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# THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

APRIL 2025



**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and individual donations. We believe that acting in solidarity and compassion with people everywhere can change our societies for the better.

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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 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

**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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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 indebted 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.**<sup>8</sup>

## 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup>

**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.<sup>12</sup>

States' continued reliance on automated tools in the provision and supervision of social protection has led to discriminatory and unfair outcomes.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> The European Commission then decided to investigate TikTok over the possibility that it had breached the regulation for failing to protect young users.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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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1. *Obligations of State Parties on Addressing and Eradicating Xenophobia and Its Impact on the Rights of Migrants, Their Families, and Other Non-Citizens Affected by Racial Discrimination*, 4 April 1
  2. *Primer: Defending the Rights of Refugees and Migrants in the Digital Age*, 5 February ; *The Digital Border: Migration, Technology and Inequality*, 21 May 1
  3. "Global: Africans and people of African descent call on Europe to reckon with their colonial legacies", 18 November 1
  4. *We Are Facing Extinction: Escalating Anti-LGBTI Sentiment, the Weaponization of Law and Their Human Rights Implications -in Select African Countries*, 9 January 1
  5. "Global: Record-breaking 12-month run of global heat underlines urgency of action to deliver climate justice", 5 June 1
  6. "Africa: Richer countries must commit to pay at COP29 as climate change forcibly displaces millions across Africa", 4 November 1
  7. *Climate Inaction, Ruled Out! European Court Clarifies State Obligations to Tackle the Climate Crisis*, 21 August 1
  8. *Amnesty International Recommendations to Parties to the UNFCCC on Human Rights Consistent Climate Action in 2024*, 23 October 1
  9. *What's Tax Got to Do with It: A Resource Guide on Tax and Human Rights*, 17 September 1
  10. *Recharge for Rights: Ranking the Human Rights Due Diligence Reporting of Leading Electric Vehicle Makers*, 15 October 1
  11. "Amnesty International's Security Lab unveils new tools to support civil society against digital threats", 5 June 1
  12. *Briefing: Gender and Human Rights in the Digital Age*, 10 July 1
  13. *Briefing: Social protection in the Digital Age*, 6 March 1
  14. *Use of Entity Resolution in India: Shining a Light on How New Forms of Automation Can Deny People Access to Welfare*, 30 April 1
  15. "Three out five young activists face online harassment globally for posting human rights content", 1 July 1
  16. "EU: Landmark Digital Services Act must be robustly enforced to protect human rights", 17 February 1
  17. "EU/Global: European Commission's TikTok probe aims to help protect young users", 19 February 1
  18. "Statement: EU takes modest step as AI law comes into effect", 1 August 1

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.<sup>3</sup> Parliament

and the government criticized the judgment, claiming that Switzerland had already implemented sufficient measures and arguing that the ECtHR had overstepped its mandate.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

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1. “Switzerland: New sexual criminal law comes into force: An important step forward, but still not enough”, 27 June (French and German only) <sup>1</sup>
  2. “Switzerland: Mohamed Wa Baile wins ethnic profiling case as the European Court of Human Rights unanimously condemns racial discrimination”, 4 March <sup>1</sup>
  3. “Switzerland: Parliament must respect landmark climate case”, 4 June <sup>1</sup>
  4. “Europe: New Amnesty briefing analyzes landmark climate judgments of the European Court of Human Rights”, 21 August <sup>1</sup>
  5. “Switzerland: Federal asylum centres: Improve the protection of children’s rights”, 22 October (French and German only) <sup>1</sup>

# SYRIA

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## Syrian Arab Republic

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**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 (Col).

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Col 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 Col 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 Col 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 Col.

## **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 Col 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.<sup>2</sup>

## 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.

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1. "Syria: Historic opportunity to end and redress decades of grave human rights violations under President Assad must be seized", 8 December 1
  2. "Europe: Safety of Syrians in Europe must not be sacrificed to political interests", 10 December 1

## TAIWAN

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### Taiwan

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**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

# 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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