



Amnesty International Report 2014/15 - Jordan

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Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Head of state: **King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein**

Head of government: **Abdullah Ensour**

The authorities maintained strict controls on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Government critics faced arbitrary arrest and detention; some were prosecuted and jailed. The government amended the 2006 Anti-Terrorism law to encompass acts deemed disruptive to Jordan's foreign relations and the dissemination of ideas deemed supportive of terrorism. The State Security Court (SSC) continued to try people accused under anti-terrorism legislation; some of the accused alleged torture or other ill-treatment. Jordan continued to receive and host thousands of refugees from Syria and, increasingly, Iraq, but barred entry to Palestinians from Syria. Women faced discrimination in law and in practice; at least 14 people were victims of so-called "honour killings". Eleven prisoners were executed in December, the first executions since 2006.

Background

Jordan felt the impact of events beyond its borders, notably the armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and Israel's military offensive in Gaza. The Syrian conflict generated further refugee flows into Jordan. Jordan hosted over 600,000 refugees from Syria, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and 30,000 refugees from Iraq. Demonstrations in March over the killing of a Jordanian judge by Israeli forces at the Allenby Bridge crossing between Jordan and the West Bank were followed by mass protests in July and August against Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza.

Conditions were tense along the border with Syria and the government tightened controls there and along the border with Iraq. In April, the government said Jordanian warplanes had fired on members of Syrian armed groups seeking to cross into Jordan. In June, the USA agreed to send missiles and military aircraft to Jordan, and in September, Jordan joined the US-led international alliance against the Islamic State armed group.

The government made little progress in implementing promised political reforms but the King gained sole authority to appoint the heads of the armed forces and the General Intelligence Department (GID) under a constitutional amendment.

Freedoms of expression, association and assembly

The government maintained strict controls on freedom of expression, using provisions criminalizing defamation of the monarchy and other institutions and religion, the Press and Publications Law, and the 2010 Law on Information System Crimes, which gave the authorities wide powers to censor print, broadcast and online media. The authorities blocked some news websites.

In early 2014, the jurisdiction of the State Security Court (SSC) was restricted to five crimes: treason, espionage, terrorism, drugs offences, and money counterfeiting. However, amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Law enacted in May imposed new curbs on freedom of expression by equating acts deemed to disrupt Jordan's foreign relations, including criticism of foreign leaders, and the dissemination of certain ideas, with terrorism.

The authorities continued to detain and prosecute political opposition activists, online critics and journalists, including members of the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir party, at least 18 of whom faced trial before the SSC, despite its poor record of upholding international fair trial standards. In March, Nayef Lafi and Ibrahim al-Kharabsheh were arrested as they lobbied parliament against amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Law, and faced up to seven years' imprisonment on charges of "illegal actions" threatening the government, and membership of a banned organization. Wassim Abu Ayesh was tried by the SSC on terrorism charges. He was accused of posting an Islamic State group video on Facebook, which he claimed was in fact a film about the abuse of detainees in Iraq, and said that his interrogators made him sign a statement without allowing him to read it.

In July, security forces attacked and assaulted journalists at an anti-Israel protest in Amman. In August, they arrested Abdulhadi Raji Majali, an *Al Ra'i* newspaper journalist, by order of Amman prosecutors for an online post to which the authorities took offence. He was released on bail one week later awaiting trial.

Also in July, the SSC imposed three-month prison terms on three peaceful pro-reform activists, Mahdi al-Saafin, Ayham Mohamed Alseem and Fadi Masamra, on charges of "undermining" the state and "insulting" the King.

Mohamed Said Bakr and Adel Awad, senior Muslim Brotherhood members, were brought to trial before the SSC following their arrest in September, accused of threatening state security in public statements that criticized Jordan's leaders and links with the USA. In December, the case against Adel Awad was thrown out due to lack of evidence.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment remained a significant concern. Among those alleging such abuses were detainees arrested on suspicion of supporting or fighting for armed groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, in Syria.

In June, the SSC acquitted Abu Qatada of terrorism charges. UK authorities had deported him to Jordan in 2013 after negotiating diplomatic assurances allegedly to ensure that "confessions" gained from others through torture would be inadmissible in a new criminal trial. In reaching its verdict the SSC did not disregard the "confession" evidence, considering it a matter of record, but concluded that it was not supported by other evidence. In September, the SCC acquitted Abu Qatada on separate charges and ordered his release.

Administrative detention

Provincial authorities held hundreds, possibly thousands, of criminal suspects in administrative detention without charge or trial using the Law on Crime Prevention, in force since 1954. The law empowers provincial governors to authorize the arrests and indefinite detention of those they deem a "danger to society" and affords those detained no means of appeal or legal remedy.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Jordan hosted over 600,000 refugees from Syria, about one third of whom were accommodated in six camps, the largest of which had a population of over 100,000. The majority of refugees lived in towns and cities throughout Jordan. While in principle maintaining an open-border policy to refugees from Syria, the authorities closed the border to Syrian refugees on a number of occasions and prevented the entry into Jordan of Palestinians and Iraqis fleeing the Syrian conflict. The presence of so many refugees was a huge economic strain and placed a burden on Jordan's resources, including water, education and health care. Insecurity increased due to the potential for the conflict to spread into Jordan.

Women's rights

Women remained subject to discrimination in law and practice, and were inadequately protected from sexual and other violence, including so-called honour crimes. Tens of thousands of women married to foreigners continued to be denied the right to pass on their nationality to their spouses and children. In November, the government afforded them greater access to education and medical care, but failed to end discrimination. The Ministry of Justice was also reportedly considering Penal Code changes to protect women against sexual harassment.

At least 12 women and two children, a girl and a boy, were victims of so-called honour killings. In at least two cases courts immediately commuted the death sentences imposed on perpetrators of such killings to 10-year prison terms, apparently under a provision allowing courts to commute or reduce sentences if the victim's family requests leniency.

In July, UNICEF, the UN children's agency, reported an increase in early marriage among Syrian refugees, noting the associated risks this posed to girls. The legal age of marriage for women in Jordan was 18 unless special dispensation for an earlier marriage was obtained from a judge. Jordanian NGO Sisterhood is Global reported that 13.2% of registered marriages in 2013 took place before the bride's 18th birthday.

Death penalty

Eleven men were executed on 21 December, the first executions in Jordan since 2006. This followed the establishment in November of a special committee of the cabinet to look into the resumption of executions.

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