforts, some methods caused a public backlash for appearing to be disproportionate, arbitrary or discriminatory. For example, to address the high number of conscription deferrals for male doctorate students, education authorities discontinued applications for self-funded full-time postgraduate studies for both men and women, even though women were not subject to compulsory conscription.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' RIGHTS

Religious freedom watchdog Forum18 reported a surge of new criminal cases opened against conscientious objectors since the middle of the year, bringing the total number to around 300, in addition to over 80 cases that had already reached trial. The case of one conscientious objector, Dmytro Zelinsky, reached the Constitutional Court in

October after the Supreme Court rejected his final appeal. The Constitutional Court was still deliberating in December whether denying the constitutional right to conscientious objection was permitted under martial law. No grants of alternative civilian service had been made since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Prosecutor General's Office reported an 80% increase in registered cases of domestic violence compared to 2023, with the number of survivors from these cases exceeding 5,000, most of them women and children. A policy brief published by the Global Public Policy Institute named sexual crimes by members of the Russian forces, the precarious living conditions of internally displaced people, economic instability, rigid gender roles and war-related stress and trauma among the main causes of gender-based violence.

Parliament adopted a new law in May aimed at harmonizing Ukraine's criminal code with the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), following its ratification in 2022. Among other things, the law introduced criminal offences for a range of gender-based violence acts including intimidation and sexual harassment both offline and online.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In June the first Pride Equality March since 2021 took place in Kyiv. However, no substantial progress was made toward legal recognition and protection of same-sex couples' rights. The relevant draft law, first registered in March 2023, had yet to be considered by parliament. A draft law from 2021, which proposed including sexual orientation and gender identity as aggravating circumstances of hate crimes in the criminal code, was not considered.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Local NGOs reported extensive and long-lasting environmental damage caused by the ongoing Russian war of aggression, including soil, water and air pollution in mainland Ukraine and the Black Sea. Authorities and environmentalists reported pollution of the rivers Seim and Desna in August and September, originating upstream in Russia; this caused mass death of fish.

In June, the government adopted a National Energy and Climate Plan that aimed to harmonize Ukraine's energy and climate policies with those of the EU, including through phasing out coal-based electricity generation by 2035.

RUSSIAN-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (GOVERNMENT OF RUSSIA)

Right to education

Violation of the right to education continued across the occupied territories, with children subjected to indoctrination, and the occupation authorities reliant on coercion of teachers that in some cases amounted to forced labour.[3]

Suppression of non-Russian identities

Russia continued its policy of "Russification" of the occupied territories, including Crimea.[4] In January, the International Court of Justice ruled that the restrictions on delivery of education in the Ukrainian language amounted to a violation of the CERD.

Religious minorities and non-Russian media and culture remained under attack. De facto authorities in the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions informed their residents that the "passports" they had begun issuing in 2016 would become invalid from 1 December 2024 and had to be exchanged for full Russian passports. Residents without Russian passports would be considered "foreign citizens", denied access to some essential services and be at risk of deportation.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in June that Russia's administration of Crimea violated numerous human rights, by imposing Russian citizenship on Crimean residents, transferring detainees to Russia, forcibly disappearing residents, and repressing religious and media

freedoms. The ECtHR held that the treatment of the Crimean Tatar people – including the forced closure of political and cultural institutions, persecution of community leaders and attacks against private property – was discriminatory. Crackdowns against minority groups in Crimea continued, including against Crimean Tatars suspected of belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses, two of whom were jailed in October.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Credible reports of torture and other ill-treatment, as well as enforced disappearances of Ukrainian civilians and military personnel, continued. Some 97% of former Ukrainian prisoners of war interviewed by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine reported being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in Russian captivity, including severe beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence, sleep deprivation and mock executions. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine reported in October that the Russian authorities had pursued "a coordinated state policy of torturing Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war"; it found that this amounted to crimes against humanity.

Maksym Butkevych, a human rights defender and prisoner of war since June 2022, was released in a prisoner swap in October. He had been convicted of a purported war crime by a de facto court in the occupied city of Luhansk, on the basis of a forced videotaped "confession".[5]

Journalist Victoria Roshchyna, forcibly disappeared from occupied Melitopol in August 2023, was confirmed to be in Russian custody in April and died in Russia's Taganrog pretrial detention centre, infamous for the alleged torture of inmates.

Denial of access

Russia did not grant UN monitors access to places of detention where Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war were held. Other international organizations, including humanitarian ones, had limited or no access to places of detention under Russian control, or to the occupied territories generally. This, together with restrictions on the movement of civilians in these territories, prevented residents from accessing essential services.

Russia's allegations of violations of international law by Ukrainian forces, such as their alleged deadly attack against a market in Donetsk in January, could not be impartially documented, due to a lack of access for independent media and human rights organizations.

Internally displaced people's rights

In March, the de facto authorities in the occupied Donetsk region adopted a measure allowing for the expropriation of property left behind by displaced persons. They listed "ownerless" properties online and gave the owners 30 days to appear in person and present a Russian or locally issued "passport" to regain ownership. This measure amounted to expropriation of property targeting displaced persons.

1. "Ukraine: Russian strikes exact increasingly heavy toll on Ukraine's children", 18 November ↑
2. "Ukraine: Ratifying the Rome Statute a welcome step, but limitations must be addressed", 22 August ↑
3. "Ukraine/Russia: Teachers in Russian-occupied territories coerced to teach Russian curriculum through threats and violence", 4 October ↑
4. *Ukraine/Russia: Ten Years of Occupation of Crimea: Russia Is Seeking to Effect Demographic Change while Suppressing Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar Identities*, 18 March ↑
5. "Ukraine: Russia's reprisals against prominent Ukrainian human rights defender who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine", 17 August ↑

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

United Arab Emirates

Authorities persisted in criminalizing the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. They conducted unfair mass trials of 57 Bangladeshi peaceful

protesters and of 78 Emirati dissidents, leading to convictions and lengthy prison sentences. Pro-Palestinian expression was suppressed. The production of fossil fuels increased. Migrant workers were disproportionally affected by the outbreak of dengue fever caused by flooding.

BACKGROUND

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) maintained strong economic relations with Israel amid the armed conflict in Gaza but ceased high-profile announcements of new joint commercial deals with Israel.

The presidency of the annual UN Conference of the Parties (COP) on climate change shifted from the chief executive of the UAE's state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) to the new host country, Azerbaijan.

In April, rare rainstorms produced record rainfall and flooding in several cities.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Authorities conducted mass arrests and a rushed mass trial of 57 Bangladeshis who peacefully protested the actions of their home government in several UAE cities on 19 July. On 20 July the Office of Public Prosecution announced that it was investigating the protests as crimes. On 21 July, the Federal Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi convicted and sentenced three Bangladeshi nationals to life in prison and 54 others to prison terms of 10 to 11 years.

According to the Emirati state news agency, the defendants "confessed" to involvement in "assembling in a public place for the purposes of rioting and undermining public order, and calling and inciting for such assemblies and marches". Footage of protests in several locations reviewed by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch did not show protesters engaging in any acts of violence, only peaceful gatherings, chanting and marching.

On 3 September the state news agency announced that President Mohamed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan had pardoned Bangladeshi nationals who "assembled and rioted" and ordered that their sentences be quashed and that they be deported to Bangladesh.

UNFAIR TRIALS

In July, authorities concluded the mass trial of 78 Emirati dissidents – the vast majority of whom had been imprisoned since 2013 and previously convicted in another mass trial – with convictions and new prison sentences handed down to 53 defendants. Forty-three received life sentences.[1]

The proceedings were shrouded in secrecy. Not a single court document, including the indictment and verdict, was made public. An Emirati lawyer involved in the trial described how authorities forbade all lawyers working on the case from sharing court documents with anyone, including their own clients. Authorities barred defence lawyers from having a copy of the judgment, which they could only view at government offices. Defendants and their families were not permitted to communicate during the trial, and families were banned from the courtroom. Only reporters working for the state news agency were permitted to enter the courthouse complex to cover the trial.

The mass trial of 57 Bangladeshis convicted of protesting was also grossly unfair. It was conducted in less than 24 hours with a single state-appointed defence lawyer.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Authorities used prolonged solitary confinement against prisoners in the mass trial of Emirati dissidents as a means of coercion and punishment. At hearings in late 2023 and early 2024, defendants, including prisoner of conscience Salim al-Shehhi, told the court that authorities had held them in solitary confinement for months to coerce them into making "confessions".

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The UAE continued to criminalize the right to freedom of expression through multiple laws and to punish actual or perceived critics of the government.

In April, authorities expelled from the UAE a Palestinian instructor at the Abu Dhabi

campus of New York University (NYU) because of his political views, expressed to his academic colleagues. In May, authorities arrested, detained and forcibly returned to his country of origin a foreign student who shouted, "Free Palestine!" at the NYU graduation ceremony. NYU administrators denied permission to students and faculty to hold events related to Palestine, suppressed pro-Palestinian expression at the graduation ceremony and warned staff that they could be punished under Emirati law if they criticized the university's administration.[2]

On 2 August the federal Office of Public Prosecution announced that, based on new "confessions", it was pursuing new criminal investigations against exiled Emiratis for "direct communication with international human rights organizations", among other "offences".

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

Amnesty International uncovered new visual evidence that UAE-manufactured armoured personnel carriers were being used by the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan, which have committed war crimes including ethnically motivated attacks on civilians.[3]

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Rather than pursuing fossil fuel phase-out measures, the UAE continued to expand its oil production capacity through ADNOC, and to push the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to authorize more Emirati exports. Expansion of oil production capacity was projected to continue into 2027. The Climate Action Tracker project ranked the UAE's climate policies and actions as "insufficient" to counter the threat of catastrophic climate change, noting that, despite progress, the UAE's emissions reduction plans relied heavily on carbon capture and storage, undermining the credibility of its 2050 net zero target.

A June report by the NGO Global Witness confirmed that the UAE's COP team had pursued fossil fuel deals for ADNOC while hosting the climate conference in 2023.

The Emirati government's approach to climate finance was to encourage private capital to pursue investments in climate adaptation projects in lower-income countries, with a profitable return expected for investors.

MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS

Flooding in April caused an outbreak of dengue fever. According to an investigation by the human rights organization FairSquare in July, the outbreak disproportionally affected migrant workers, who also struggled to access adequate healthcare and information. FairSquare found that, although the authorities had cleared main roads, dengue-breeding stagnant water remained for months in industrial areas where migrant workers live and work.

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1. "UAE: Scores convicted in sham mass trial violating fundamental legal principles", 10 July ↑
2. *New York University, UAE Authorities Quash Campus Freedom*, 22 August ↑
3. *New Weapons Fuelling the Sudan Conflict*, 25 July ↑

UNITED KINGDOM

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Legislation was passed overriding court rulings relating to human rights to enable the enforced removal of asylum seekers to Rwanda. Arms transfers to Israel were maintained for much of the year before being partially suspended by the new government. Public authorities engaged in a range of conduct that had a chilling effect on protest and speech connected to Gaza and Palestine. Peaceful environmental protesters faced lengthy prison sentences. Children from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds were disproportionately impacted by the high level of child poverty.

BACKGROUND

In July, following a general election, the Conservative Party, which had been in power for 14 years, was replaced by a Labour Party

administration. As a result, some policies that constituted serious threats to human rights were dropped or altered. In August, days of racist violence occurred in towns across England and Northern Ireland. This occurred against a backdrop of sustained anti-asylum seeker rhetoric from figures in politics and the media and the implementation of government policies that collapsed the asylum-processing system and damaged social cohesion. The violence was incited through misinformation, discriminatory speech and advocacy of hatred on social media following the killing of three children in the town of Southport by an attacker who was falsely identified as an asylum seeker and a Muslim.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In April the Safety of Rwanda Act passed into law. This sought to overturn a 2023 Supreme Court ruling that Rwanda was not a safe country to send people seeking asylum, and suspended or overrode a wide range of rights protections. It followed the Illegal Migration Act 2023 by implementing a wider policy, enforced by that act, of refusing to process asylum claims made in the UK. However, following the change of government, the scheme to enable the enforced removal of asylum seekers to Rwanda was scrapped and regulations were passed suspending the effect of the Illegal Migration Act. The new government announced its intention to clear the backlog of asylum claims that had built up under the previous policy and also announced the decommission of an ex-prison barge and a former air force base as accommodation for people seeking asylum.

The new government committed to repealing the Safety of Rwanda Act and announced plans to introduce a new Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill. The details of this bill were not publicly available at year's end, but the government indicated that it would pursue the same aim as the previous government of seeking to prevent and deter people from seeking asylum in the UK, increase immigration detention space and fast-track the removal of people from the UK.

In September, an internal Home Office report was published on the roots of what is known as the Windrush scandal. The report confirmed the racism at the heart of government policy and laws passed by parliament over several decades "to reduce the number of people with black or brown skin" permitted to live in the UK. This resulted in many Black and Asian British people being deprived of their UK citizenship and later being exposed to immigration policies such as forced removal, from which they should have been immune but could not protect themselves.

In October, it was announced that the new government would continue the previous administration's policy of phasing out physical immigration status documents, to be replaced by purely digital "e-visas". There were serious concerns that this policy would be exclusionary and transfer control over the evidence of a person's lawful right to residence and services from the individual to the Home Office.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

For the first half of the year, the then government refused to suspend export licences for arms and other military equipment to Israel, including for equipment being used in the conflict in Gaza. In June, UN special experts called on states to end all transfers of military equipment to Israel to avoid the risk of responsibility for human rights violations. In September, the new government partially suspended export licences, citing a "clear risk" of breaches of international humanitarian law by the Israeli military. However, the UK contribution to the F-35 fighter jet, a crucial element in Israeli military activity, was excluded from this suspension. A judicial review into UK government policy on arms export licences was ongoing at year's end.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Major and regular street protests continued in the capital, London calling for a ceasefire following the October 2023 Hamas-led attacks in Israel and the subsequent Israeli military response. These protests were

subject to some restrictions, but police allowed them to go ahead in the face of considerable political pressure to ban them.

In May, government-issued regulations handing police enhanced powers to impose restrictions on protests on grounds of "serious disruption" were ruled to be unlawful by the Divisional Court. The new government's appeal against this decision was heard in December.

Environmental protesters engaging in peaceful protests deemed "seriously disruptive" or constituting a "public nuisance", acts potentially amounting to "contempt of court" or protest involving "criminal damage", regularly faced imprisonment. In some instances this included very lengthy prison sentences of up to five years.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Throughout the year, investigations continued into the nature and extent of surveillance activities by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) on journalists. In December, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal ruled that the PSNI and the Metropolitan police in London had unlawfully surveilled two journalists in 2012 and 2013. In June, an independent barrister-led review of the issue was launched.

Also, throughout the year, the government and other public authorities engaged in a range of conduct that unduly curtailed the right to freedom of expression and had a chilling effect on speech connected to Gaza and Palestine. This included the use of the much criticized Prevent counterterrorism programme, the cancellation of visas and disciplinary proceedings against individuals, with particularly harmful impact on Muslim and racialized school children and young people.

In March, the government published a revised definition of the concept of "extremism", which was to be used by public bodies to assess individuals and groups as "extremist", with a view to excluding them from public funds, platforms and other forms of "legitimacy".

In May, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill failed to become law when parliament was dissolved due to the calling of the general election. The bill, which would have made it potentially unlawful for public bodies to reflect human rights and ethical issues in decisions about procurement or their investment of funds, would have stifled calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In January, the Irish government lodged an interstate case against the UK government at the European Court of Human Rights regarding the Northern Ireland Legacy Act. Two judgments from the Belfast High Court and Northern Ireland Court of Appeal were handed down in February and September, which found the act incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and in breach of the Windsor Framework agreement between the UK and the EU. Among the findings were that the provisions on immunity from prosecution were incompatible with Articles 2 and 3 of the ECHR and Article 2 of the Windsor Framework and should therefore be disapplied. The legacy body established by the act – the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery – was found to be unlawful in relation to participation and disclosure of evidence. The UK government committed to repealing some, but not all, elements of the Legacy Act and signalled that it intended to appeal to the Supreme Court.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Throughout the year there continued an extremely hostile media and political climate against trans people. Hate crime against LGBTI people reportedly rose. The government issued guidance to schools not to discuss "gender identity" during sex and relationships education. In November, the Supreme Court heard a challenge brought by a gender critical group seeking to exclude trans people with the UK's form of legal gender recognition from sex discrimination

protections in their legal gender. A judgment had not been issued by year's end.

In September the Scottish government's proposal to introduce a comprehensive ban on conversion practices was delayed, with the Scottish government saying it would instead wait for the UK government to introduce a bill. The previous UK government did not deliver a conversion therapy ban because the bill was held up over the debate about the inclusion of trans people. The new government committed to publishing a draft bill, including a full conversion therapy ban, but only aimed at forming the basis for further consultation.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

During COP29 in November, the new government committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% by 2035, an increase from the 78% pledged by the previous government. The new government maintained the previous government's commitment to providing GBP 11.6 billion in climate financing until March 2026, a position rated "highly insufficient" by the Climate Action Tracker.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

In January the Children's Commissioner for Wales criticized the Welsh government's plan for tackling child poverty, while in March, UK government statistics showed 4.3 million children living in poverty across the UK. The statistics demonstrated a disproportionate impact on children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, of whom 47% were living in poverty compared with 24% of white children.

These statistics were followed in October by annual government data showing that levels of homelessness in England had risen 12.3% in a year. Street homelessness, termed "vagrancy", remained subject to criminal law.

In February, a coalition of civil society groups including Amnesty International highlighted the inadequacy of the standard social security allowance, which was less than the cost of common essentials for a single person.

In March, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reported that the UK had failed to meet its obligations across numerous articles of the convention.

In September, the Scottish government dropped plans to introduce a Human Rights Bill. The bill would have incorporated the ICESCR and other international human rights conventions into Scottish law.

DISCRIMINATION

In August, the UN CERD Committee recommended, among other things, reforms to immigration legislation, suspension of the Prevent counterterrorism strategy and an end to the use of strip searches of children.[1]

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Despite decriminalization, there remained significant obstacles to accessing abortion care in Northern Ireland, including a lack of early screening for fetal impairments.

In England and Wales, there was an increase in investigations and prosecutions of women accused of having an abortion illegally. A number of trials were scheduled for 2025.

In September, the Scottish government introduced "safe access zones" around hospitals and clinics providing abortion services. A similar law in England and Wales came into force in October.

1. *UK: Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, 1 August ↑

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

United States of America

Abortion bans severely impacted reproductive rights. Access to asylum was limited by border policies, but some nationalities continued to enjoy Temporary Protected Status. Nationwide campus protests against Israel's genocide in Gaza

were met with violence from law enforcement and counter-protesters. Black people were disproportionately affected by police use of lethal force. Progress towards abolishing the death penalty was minimal. Arbitrary and indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay continued. Despite ongoing gun violence, Congress failed to enact any federal regulations, but President Biden issued executive actions to help address the violence. The USA continued using lethal force around the world and provided arms to Israel that were being used in direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks. Discrimination and violence against LGBTI people were widespread and anti-LGBTI legislation persisted. Congress failed to pass bills to address reparations regarding slavery and its legacies. Gender-based violence continued to disproportionately affect Indigenous women. Fossil fuel use and production expanded. Black people, other racialized groups and low-income people suffered severe health, environmental and climate impacts from the petrochemical industry.

BACKGROUND

Campaigns for the presidential elections focused on issues around inflation and the cost of living, access to housing and immigration at the southern border. They involved divisive rhetoric that targeted communities including migrants and refugees, people seeking access to reproductive healthcare, LGBTI people and racialized groups.

Donald Trump was elected for a new presidential term in November.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The legality and accessibility of abortion varied greatly across the country. Nineteen states had total or near-total abortion bans by the end of the year. The 2024 release of a maternal mortality review from 2022 confirmed that at least two women had died in Georgia due to delayed care after a six-week abortion ban had taken effect there.

Bans and restrictions to abortion created fear, confusion and devastation. It forced people to delay care and threatened their rights to life and health and, ultimately, forced people to give birth against their will.[1]

Additional barriers existed for many people, including Black and other racialized people, Indigenous Peoples, undocumented immigrants, transgender people, rural residents and people living in poverty. Medical professionals increasingly left states with severe abortion bans, further widening reproductive healthcare "deserts", particularly in rural and low-income areas. Socio-economic barriers prevented many individuals from being able to travel out of state to seek abortion services.

People in seven states voted to protect the right to abortion.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Migration measures continued to drastically limit access to asylum at the US-Mexico border. A Presidential Proclamation in June suspended entry at the border if there had been a seven-day average of 2,500 or more encounters, continuing until there have been 28 consecutive calendar days in which the seven-consecutive-calendar-day average was less than 1,500. The border closure did not apply to individuals who had obtained an appointment through the "CBP One" mobile application (among other limited exceptions), but appointments were limited. The application's mandatory use of facial recognition and GPS tracking raised serious privacy, surveillance and discrimination concerns.[2] The proclamation also prohibited border agents from asking people about their protection needs, resulting in increased deportations without access to asylum screenings. Screenings imposed more stringent standards and access to due process was limited. These policies continued to force asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for long periods of time, prolonging their exposure to violence, particularly affecting Black, Indigenous and LGBTI people.

The administration granted, extended and redesignated Temporary Protected Status for

Ethiopian, Haitian, Lebanese, Myanmar, Somalian, Syrian and Yemeni nationals, extending work authorization and protection from removal. Approximately 177,190 people were granted travel authorization through the parole process for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans between January and August.

Authorities expanded the system of arbitrary mass immigration detention, surveillance and electronic monitoring.

Anti-immigrant, racist rhetoric grew – particularly during the presidential campaign – resulting in violent attacks and threats to immigrant communities and humanitarian service providers.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Students and staff at universities across the country engaged in protests in opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza and US complicity, demanding their academic institutions issue official calls for a ceasefire, calling on the government to end its supply of arms to Israel, and urging their schools to divest from companies profiting from the conflict.

Largely peaceful protests and encampments faced academic sanctions and punishments, violence from counter-protesters, and violence from law enforcement summoned by college administrations.[3] Police, often in riot gear, used force, including batons, rubber bullets and rounds, pepper spray and tear gas to disperse and detain protesters. At least 3,100 students, staff and others were arrested or detained. Amnesty International and UN experts criticized the summoning of law enforcement to disperse these protests.[4]

Congress and 19 states introduced 52 bills restricting the right to protest, with seven bills enacted in four states.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Pollution from the hundreds of fossil fuel and petrochemical plants along the Houston Ship Channel in Texas harmed the health and human rights of residents, disproportionately affecting marginalized and racialized communities.[5] The lack of regulatory oversight continued, creating a "sacrifice zone" that perpetuated environmental racism and a legacy of racially discriminatory housing practices.

In August, a federal court blocked the government from requiring Louisiana to implement safeguards against the impacts of pollution. The safeguards related to federal civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, skin colour or national origin.

According to the most recent data from the Department of Energy, fossil fuel production comprised 84% of US energy production in 2023. The US expanded fossil fuel production to the highest levels of any country ever. In June, a liquefied natural gas export project was approved in Louisiana, expected to become one of the largest US gas export projects.

In March, President Biden signed an appropriations bill designating USD 931.9 million for international climate finance for the 2024 fiscal year, despite previously pledging USD 3 billion for that year.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

According to media sources, police shot and killed 1,133 people in 2024. Black people were disproportionately impacted by the use of lethal force, comprising nearly 22% of deaths from police use of firearms, despite representing 13% of the population. After 10 years, the government still had not fully implemented the Death in Custody Reporting Act to document the number of people killed by law enforcement every year.

Congress failed to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which included policies such as a ban on racial profiling, and law enforcement accountability.

DEATH PENALTY

Alabama conducted three executions by nitrogen hypoxia, despite condemnation by national and international groups.[6] UN experts called for a ban of the method, labelling it "human experimentation" that "amounted to torture". South Carolina carried out its first execution in 13 years following a state court decision that its execution methods were not "cruel and unusual

punishment". Indiana conducted its first execution since 2009.

Louisiana enacted legislation to include nitrogen hypoxia and the electric chair as methods of execution, while Kansas attempted to pass a bill adding nitrogen hypoxia as an option for executions. Iowa attempted to reinstate the death penalty for first-degree murder of a police officer or prison official. Tennessee expanded the crimes subject to capital punishment to include "aggravated rape of a child" despite being unconstitutional. Alabama failed to pass a bill applying its 2017 ban on judicial override for death penalty cases retroactively, which could have overturned the sentences of at least 30 individuals. Delaware officially repealed the death penalty after it was found unconstitutional in 2016.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

Twenty-six Muslim men remained arbitrarily and indefinitely detained in the US detention facility in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in violation of international law. The Biden administration transferred four detainees out of Guantánamo in 2024. Fourteen of the remaining detainees have been cleared for transfer, some for over a decade, without progress. Congress continued to block the transfer of Guantánamo detainees to the USA, so they can only be transferred to third countries where their human rights would be respected.

There continued to be no accountability, redress or adequate medical treatment for detainees who have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and/or enforced disappearance.

Eight detainees, including five men accused of participating in the 11 September 2001 attacks, continued to face charges in the military commission system, in breach of international law and standards relating to fair trials. They could face the death penalty if convicted, which would constitute arbitrary deprivation of life since proceedings did not meet international standards, and the detainees were systematically tortured. Three of the defendants in the 9/11 military commission case reached an agreement to plead guilty and avoid the death penalty, but the Secretary of Defense quashed that agreement and the case remained in limbo. After 23 years, there had been no accountability for the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks.

Leonard Peltier, a Native American activist, was serving two consecutive life sentences relating to the deaths of two federal agents in South Dakota in 1975. Serious concerns remained about his conviction and sentencing. Now 80 years old with serious, chronic health issues, his application for compassionate release was denied in April and his application for parole was rejected in July.[7] An application for clemency to President Biden was pending at the end of the year.

RIGHT TO LIFE AND SECURITY OF THE PERSON

According to government statistics released in 2024, at least 48,204 people were killed by gun violence in 2022, the most recent year for which data exists. Gun violence was the leading cause of death among children and adolescents. Gun violence swelled in 2024 with 503 mass shootings, and at least 112 primary/secondary school or college shootings where a victim was injured or killed. The government's failure to enact evidence-based firearm regulations jeopardized the human rights of the whole population.

In the absence of congressional action on gun violence prevention and gun reform legislation, President Biden issued several executive orders expanding background checks on firearm purchasers, addressing safe storage of guns, and providing support for states that were disarming domestic abusers.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

The USA continued to use lethal force, which in some cases could amount to extrajudicial executions, around the world and withheld information regarding the legal and policy standards and criteria applied by US forces to the use of lethal force.

The administration created a new civilian harm mitigation and response policy in which it agreed to conduct more thorough investigations of civilian harm and created a Center of Excellence to guide those investigations. However, it refused to revisit well-documented cases of civilian deaths and harm, and failed to provide reparations for past civilian killings, including those it had acknowledged.

US-made bombs and components were identified by Amnesty International in unlawful deadly air strikes by the Israeli military on residential homes and a makeshift camp for displaced people in the occupied Gaza Strip in January,[8] April,[9] and May.[10] The continued supply of munitions to Israel violated US laws and policies regarding the transfer and sale of arms, intended to prevent arms transfers that risk contributing to civilian harm and violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.

In February, President Biden issued an executive order that imposed sanctions on individual Israeli settlers, Israeli settler organizations, and a Palestinian armed group for undermining peace, security and stability in the West Bank.

In September, the Department of Justice announced indictments against Hamas members covering a period from 1997 and including charges of "conspiracy to murder US nationals" and "conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization resulting in death".

DISCRIMINATION

Individuals experienced worrying levels of violence based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, especially racialized transgender people. Government data from 2024 showed that at least 2,900 hate crimes against LGBTI people were reported in 2023. According to the Human Rights Campaign, 84% of transgender people killed were people of colour and 50% were Black transgender women.

State legislatures introduced 574 anti-LGBTI bills, of which 46 passed into law. These laws impacted LGBTI individuals' access to healthcare and public facilities, ability to access legal documents in their preferred identity, participation in school activities, and access to LGBTI-related educational materials, among others.

In January, the California Legislative Black Caucus proposed a reparations package with 14 bills to dismantle the legacies of slavery and systemic racism affecting people of African descent, of which 11 had either passed into law or were pending committee review.

In June, the Oklahoma Supreme Court dismissed a case brought by Viola Fletcher and Lessie Benningfield seeking reparatory justice as the last survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, in which a mob of white people attacked and killed hundreds of Black residents. A rehearing was dismissed in September, denying accountability for one of the USA's worst anti-Black racist crimes of the 20th century.

In July, the Department of the Interior published its final report on the Federal Indian Boarding School initiative, which sought to address the intergenerational trauma inflicted on Indigenous children by the violent assimilation programme from 1871 to 1969. The investigation identified at least 74 marked and unmarked burial sites at 65 schools and at least 973 confirmed deaths, although the actual number of deaths is estimated to be triple this.

In September, the New York City Council passed legislation to "acknowledge and address the legacy and impact of slavery and racial injustices".

Congress failed to pass a law to establish a commission to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans regarding slavery and President Biden failed to issue an executive order that would do the same.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The staggering rates of sexual violence against American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women continued. Government data suggested that AI/AN women were 2.2 times more likely to experience sexual violence than non-Indigenous women. The law continued to restrict the ability of Tribes to

prosecute non-Indigenous perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women, although the 2022 Violence Against Women Act, enacted in 2024, included provisions allowing 31 out of 574 federally recognized Tribes to do so thus far.

AI/AN survivors continued to face barriers to accessing post-rape care, including forensic examinations necessary for criminal cases.

1. *Abortion in the USA: The Human Rights Crisis in the Aftermath of Dobbs*, 5 August ↑
2. *USA: CBP One: A blessing or a trap?*, 8 May ↑
3. "Amnesty International urges university administrations to respect and protect students' rights to protest", 24 April ; ↑
4. "Amnesty International USA condemns university administrations' responses to campus protests", 3 May ↑
5. *USA: The Cost of Doing Business? The Petrochemical Industry's Toxic Pollution in the USA*, 25 January ↑
6. "Amnesty International USA condemns Alabama's execution of Kenneth Smith, calls for moratorium on use of the death penalty as first critical step", 26 January ↑
7. "U.S. Parole Commission denies Leonard Peltier's request for freedom; President Biden should grant clemency", 2 July ↑
8. "Israel/OPT: New evidence of unlawful Israeli attacks in Gaza causing mass civilian casualties amid real risk of genocide", 12 February ↑
9. "Israel/OPT: Israeli air strikes that killed 44 civilians further evidence of war crimes – new investigation", 27 May ↑
10. "Israel/OPT: Israeli attacks targeting Hamas and other armed group fighters that killed scores of displaced civilians in Rafah should be investigated as war crimes", 27 August ↑

URUGUAY

Eastern Republic of Uruguay

Limitations to freedom of expression and access to public information continued, generating concerns over the State's transparency. Prisons remained very overcrowded, often resulting in inhumane detention conditions; death rates in prison were high. Military personnel were prosecuted for offences amounting to crimes against humanity committed during the civil-military regime (1973-1985), but no progress was made in investigations into enforced disappearances under the regime. Uruguay continued to be a hostile country for girls and women, with high rates in femicides and complaints for violence against women. Mental health services were inadequate, as was the provision of social care. Adolescent pregnancies remained concerning. The confirmed installation of a data centre had possible environmental consequences.

BACKGROUND

The system of rights guarantees in Uruguay continued to weaken. The Executive and Legislative branches publicly questioned the Attorney General's Office, which led the Association of Prosecutor Magistrates to complain to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

A report by the local organization Centre for Archives and Access to Public Information stated that there were 59 cases of threats and restrictions on the freedom of expression of journalists in Uruguay between April 2023 and March 2024.

Amendments to the Media Law threatened diversity, media plurality and government transparency because they favoured media market concentration.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

Overcrowding persisted in the penitentiary system during 2024. According to information provided by the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Penitentiary System, the prison population had increased steadily, reaching about 16,266 inmates by November, of whom 14,923 were male and 1,343 were female. Furthermore, 70 children under four years old were in custody with their mothers.

In 2024, 54 inmates died in custody: 33 due to violent murders, 18 due to natural causes and three were under investigation. Civil society organizations raised concerns about deteriorating and insanitary detention conditions such as overcrowding and the

negative impact on the right to health of people deprived of their liberty.

IMPUNITY

In 2024, there were five convictions, five indictments and five confirmations of convictions of current or retired members of the military and police on charges of torture, kidnapping and killing, amounting to crimes against humanity, under the civil-military regime in the 1970s and 1980s. However, no substantive progress was made in clarifying the fate of those forcibly disappeared under the regime.

The remains of Amelia Sanjurjo and Luis Eduardo Arigón, political activists who were abducted and disappeared during the military regime, were identified in May and September, respectively.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to the Ministry of the Interior, between January and October, there were 19 femicides and 35,293 complaints about violence against women. The worrying level of gender-based violence could be due to the failure to fully implement the law on gender-based violence against women (Law 19,580) or to allocate sufficient resources for the creation of multi-purpose courts capable of dealing with all matters relating to gender-based violence.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Access to public information remained inadequate 15 years after the approval of the Law of Access to Public Information (Law 18,381). Public institutions, which are subject to this law, had failed to implement policies of transparency and access to public information.

According to the Centre of Archives and Access to Public Information, the number of cases of restricted access to public information remained high with 18 instances recorded.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Access to mental health services remained insufficient and there was no official data on the suicide rate. According to the Pan American Health Organization, every week in Uruguay around 16 people die by suicide, one of the highest suicide rates in Latin America.

RIGHT TO SOCIAL CARE

Nine years after its creation by Law 19,353, the National Integrated Care System was not functioning effectively and its target population (children under three years old, people with disabilities and older adults in a situation of dependency) were still unable to access care, as stipulated by the law. This was a violation of their right to access care and had a disproportionate impact on women who are often overrepresented in unpaid care work due to entrenched gender discrimination.

The Pro Care Network in Uruguay highlighted the need to reinstate the National Secretariat for Care to coordinate the National Integrated Care System and ensure it fulfils its mandate. The network also emphasized the need for stable and sufficient resources and a solidarity-based model for the co-financing system.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Despite progress within the sexual and reproductive rights agenda, obstacles remained in the prevention of adolescent pregnancies and government policy in this area remained inadequate. According to information provided by the Pregnancy Notification System of the State Health Services Administration, 190 girls and adolescents under 15 years of age were pregnant in the period May 2021 – April 2024, of whom 22 terminated their pregnancies. In 39% of these cases, the pregnancies were the result of sexual abuse and in 22% of the cases sexual abuse could not be ruled out.

Violations of the rights of children and adolescents institutionalized in the state child protection system were identified, when an adolescent died after being sexually exploited while under state care.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The installation of a multinational company's data centre in Uruguay was confirmed, generating concern about its impact on human rights and the environment, as well as the possible tax exemptions that the company will receive. The Ministry for the Environment raised concerns over the data centre's potential environmental damage in terms of air pollution and water usage. Amnesty International requested access to information from the Ministry for the Environment on the tax benefits that the company will receive, but no information had been forthcoming by the end of the year.

UZBEKISTAN

Republic of Uzbekistan

The authorities continued to tighten their control over the right to freedom of expression and the media. Activists, bloggers and independent journalists faced politically motivated prosecutions for reporting on allegations of corruption and human rights abuses, including violations of housing and labour rights. Torture and other ill-treatment remained routine and pervasive, with impunity commonplace for those suspected of criminal responsibility. LGBTI people faced intimidation, physical assault, defamation on social media and arbitrary detention on false criminal charges. Many victims of forced evictions and expropriations remained without effective legal redress.

BACKGROUND

No genuine political opposition parties took part in the parliamentary elections in October. The ruling party won a majority of seats.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities continued to tighten their control over the right to freedom of expression and the media, suffocating any genuinely independent outlets. In the absence of free media, bloggers and social media commentators faced politically motivated prosecutions for reporting allegations of corruption, human rights abuses and other politically sensitive topics. At least 10 were convicted of defamation and insulting the president online, and some also faced fabricated charges of extortion and fraud.

International human rights NGOs faced increasing restrictions to their legitimate monitoring and reporting activities. Human rights defenders and activists also faced intimidation, harassment and attacks. Activists Umida Niyazova and Sharifa Madrakhimova were threatened and physically assaulted in April by a pro-government blogger and an unknown man. The assailants were attempting to stop the two women monitoring cotton production and interviewing farmers and workers at the Indorama Agro cotton company about labour disputes. The police declined to press charges against the blogger and his accomplice. Shortly afterwards the blogger accused Umida Niyazova on social media of denigrating Uzbekistan's reputation.

In July, OSCE experts expressed concern that the most recent revised draft of the Information Code contained overly broad and discriminatory restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, such as prohibiting the dissemination of information that promotes "separatism" and "religious extremism" and shows disrespect towards the state and society. The draft code was pending adoption at the end of December.

In July, ethnic Tajik journalist Salim Inomzoda was arrested and charged with disseminating "information threatening public safety" for reposting on Facebook in 2022 a traditional Tajik song, which the authorities found to be "separatist". He faced up to eight years' imprisonment.

New amendments to the law on the status of foreigners and stateless persons, signed in November, granted the authorities the power to designate as "undesirable" any foreigner found to be damaging the reputation, culture, values, traditions or history of Uzbekistan. Penalties included fines and a five-year ban on entering the country.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In February the Supreme Court designated Alga Karakalpakstan, an unregistered political opposition party advocating for the independence of the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, as "extremist" and banned it.

On 30 May a court sentenced Parakhat Musapbarov to six years' imprisonment for alleged membership of Alga Karakalpakstan. The conviction was based solely on his forced "confession" in pre-trial detention, which he retracted in court, and comments he had posted on social media while living in neighbouring Kazakhstan.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained routine and pervasive in places of detention, and impunity was commonplace for those suspected of criminal responsibility. There was no progress on proposals by the Prosecutor General's Office on establishing independent mechanisms for monitoring torture and conditions of detention, and the authorities continued to stall relevant legal reforms that they had promised to a number of international monitoring bodies.

The parliamentary commission set up in 2022 to investigate the violent repression of protests in Karakalpakstan, including the alleged torture of dozens of detained protesters, finally presented a report to parliament in December. The full text had not been made public by year's end. The authorities ignored calls for an international independent investigation.

In August, human rights defenders reported that the health of Karakalpakstan lawyer and editor Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov, was deteriorating. He had been sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment after an unfair trial for his alleged role in the July 2022 protests. According to his mother, who had visited him in prison, he was forced to work in a lime factory in dangerous conditions without any protective clothing, had lost weight, had difficulty eating and breathing, and had rashes on his hands and face. The authorities failed to provide the necessary medical assistance, and he had limited access to his lawyer and family.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

Following his visit to Uzbekistan in August, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing warned that there was a large gap between law and practice regarding the right to housing. He noted that "judicial independence remain[ed] a challenge" and that "an overwhelming majority of cases involving developers and residents seem[ed] to be decided in favor of developers". The special rapporteur also expressed concern that victims of forced evictions, housing rights defenders, lawyers, bloggers and journalists reporting about arbitrary housing demolitions had been intimidated, prosecuted or detained on dubious grounds.

On 5 January a court decided to transfer Shahida Salomova, who had been an outspoken critic of human rights abuses in urban development and had defended victims of forced evictions, from an open to a closed psychiatric hospital. She was forbidden contact with her relatives and lawyer and subjected to compulsory medical treatment. She had been confined to a psychiatric institution in 2022 after accusing the president and his family of corruption on social media. The special rapporteur expressed regret that he had not been allowed to visit Shahida Salomova and called for an independent international medical assessment of her condition.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI people continued to be at risk of human rights violations and abuses by law enforcement officials and private individuals. They faced intimidation, physical assault, defamation on social media and arbitrary detention on false criminal charges.

The government persisted in refusing to decriminalize consensual sexual relations between men. Responding in April to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the authorities stated that the decriminalization of such relations contradicted "the traditions of the multi-ethnic people of Uzbekistan, the values of the

institution of the family and national customs."

The authorities also warned of the danger of "homosexual propaganda" and insisted that sexual orientation and gender identity could not be included as protected characteristics in anti-discrimination legislation because they contradicted "the values of the institution of the family".

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Uzbekistan remained vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, overuse of water for agricultural purposes, desertification and air pollution.

The capital city, Tashkent, ranked among the 10 most polluted cities in the world. A World Bank study found that 83% of its inhabitants were exposed to levels of air pollution six times greater than the WHO's recommended levels, accounting for around 3,000 premature deaths annually. Dust from construction sites and roads contributed to more than half of airborne pollutants.

In a bid to slow encroaching desertification, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated a programme to sow drought-resistant seeds over arid areas, including Karakalpakstan which had been particularly affected by the drying out of the Aral Sea.

VENEZUELA

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Protests following the announcement of the results of the presidential election in July were violently repressed with excessive use of force and possible extrajudicial executions. Thousands of arbitrary arrests were carried out against political opponents, human rights defenders and journalists; hundreds of children were among those detained. Detainees including women and children were allegedly tortured. Detention conditions continued to deteriorate. Impunity prevailed for human rights violations. The ICC authorized the resumption of the investigation into alleged crimes against humanity. Journalists remained at risk of arbitrary detention and harassment and the government continued its attempts to obstruct independent media. Human rights NGOs were threatened with closure and human rights defenders remained at significant risk. By the end of the year more than 7.89 million Venezuelans had fled the country. Oil spills at El Palito refinery in Carabobo state severely impacted marine fauna. High levels of poverty persisted and people lacked access to adequate food, water and healthcare. Violence against women persisted and abortion remained criminalized. There was no progress in ensuring the rights of LGBTI people. Illegal mining and violence threatened Indigenous Peoples' rights in the Orinoco Mining Arc area. OHCHR staff were expelled from the country. The mandate of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela was renewed.

BACKGROUND

The presidential election in July was fraught with controversy. Opposition parties to the government of Nicolás Maduro faced numerous obstacles to participating in the election, including obstructed registration, arbitrary detention of their members and torture.

Despite international pressure on the electoral authorities to publish detailed electoral results, including from the EU and other states in the region, such as Brazil and Colombia, the government rejected any form of inquiry and continued persecuting political opponents.

The Supreme Tribunal of Justice validated the appointment of Nicolás Maduro for a new term as president. Presidential candidate Edmundo González Urrutia, who had contested the results, fled the country in September and was granted asylum in Spain.

In February, staff of the , the UN human rights office, OHCHR were expelled from the country after reporting on Rocío San Miguel's disappearance. By the end of the year, a small team of OHCHR staff had been readmitted into Venezuela.

The mandate of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela was renewed for two years by the UN Human Rights Council, although the authorities had not granted access to the country by the end of the year. In October the mission published a report denouncing the continuation of a repression-state policy and crimes against humanity, with emphasis on the electoral and post-electoral crisis.

RIGHT TO LIFE

Between 28 July and 1 August, immediately after the presidential election, at least 24 people died as a result of the government's repression of protests against the appointment of Nicolás Maduro. Most of these killings could amount to extrajudicial executions. Two of the victims were children and one police officer was reportedly killed. All but one of the deaths resulted from gunshot wounds. Human rights organizations pointed at the Bolivarian National Guard, Bolivarian National Police, army and pro-government civilian armed groups known as "*colectivos*" as the perpetrators of these killings.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Since the announcement of the presidential election results, the authorities intensified their policy of repression, including widespread arbitrary detentions on political grounds, enforced disappearances and torture. According to official figures, more than 2,000 people were detained after 28 July. By October, the NGO Foro Penal confirmed more than 1,900 of the detentions, of which 129 were of children. By the end of the year, the government had freed 1,369 people and detained 15 others. However, hundreds of people remained arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, including three children.

These mass arrests were carried out without either warrants or those detained being caught committing an illegal act. Many detainees were subjected to enforced disappearance for several days. They were forced to have court-appointed lawyers who lacked independence. Families of the detainees were denied information about their whereabouts for several days, including in cases where children were detained. The detainees were charged with generic terrorism-related offences and the hearings were conducted by counterterrorism courts, which lacked impartiality and independence. As of December, 221 women were still in detention.

Jesús Armas and Luis Tarbay, activists from the opposition political party Vente Venezuela, were arbitrarily arrested by unidentified individuals in Caracas on 11 and 24 December respectively. By the end of the year around 160 members of Vente Venezuela and 34 members of Primero Justicia, another opposition political party, were in detention or forcibly disappeared.

Between April and the end of the year, six members of Vente Venezuela requested asylum in the Argentinian embassy in the capital, Caracas. In August, after the government ceased diplomatic relations with Argentina, the Brazilian government took over the protection of the premises. By the end of the year, Venezuela had not granted safe conduct to the individuals to leave the country.

The government launched a new function in its mobile application VenApp to enable users to report government critics in the aftermath of the July presidential election. Denunciations via VenApp were supposedly responsible for many of the detentions after the election-related protests.[1]

The Attorney General announced the arrest of a prosecutor on charges of "intentional delay or omission of functions" for refusing to prosecute detainees for terrorism crimes following post-election protests.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela reported allegations of torture of people detained before and after the presidential election.

Human rights organizations denounced torture and other ill-treatment in detention centres, including beatings, suffocation,

electric shocks and threats, and sexual violence against women.

Children arbitrarily detained after the election were tortured to force them to incriminate themselves by stating on video that they had participated in the protests, according to relatives. In many cases children were detained with adults.

Searches at a women's prison, the National Institute for Women's Guidance, were reported. Videos shared on social media in August, recorded from outside the detention centre, captured the sound of women screaming that they were being tortured. Human rights organizations reported allegations of ill-treatment in La Crisálida detention centre, where women were detained after the post-election protests.

INHUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

Prison conditions continued to deteriorate. The Venezuelan Prisons Observatory reported that inmates in Tocorón prison received only two glasses of water per day. Police cells continued to be used as prisons and, by September, overall prison overcrowding had exceeded 184% of capacity.

Protests continued to take place in pretrial detention centres due to procedural delays, overcrowding and lack of healthcare, according to NGOs.

IMPUNITY

Impunity for human rights violations and crimes under international law remained widespread. A report from the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela expressed deep concerns about the state's lack of willingness to prosecute those suspected of criminal responsibility.

According to the civil society organization Venezuelan Programme for Education Action on Human Rights, six officers of the Bolivarian National Police Special Actions Force were sentenced in June for participating in an extrajudicial execution five years previously. There were still no convictions for 95% of killings during peaceful demonstrations between 2014 and 2024.

Venezuela was ranked lowest globally (142nd) in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2024.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The Appeals Chamber of the ICC rejected the Venezuelan authorities' appeal and confirmed the "decision authorizing the resumption of the investigation" into alleged crimes against humanity committed since at least 2014. Despite the lack of progress, the ICC Office of the Prosecutor inaugurated a new in-country office in Caracas "focused on complementarity activities and engagement with the national authorities".

In September, a federal appeals court in Argentina ordered the arrest of President Nicolás Maduro and minister of interior Diosdado Cabello, among others, for alleged crimes against humanity committed since 2014.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Throughout the year protests demanding economic and social rights occurred across the country. According to the Venezuelan Observatory on Social Conflict, between 29 and 30 July, 915 protests were registered, of which 138 were violently repressed. The presence of *colectivos* attacking and threatening protesters was recorded.

In the weeks before and after the presidential election, the authorities increasingly criticized demonstrations to generate fear and crush dissent.

At least 12 journalists were arbitrarily detained and attacks continued against independent media. The NGO Public Space registered 507 violations of the right to freedom of expression from January to September. The government continued shutting down radio stations and hindering access to social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter). The authorities reportedly continued hacking and phishing the Instagram accounts of journalists and citizens.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders remained seriously at risk. Parliament passed legislation allowing the government to control, monitor, and ultimately close down human rights NGOs. The law entered into force in December imposing deadlines on NGOs to register and fulfil the requirements of the law in order to be able to work in the country legally.

Human rights defender Javier Tarazona remained in detention. In February, human rights defender Rocío San Miguel was forcibly disappeared for three days alongside members of her family. She was later charged with terrorism, denied access to legal representation, and remained in detention at the end of the year. Activist, human rights defender and journalist Carlos Julio Rojas was detained in April and remained in detention at year's end.

Three human rights defenders – Kennedy Tejeda, Edward Ocariz and Henry Gómez – were detained after the election. Kennedy Tejeda remained in detention at the end of the year.

The NGO Centre for Defenders and Justice recorded 979 attacks and security incidents against human rights defenders during 2024, an increase compared with 524 such events in 2023.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

More than 7.89 million people had fled the country by the end of the year.

The CERD Committee denounced the administrative detention of refugees and migrants in Venezuela pending deportation without access to legal assistance or a procedure to access international protection. Refugees and migrants in the country also faced administrative, economic and geographical barriers to access their personal documentation.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Despite requests from civil society organizations, Venezuela again failed to sign its accession to the Escazú Agreement, which aims to guarantee the rights to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters.

Frequent oil spills at El Palito refinery in Carabobo state severely impacted marine fauna. The lack of environmental public policies to address the spills and the opacity of information from the authorities was highlighted by activists and affected groups.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Venezuela's humanitarian crisis continued and economic, social and cultural rights were systematically violated. Poverty levels increased and the situation was aggravated by high fuel costs and scarcity of electricity and drinking water.

Electricity supply failure persisted. According to press reports, a blackout in August left 80% of the country without electricity; some areas were without power for 10 hours. There was no official technical report on the reasons for the blackout.

The CERD Committee reported high pupil dropout rates and a lack of qualified schoolteachers in its review on Venezuela in August.

Right to health

The CERD Committee denounced the limited access to high-quality healthcare, mainly in rural areas or areas with a predominantly Indigenous population.

Treatment and access to health services for those suffering chronic diseases remained extremely precarious. The National Hospitals Survey, carried out in July by the civil society organization Doctors for Health, recorded that 57% of the monitored health centres lacked a regular water supply in critical areas such as emergency, intensive care and operating rooms. Scarcity of medical equipment and supplies was also reported in hospitals, with shortages of approximately 35%. People living with HIV continued to face scarcity of the resources necessary for their treatment, including diagnostic and infection control tests and breast milk substitutes for HIV-exposed infants.

Health-sector NGOs warned of the need to expand the coverage of vaccinations under the Expanded Plan of Immunization, and to guarantee and strengthen the Global Plan of Action published by the Pan American

Health Organization, to prevent the reappearance of preventable diseases.

Right to food

By December a basic food basket for a household of five cost the equivalent of USD 498.47, while the monthly minimum wage was only USD 2.36, leaving the majority of the population facing severe food insecurity.

In February, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food visited Venezuela. He reported that nearly 82% of the population were living in poverty and 53% were exposed to extreme poverty with insufficient income to purchase a basic food basket. He reported that people were having to reduce portion sizes, skip meals and buy less nutritious food items as a result of poverty. He also stated that women were disproportionately affected by food poverty since they were often the caregivers for their families and communities while working for a wage. Some women resorted to exchanging sex for food. Pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls were particularly at risk of undernourishment.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

No progress was made in improving sexual and reproductive rights, and abortion remained criminalized. The humanitarian emergency in Venezuela continued to obstruct women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive rights. According to figures from the NGO Network of Women Peacebuilders, 40% of women of reproductive age did not use contraceptive methods due to the high cost and lack of access.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI rights continued to be neglected. The Venezuelan Observatory of LGBTIQ+ Violence reported that 68 LGBTIQ+ women had been victims of discrimination or violence.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

During the first half of the year, the Centre for Justice and Peace documented 58 femicides and 27 attempted femicides. The Network of Women Peacebuilders reported that 71% of women had suffered psychological violence and 41% physical violence in 2024.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights expressed concern about the ongoing impacts of illegal mining on the life, health and survival of the Yanomami People, specifically in the Orinoco Mining Arc. The commission warned that Indigenous Peoples were facing an acute health crisis due to water contamination by mercury in the Amazon region. This impacted hunting and fishing and as a consequence increased malnutrition.

1. "Venezuela: Tech companies set dangerous precedent with app for reporting anti-government protesters", 7 August ↑

VIET NAM

Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Human rights defenders, journalists and people detained for political reasons faced torture and inhumane prison conditions. The government used counterterror laws against activists and Montagnards from the Dak Lak region, resulting in arbitrary arrests and detentions. New laws were introduced to police social media and further silence dissent. High levels of pollution persisted. Death sentences continued to be imposed and there was heightened concern over an intensifying crackdown on civil society space.

BACKGROUND

Four different presidents during the year reflected the internal tumult within the Communist Party. A concurrent anti-corruption drive targeted high-profile political as well as business figures. Viet Nam's human rights record was examined by the UN. A deadly attack on two police posts in Dak Lak region in June 2023 elicited a furious response from the government in March. The Montagnard Indigenous Peoples

continued to face decades-long systemic repression and discrimination, rooted in a complex history of marginalization and lack of protection of their traditional land rights and freedom of religion.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Imprisoned human rights defenders, journalists and activists continued to be subjected to torture and other ill-treatment including denial of adequate healthcare.

In October, human rights defenders Trịnh Bá Tư and Bùi Văn Thuận, both serving eight-year prison sentences for "anti-state propaganda", began a hunger strike at Nghe An prison No 6. Tư, a land rights defender, had previously reported on prison conditions during his detention. His mother and brother were held in different prisons, facing similar conditions. Thuận, a former teacher and a member of the Muong ethnic group in Hoa Binh province, protested about human rights violations and environmental issues.

After 21 days, Tư and Thuận ended their hunger strike when authorities agreed to improve conditions, including opening the "tiger cage" used to hold imprisoned activists in solitary confinement in Nghe An province. A "tiger cage" is a torture device made of iron bars, providing a space of only 1m (3.3 feet) wide in which to move around. Prisoners were reportedly locked in these cages for months at a time.

Journalists

In November the family of journalist Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn described his health as rapidly declining, fearing an untreated cancer. Tuấn is a member of the Vietnam Independent Journalists' Association (IJAVN), serving an 11-year prison sentence for making, storing and disseminating information "for the purpose of opposing the State of Socialist Republic of Vietnam", under Article 117 of the Criminal Code. Two others imprisoned from the IJAVN, Phạm Chí Dũng (15-year sentence) and Nguyễn Tường Thụy (11-year sentence), also reported their health degradation.

In October, blogger and YouTuber Đường Văn Thái was given a 12-year sentence by the Hanoi People's Court after he was accused of making and spreading information aimed at opposing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Granted refugee status in Thailand in 2019, Đường Văn Thái went missing in Bangkok on 13 April 2023. The circumstances of his disappearance suggested Vietnamese state agents may have been involved in capturing him and taking him back to Viet Nam, according to witness testimony and audio recordings on file with Amnesty International.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In September, Viet Nam refused to adopt numerous recommendations linked to freedom of expression issued by the UN's UPR procedure. According to Amnesty International's records, at least 45 journalists, human rights defenders and citizens have been arrested, often on spurious charges, since April 2023. The situation for civil society worsened amid a more general political tightening. Civicus, an NGO monitoring global civic space, rated Viet Nam as "closed", the lowest possible ranking.

Digital surveillance

On 9 November the government issued a decree which targeted social media operators – including Meta's Facebook and Alphabet's Google – requiring Vietnamese users to authenticate accounts by providing a mobile phone or personal identification number. It requires operators to provide details on Vietnamese users to the Ministry of Information and Communications and the Ministry of Public Security, and remove content at either Ministry's request.

This decree continued the strict policing of online freedom of expression by the Ministry of Public Security.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In January, more than 100 Montagnard people were convicted on terrorism-related charges connected to the 2023 attack on police posts. The UN condemned the use of counterterrorism laws against the Montagnards.

In August, UN Special Rapporteurs accused the government of "inciting civilian vigilantes from a majority ethnic group to hunt down suspects believed to be Montagnard Indigenous Peoples" following the 2023 attack. Būm Byă, one of those arrested, died in custody on 8 March after being tortured. Two Montagnards told Amnesty International they were tortured by authorities to force confessions after being arbitrarily arrested following the attack.

RIGHT TO HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In June, UN representatives from WHO, UNDP and UNICEF called for stronger action to counter Viet Nam's pollution problem. This followed IQAir's annual survey, released in March, which named Viet Nam the second most polluted country in the ASEAN region, with the 22nd worst air quality globally. According to Ember, a global energy think tank, Viet Nam generated 42% of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources, higher than the global average of 39%. However, coal use, imports and coal-fired emissions all climbed to record levels.

Detained environmental activist Đặng Đình Bách, a leader of the climate change movement in Viet Nam that had sought a just transition from fossil fuels, began a third hunger strike early in the year. He was protesting against his detention conditions, which were described by the UN in February as "deplorable". Initially arrested on 24 June 2021, he was sentenced to five years in prison for "tax evasion" and held in a prison wing reserved for imprisoned activists in Nghe An Province. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention had deemed his detention to be arbitrary.

DEATH PENALTY

The government made no observable progress to end its use of the death penalty, including for economic crimes and drug-related offences. Its use remained shrouded in secrecy.

Trương Mỹ Lan, a well-known business figure and the chairwoman of property giant Vạn Thịnh Phát, was found guilty in April of fraud and embezzling billions of dollars from Saigon Commercial Bank. Lan was sentenced to death, although she may avoid this outcome if she can return some of the embezzled assets. Her case was perceived as the highest profile in the "Blazing Furnaces" anti-corruption campaign.

YEMEN

Republic of Yemen

All parties to the conflict, which controlled different parts of Yemen, continued to arbitrarily detain, forcibly disappear and unjustly prosecute human rights defenders, journalists, human rights and humanitarian workers, and people critical of the authorities' human rights records and policies. Courts across Yemen sentenced people to death, sometimes after grossly unfair trials. All parties to the conflict arbitrarily restricted delivery of humanitarian aid. The Huthi de facto authorities continued to ban women from travelling without a male relative, undermining their right to work and other human rights. All parties to the conflict failed to protect women's right to privacy online and to provide redress to survivors of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Prosecutions of LGBTI people continued. All parties to the conflict contributed to environmental degradation.

BACKGROUND

The de facto continuation of the UN-brokered nationwide ceasefire contributed to a further decline in fighting and cross-border attacks. However, all parties to the conflict continued to sporadically attack civilian areas and frontlines including in Ta'iz, Sa'adah and Bayda governorates.

The Huthi armed forces attacked at least 57 commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, claiming they were linked to Israel, the USA or the UK. On 6 March, Huthi armed forces attacked the MV *True Confidence* in the Gulf of Aden, killing three

crew members and injuring at least four others. They continued to arbitrarily detain the 25 crew members of the *Galaxy Leader*, which they seized on 19 November 2023.

US armed forces conducted naval and air strikes, some jointly with UK armed forces, against Huthi targets with the declared purpose of degrading the Huthis' capabilities to threaten maritime trade and personnel.

The Huthis carried out missile and drone attacks against Israel on at least 48 occasions, with the stated aim of supporting Palestinians in Gaza. On 19 July a civilian was killed and four others injured in a drone attack on the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. In retaliation, on 20 July, Israel carried out air strikes on Hodeidah port, critical for delivering humanitarian aid and food, and Ras Kathnib power station in Hodeidah governorate, reportedly killing at least six civilians and injuring at least 80 others. The strikes targeted two port cranes and fuel storage facilities.

On 29 September, Israel carried out air strikes on the ports of Hodeidah and Ras Issa, as well as al-Hali and Ras Kathnib power stations, in Hodeidah governorate, reportedly killing five civilians and injuring at least 57 others.

In December the Huthis claimed 17 attacks against Israel. On 21 December, a missile attack hit a playground in Jaffa, reportedly injuring 16 civilians. Israel conducted air strikes on 19 and 26 December on ports in Hodeidah governorate, power stations in Hodeidah and Sana'a governorates, and Sana'a International Airport. The air strikes reportedly killed at least 13 civilians, injured dozens and caused damage to ports and the airport.

Extreme weather caused deaths, destroyed homes and livelihoods, exacerbated internal displacement and increased food insecurity.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

All parties to the conflict continued to crush dissent and stifle civil society. Among those targeted were political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists, human rights and humanitarian workers, religious minorities and people critical of the authorities' human rights records and policies.

Huthi de facto authorities

On 2 January the Huthi security and intelligence service arrested judge Abdulwahab Mohammad Qatran for his online criticism of the Huthi de facto authorities. He was arbitrarily detained at the Huthi-controlled security and intelligence detention centre in the capital, Sana'a, for more than five months, during which he was denied his right to a lawyer and spent more than one month in prolonged solitary confinement. He was released on 12 June after pledging not to publish his views on social media.[1]

In June the Huthi security forces arbitrarily detained 13 UN staff and dozens of staff from local and international NGOs.[2] In December, Huthi authorities reportedly released three of the detainees. Their arrests coincided with a Huthi-led media campaign accusing human rights and humanitarian organizations and their staff of "conspiring" against Yemen's interests.

Between June and August the Huthi de facto authorities released the remaining five members of the Baha'i religious minority who had been arbitrarily detained with 12 others for more than a year without charge. They were detained after Huthi armed forces stormed a peaceful gathering in a private residence in Sana'a on 25 May 2023.[3] As a condition of their release, some were forced to sign pledges that they would refrain from engaging in Baha'i-related activities.

Southern Transitional Council

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) de facto authorities continued to unlawfully and arbitrarily restrict the work of civil society organizations and human rights defenders in the southern governorate of Aden.

On 26 May a group of armed men accompanying women from the STC-supported Southern Women Union forcibly took over the Yemeni Women Union centre, an independent civil society organization in Sira district, Aden. The armed men denied

the staff access to the centre, preventing the provision of protective services to women.[4] In June the centre's staff were able to regain access and resume activities after agreeing to allow the Southern Women Union to operate from within the centre.

Government of Yemen

The internationally recognized government of Yemen continued to harass, arbitrarily detain and prosecute journalists in areas under its control, including in Ta'iz, Ma'rib and Hadramout governorates.

According to Marsadak, a Yemeni observatory for media freedoms, on 5 May the Public Funds Court in Hadramout governorate sentenced journalist Ali Salmeen al Awbathani to a six-month suspended prison term for publishing content criticizing a public institution.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

Huthi de facto authorities

The Huthi de facto authorities continued to use the Huthi-controlled Specialized Criminal Court in Sana'a (Sana'a SCC) as a tool for political repression by sentencing people to prolonged prison terms and the death penalty following grossly unfair trials. The Huthis' prosecutorial authorities continued to use charges of "spying" to prosecute political opponents and silence peaceful dissent.

On 1 June the Sana'a SCC sentenced 44 people to death, 16 of them in their absence, on trumped-up spying charges following an unfair mass trial. According to their lawyer, the 28 detained defendants were forcibly disappeared for nine months following their arrest and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to extract forced "confessions".

Human rights defender Fatma al-Arwali remained at risk of execution after the Sana'a SCC convicted her of "aiding an enemy country" and sentenced her to death on 5 December 2023 following a grossly unfair trial.[5]

On 20 August the Sana'a SCC extended the sentence of journalist Nabil al-Sidawi by one year. Huthi security and intelligence services had detained him on 21 September 2015. He was held without charge or trial for around four years and was sentenced in 2022 by the Sana'a SCC to eight years in prison on spying charges following a grossly unfair trial.

Southern Transitional Council

On 28 May the Aden Specialized Criminal Court sentenced journalist Ahmad Maher to four years in prison following a grossly unfair trial on charges of disseminating false and misleading news and forging identity documents.[6] Security forces affiliated with the STC arrested him in Aden in August 2022 and subjected him to torture and other ill-treatment during interrogations at Dar Sa'ad police station to force him to "confess" to involvement in an attack on the police station in March 2022. He was denied the rights to adequate defence, a lawyer of his choosing, presumption of innocence and not to self-incriminate. On 25 December the Aden Specialized Criminal Court of Appeal acquitted Ahmad Maher, but he continued to be detained after the Specialized Criminal Prosecution conditioned his release on providing a guarantor with a "commercial guarantee", a condition the family could not meet.

DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Access to food, safe drinking water, a healthy environment and adequate health services remained highly restricted. More than 2.7 million children were acutely malnourished according to UNICEF. According to OCHA, 18.2 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection services and almost half of the population faced food and nutrition insecurity. Yemen experienced another outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera, with hundreds of cases reported daily.

Parties to the conflict continued to impose arbitrary administrative and bureaucratic constraints on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Huthi de facto authorities intensified their restrictions on the work of humanitarian organizations. Their arbitrary detention in June of dozens of UN and local and international NGO staff (see above)

reduced these organizations' ability to provide humanitarian aid and protection services. In September the UN suspended all non-lifesaving or sustaining activities in Huthi-controlled areas to minimize the risk to aid workers.

In August the Huthi-run Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation reiterated the Huthis' restrictive policies on humanitarian activities in meetings with UN and INGO staff.

The fragmentation of power in southern Yemen, which left some ministries under the control of the internationally recognized government and others under the control of the STC, continued to slow the approval of aid projects and travel permits, disrupting aid delivery.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Women continued to face online blackmail and harassment on Facebook, facilitated by the authorities' failure to take adequate measures to protect women's right to privacy online or to provide redress to survivors of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. This was facilitated by insufficient preventive action by Meta, Facebook's owner, to ensure that its reporting mechanisms for online violence were accessible and culturally sensitive to socially conservative contexts including Yemen.[7]

The Huthi de facto authorities continued to restrict women's right to freedom of movement without the accompaniment or written approval of a male guardian (*mahram*). Among its effects, this restricted women's right to work and the ability of Yemeni women humanitarian workers to conduct fieldwork and deliver aid. Humanitarian workers reported that the *mahram* requirement was also increasingly enforced on an ad hoc basis in government-held areas, including Ta'iz and Ma'rib governorates.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Parties to the conflict continued to target and prosecute LGBTI people solely for their actual or presumed gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

On 23 January the Huthi-affiliated criminal court in Dhamar in northern Yemen sentenced nine men to death – seven by stoning and two by crucifixion – while 23 other men were handed prison sentences of between six months and 10 years on various charges including "homosexuality", "spreading immorality" and "immoral acts".

On 1 February the court of first instance in Ibb in southern Yemen handed death sentences to 13 male students and sentenced three others to flogging on charges of "spreading homosexuality".[8]

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The Huthis' maritime attacks and the Israeli attacks on Hodeidah port posed significant environmental risks, threatening marine life and the livelihoods of coastal communities, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

On 18 February the Huthis attacked the MV *Rubymar*. On 2 March it sank approximately 26km west of the port of Mocha, in eastern Yemen. The vessel was carrying some 21,000 tonnes of ammonium phosphate sulphate fertilizer, which posed an environmental risk in the Red Sea.

On 12 June the Huthis attacked the MV *Tutor*. It sank on 18 June with its cargo of 80,000 tonnes of coal.

On 16 July the Huthis attacked the oil tanker *Chios Lion*. An oil slick initially measuring 220km long was seen near the site of the strike, threatening the Farasan marine sanctuary, according to the Conflict and Environment Observatory.

On 20 July, Israeli air strikes on Hodeidah port and Ras Kathnib power station in Hodeidah governorate targeted fuel storage facilities, setting them ablaze for at least four days. The strike on Hodeidah port caused fuel spills into the harbour to the detriment of its marine environment.

The mismanagement of oil infrastructure by the government in Shabwa governorate continued to cause severe pollution. In July, damage to an oil pipeline caused large quantities of crude oil to spill across

hundreds of meters of coastline near the village of Ayn Bamabad.

1. *Yemen: Further Information: Judge Released From Arbitrary Detention: Abdulwahab Mohammad Qatran*, 20 June ↑
2. "Yemen: Huthi authorities must immediately release arbitrarily detained staff from UN and civil society organizations", 4 July ↑
3. *Yemen: Further Information: Four Arbitrarily Detained Baha'is Released*, 6 September ↑
4. "Yemen: STC de facto authorities must ensure safety of women's shelter following takeover of Yemeni Women Union centre", 6 June ↑
5. *Yemen: Woman Human Rights Defender at Risk of Execution: Fatma al-Arwali*, 1 February ↑
6. *Yemen: Further Information: Journalist Sentenced to Four Years in Jail: Ahmad Maher*, 25 June ↑
7. *Yemen: "My Life Was Completely Destroyed": Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Yemen*, 5 November ↑
8. "Yemen: Huthis must stop executions and release dozens facing LGBTI charges", 9 February ↑

ZAMBIA

Republic of Zambia

Opposition political party members and government critics were arrested, and their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly severely restricted. While more children benefited from free education, overcrowded classrooms compromised educational standards. Drought heightened food insecurity and the president declared a national emergency. A national human rights body expressed concerns about reports of torture and other ill-treatment by the police. LGBTI people's rights were increasingly under threat. Persons with albinism had limited access to necessary sunscreen aids for the prevention of skin cancer. Food shortages and financial difficulties were believed to have led to an increase in child abuse and gender-based violence.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Opposition members and government critics were arrested for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

On 25 May, independent MP Emmanuel Banda was abducted in the capital, Lusaka, by unidentified men. He was found the next day on a farm approximately 43km from Lusaka and hospitalized because of alleged torture during his abduction. Five people, including two opposition MPs, who alleged on social media that the government was involved in the abduction were arrested and charged with "espionage" and "spreading hate speech".

In July, O'Brien Kaaba, a lecturer and former commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), was sued for defamation by the Solicitor-General and another former ACC director over a newspaper article he wrote alleging corruption within the ACC.

On 8 August, Fred M'membe, president of the opposition Socialist Party, was arrested and charged with "seditious practices" in relation to an article on his Facebook page exposing allegations of corruption in government. He was released on bail on 12 August.

In October, investigative journalist Thomas Zgambo was arrested following the publication of an article he wrote which was perceived as critical of government officials. He was charged with criminal libel five days later.

Police restricted opposition political rallies and dispersed other demonstrations.

In June, heavily armed police stopped a Socialist Party rally in Kitwe, Copperbelt Province, after initially authorizing it.

Also in June, police stood by while cadres belonging to the ruling United Party for National Development wielded weapons and threatened violence against people attending a rally organized by the opposition New Heritage Party. In the same month, President Hakainde Hichilema publicly condemned political violence by those who claim to support him or his party saying that he would not allow any individual to hide behind a

political party, church or civil society: "You break the law, the police take you."

In July, four people were arrested in Lusaka for planning a protest against the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation's ongoing schedule of planned electricity blackouts. They were charged with "idle and disorderly conduct".

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

In May, Raphael Nakacinda, secretary general of the opposition Patriotic Front party, was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for "defaming the president", although the law under which he was convicted was repealed in 2021.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The government's programme of free primary and secondary school education, introduced in 2021, led to an increase in new enrolments during the year. However, a lack of infrastructure to support the increase led to overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of teachers, desks and textbooks. In response, the government increased the education budget from 13.9% to 15.4% of the national budget and announced plans to hire a further 5,400 teachers.

RIGHT TO FOOD

In February, President Hichilema declared a national emergency because of severe drought caused by El Niño weather conditions, affecting 9.4 million people in 84 of 116 districts. Approximately 1 million hectares of maize were destroyed by drought. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification estimated that 5.8 million people were likely to experience heightened hunger between October 2024 and March 2025. The government increased the budget for social protection to ZMK 73 billion (more than USD 2.6 million) in the 2025 national budget to address urgent needs in drought-affected communities. In March the Food Security Cluster Joint Rapid Assessment Report revealed that female-headed households were more likely to have a poor consumption score compared to male-headed households, meaning their diet was less diverse.

In August, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, reported that drought had significantly reduced food availability for the most vulnerable populations.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL TREATMENT

The Zambia Human rights Commission (ZHRC) expressed concerns about cases of torture and other ill-treatment by the police. In February a suspected child offender was handcuffed and subjected to *kampelwa* – being hung upside down from a metal rod – while being interrogated by officers to extract a "confession" and identify or locate others believed to be connected to the alleged offence.

In April the ZHRC called for an investigation into an incident described in a video circulated on social media in which a woman said she suffered a broken spine when she was beaten by police officers in Mpongwe District. She said she was attacked after she complained about the acquittal of a police officer accused of sexual assault against her 14-year-old daughter.

DISCRIMINATION

LGBTI people

Increasing intolerance towards LGBTI people by the government and religious groups further threatened their rights. In May the Zambian Civil Liberties Union petitioned the Constitutional Court seeking to have Section 155(a)(c) of the Penal Code, which criminalizes sexual acts against the "order of nature", declared unconstitutional. In August, religious leaders opposed the petition stating that "homosexuality" had no place in Zambia. President Hichilema also reaffirmed his position on consensual same-sex sexual acts during a speech at a Lusaka church saying, "the country shall remain… Christian".

Despite calls on the government to release a gay man who was sentenced to 14 years' hard labour for "sodomy" in 2021, he remained in jail without access to healthcare.

Persons with albinism

Concerns persisted about the limited access for persons with albinism to necessary sunscreen aids to prevent skin cancer, to which they are particularly vulnerable. While there remained no official record in Zambia of the number of persons with albinism living with skin cancer, the NGO Albinism Multipurpose Organisation recorded 16 cases since 2018, 11 of whom had died.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In July the Zambia Police Service said it recorded 9,318 cases of gender-based violence nationwide in the second quarter of 2024 (including 36 femicides), in comparison to 9,988 cases recorded in the same period of 2023. In contrast, social workers reported that food shortages and household financial difficulties led to a rise in child abuse and to gender-based violence.

ZIMBABWE

Republic of Zimbabwe

A bill that threatened the existence and work of civil society organizations remained before parliament. There was an increase in violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, particularly before the Southern African Development Community summit when the use of arbitrary arrests and detentions escalated. The economy continued to deteriorate in the context of an El Niño-induced drought, and 7.6 million people faced food insecurity. Authorities facilitated treatment for women with obstetric fistula. Legislation outlawing the practice of early and child marriage was enacted. A bill to abolish the death penalty was passed into law.

BACKGROUND

The economic crisis deepened. In September the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe devalued the ZiG (Zimbabwe Gold) – the country's latest currency – by 43%. The devaluation weakened the official exchange rate from ZiG 13.9 to ZiG 24.4 to the US dollar.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

By October, the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill 2024 had passed through the National Assembly and the Senate. However, in November it was returned to the Senate for reconsideration after it was noted that some amendments made by the National Assembly during the committee stage process had not been incorporated.

The government said the PVO Bill aimed to "curb money-laundering and [the] financing of terrorism" and ensure that NGOs "do not undertake political lobbying." The lapse in progress of the original PVO Amendment Bill 2021 in August 2023, following parliament's dissolution ahead of elections, raised hopes that President Emmerson Mnangagwa had duly considered submissions from civil society organizations raising concerns that the bill fell short of international human rights standards and provisions in the Constitution. However, the new Bill maintained provisions that could adversely affect civic space and threaten the very existence and operations of civil society organizations.[1]

Authorities continued to use repressive tactics, including via the justice system, to silence dissent and criminalize opposition members.

In January, Job Sikhala, a former leader of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) opposition party, was released from prison after being given a two-year suspended sentence and fine for "incitement to violence". He had spent 595 days in pre-trial detention. In February he was given a nine-month suspended sentence and fined on charges of "publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the state" – offences that the Constitutional Court declared void in 2014. The charges related to a video circulated on Facebook in which it was claimed that a police officer killed a baby. In July the High Court of Zimbabwe acquitted him of the charges.[2] Former CCC lawmaker Fadzayi Mahere, who had been

convicted in 2023 for "communicating falsehoods" after posting the video on X (formerly Twitter) was acquitted in February 2024 by the High Court following appeal.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

There was an increase in the use of arbitrary detention against and prosecution of human rights defenders, political opposition members and supporters, activists, journalists and others expressing dissenting views or exercising their right to peaceful assembly.

In particular, the government intensified its crackdown against opposition and civil society members ahead of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community held on 17 August in the capital, Harare. Police arrested more than 160 people including elected officials, opposition members, union leaders, students and journalists.[3]

On 16 June, police raided the home of CCC party leader Jameson Timba during a private gathering, arresting 78 people. They were held in custody for more than 48 hours before being brought to court, in violation of Zimbabwean law, and charged with "gathering with intent to promote public violence and disorderly conduct". On 4 September, 12 of those arrested were acquitted after the court found that they were not involved in the gathering. On 27 November, after 160 days in detention, Jameson Timba and 34 of his co-accused were convicted and given suspended prison sentences.

On 24 June, 44 Zimbabwe National Students Union members were arrested in Harare and charged with "disorderly conduct" before being released. On 29 June, members of the National Democratic Working Group, a social justice movement, were arrested at a private residence in Harare during a meeting to raise funds for impoverished families, a gathering deemed by authorities to be "unsanctioned".

On 31 July, activists including Namatai Kwekweza, Robson Chere, Samuel Gwezi and Vusumuzi Moyo were forcibly removed from a plane and arrested by state agents. The four were held for eight hours without access to their lawyer and denied bail. Robson Chere was tortured in detention, suffering extensive physical injuries.

On 1 August, 13 activists, including former legislator John Houghton, the former mayor of Kariba, George Masendu, and activist Farai Mageva, were arrested in Kariba for staging an "unsanctioned protest" demanding the release of opposition leader Jameson Timba and 77 other activists. They were detained at Kariba police headquarters before being released on bail on 2 September. On 2 August, Kelvin Gonde and opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume were arrested and charged with participating in an unlawful gathering and disorderly conduct. On 16 August, police in Gokwe arrested 12 people for allegedly participating in an anti-government demonstration.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

The Media Institute of Southern Africa Zimbabwe, an independent organization, recorded six violations that undermined press freedom and prevented journalists from fulfilling their constitutional duty to inform the public.

In February the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution for Midlands province banned Sydney Mubaiwa, bureau chief of the Mirror Midlands newspaper, and Stephen Chadenga, a journalist on NewsDay newspaper, from reporting on government functions in the area. They were attending a meeting organized by the Zimbabwe Gender Commission when they were singled out and barred from attending government events.

In the same month, NewsHawks, an online investigative publication, said it had dropped further reporting on three army generals after it received "subtle threats and direct pressure" from state security agents.

Also in February, journalist Admire Chitsungo was arrested and detained briefly at Kadoma Central Police Station after photographing local police confiscating vendors' wares in Kadoma.

On 4 June, 16 journalists were barred from covering the signing of the "Integrity Pledge"

by the new Reserve Bank Governor, John Mushayavanhu, and his staff at the bank's offices in Harare.

In August a senior police officer ordered Nunurai Jena, a correspondent for the Studio 7 news station, to leave an inter-district meeting held by the Mashonaland West branch of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front party in the Chinhoyi municipality. The order was given on grounds of his association with Studio 7.

Later the same month, police handcuffed Herald newspaper journalist Charles Muchakagara and tried to confiscate his camera when he photographed a traffic accident in Harare.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

The El Niño-induced drought and the protracted economic decline adversely affected access to nutrition, health, water and sanitation, education, social protection, shelter, agriculture, energy and infrastructure. According to UNICEF, 7.6 million people (50% of the population) faced food insecurity. In April the government declared the drought to be a national disaster. In May, authorities issued a joint flash appeal, costed at USD 3.9 billion, which included USD 2 billion for immediate response to the drought and the rest for ongoing resilience-building.

The authorities continued to take measures to contain a cholera outbreak that began in 2023. According to the WHO, by 31 July, Zimbabwe had recorded a total of 34,549 cholera cases, with 718 associated deaths, yielding a case fatality rate of 2.1% across 63 districts and 10 provinces. On 30 July the Ministry of Health and Child Care declared the end of the outbreak, after an 18 month-long response, with the last cholera case being reported on 30 June.

The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Defence, Home Affairs, Security Services and War Veterans' Affairs undertook public hearings to establish whether and to what extent people in Zimbabwe were affected by statelessness. Noting the effects of statelessness on the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, the committee recommended that the government set aside resources for a quantitative study to determine the numbers of people at risk of statelessness, and that employees of the Civil Registry department be trained to offer quality services to stateless people.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Teenage pregnancy, child abuse, early and child marriage, and early school dropout rates among girls remained prevalent. A local media source reported that at least 16 girls at Monozi Primary School (serving pupils up to 13 years old) in Mbire District failed to sit their Grade Seven examinations due to pregnancy.

Women participating in informal cross-border trade in Zimbabwe continued to face gender-based violence and economic exploitation, impeding their ability to exercise their human rights, including the right to decent work.[4] They frequently faced physical assault, sexual harassment and intimidation, often perpetrated by state officials, including border authorities.

Notable progress was made in the provision of maternal healthcare through the treatment of obstetric fistula. During the year the government and its partners established three treatment centres providing free care for women living with the condition.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In September, President Mnangagwa assented to the Criminal Laws Amendment (Protection of Children and Young Persons) Bill 2024, which raised the age of consent from 16 to 18. The act includes provisions to protect young people from sexual abuse and early and child marriage. The law followed a Constitutional Court ruling in 2022 which found that the Criminal Law Code did not adequately protect children aged 16 to 18 from sexual exploitation.

DEATH PENALTY

On 31 December, President Mnangagwa signed into law the Death Penalty Abolition Bill. The Act abolished the death penalty for all crimes by prohibiting courts from

imposing the punishment, amending the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act to delete references to the death penalty, and repealing sections that set out how the penalty should be imposed and carried out, among other things.[5] It also includes provisions for the re-sentencing of those under sentence of death at the time of abolition. However, a new provision in the Defence Act introduced by the Death Penalty Abolition Act 2024 allows for the reinstatement of the death penalty if a state of public emergency is declared under section 113 of the Constitution.

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1. *Zimbabwe: Further Information: Civil Society Under Attack With New Draft Law*, 19 April ↑
2. *Zimbabwe: Further Information: Former Opposition Leader's Convictions Quashed: Job Sikhala*, 31 July ↑
3. "Zimbabwe: Authorities must end massive crackdown on dissent before SADC summit", 9 August ↑
4. "Southern Africa: Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe failing to protect the human rights of women working in informal, cross-border trade", 8 March ↑
5. "Africa: Countries on the cusp of abolition must take a stand against the death penalty", 10 October ↑

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

APRIL 2025

Despite some positive changes to laws and policies in certain countries, human rights have been under attack across the world. Authoritarian practices have spread and existing protections for human rights have been pushed aside, ignored or trampled.

The 2025 edition of Amnesty International's annual report, *The State of the World's Human Rights*, assesses national, regional and global developments across a wide range of human rights themes. It identifies world trends related to violations in armed conflicts, repression of dissent, discrimination, economic and climate injustice, and the misuse of technology to infringe on human rights. It also highlights how powerful states have deliberately undermined the international rules-based system, hindering the resolution of problems that affect the lives of millions. Many of these trends represent setbacks that risk being aggravated in 2025 and beyond.

The report documents human rights concerns during 2024 in 150 countries, connecting global and regional issues and looking to the future. It includes calls for action by governments and others to improve people's lives. It is essential reading for government leaders, policymakers, advocates, activists and anyone interested in human rights.

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