

proposing an artistic performance in a private messaging conversation that in the end never took place. He was later released on condition that he left Cuba.

On 11 July, the day of nationwide protests, authorities detained prisoner of conscience Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, a member of the San Isidro Movement which mobilized initially in opposition to a law that would censor artists, just after he announced on social media that he intended to join the protests. Later in the year, he contracted Covid-19 in prison and went on hunger strike in protest at his continued imprisonment. He remained in prison at the end of the year.

Similarly, state security officials detained José Daniel Ferrer García, activist and leader of the unofficial political opposition group Patriotic Union of Cuba, as he tried to attend the demonstrations in Santiago de Cuba with his son. Authorities later concealed his whereabouts, potentially amounting to an enforced disappearance. Despite the authorities' ongoing repressive policy, throughout the year artists and activists continued to collaborate and innovate in solidarity. Artist Erik Ravelo launched "The Eternal Flame", a digital conceptual memorial in support of artistic freedom of expression in Cuba.⁶

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The economic situation continued to deteriorate, with media reports of significant shortages of food, essential medicines and other basic items. In May, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights expressed concern over "acute and persistent food shortages in Cuba", especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Throughout the year there were electricity outages.

At various moments in the year there were reports of hospitals being overwhelmed with Covid-19 cases. However, by the middle of the year the authorities had scaled up their vaccination programme.

The authorities continued to place the blame for shortages exclusively on the economic embargo. Although the embargo

violates economic, social and cultural rights in Cuba, it does not negate Cuba's obligations to guarantee these rights to the maximum of its available resources.

1. "Cuba: Massive protests are a desperate cry to a government that doesn't listen", 12 July
2. "Cuba: Amnesty International names prisoners of conscience amidst crackdown on protesters", 19 August
3. "Cuba: Rejection of request to protest is yet another example of intolerance of freedom of expression", 22 October
4. "Cuba: Amnesty International names Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara of the San Isidro Movement a prisoner of conscience", 21 May
5. "Cuba: Amnesty International launches a holidays solidarity action in support of prisoners of conscience", 17 December
6. "Cuba: Amnesty International and artist Erik Ravelo launch 'The Eternal Flame', a digital conceptual memorial in support of San Isidro Movement and freedom of expression", 29 April

CYPRUS

Republic of Cyprus

Head of state and government: **Nicos Anastasiades**

Allegations of pushbacks of refugees and migrants continued. A leading anti-racism association was threatened with dissolution. Police used excessive force against anti-corruption protesters.

BACKGROUND

No progress was made during talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders in April in Geneva for the resumption of formal negotiations in relation to the settlement of the Cyprus problem (the continuing dispute over the administration of the island).

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

There were continued reports of pushbacks at sea of refugees and migrants to Lebanon, which since 2019 has regularly returned Syrians to Syria, where their safety was at risk. In August, reports emerged that the authorities intercepted two boats carrying 89 people and pushed the passengers back to Syria, except for two people with health needs who were separated from their families and transferred to Cyprus.

Human rights bodies and others expressed concerns about the living conditions in reception facilities, including the restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In November, the president requested emergency support from the EU for the management of migration, including the temporary suspension of new asylum applications.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The leading anti-racism organization KISA continued to face dissolution proceedings as a result of a 2020 legislative change, which led to the organization's removal from the registry of associations in December 2020 due to a minor delay in their complying with the new requirements. KISA appealed before the country's Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the organization was operating with serious limitations.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In September, the Cyprus Supreme Court heard an appeal by a young British woman against a district court ruling which found her guilty of making false claims when she reported she was gang-raped in July 2019. Serious concerns existed about the reported shortcomings of the police investigation into the case and the fairness of her first instance trial.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

In February, police reportedly used unlawful force against peaceful protesters during an anti-corruption demonstration in Nicosia. An investigation was started by the Independent Authority for the Investigation of Complaints against the Police. Although the investigation was reportedly completed, the outcome was not known by the end of the year.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The Cypriot authorities kept in place an unlawful and disproportionate blanket ban on all demonstrations, introduced as part of Covid-19 related restrictions in March 2020.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

During the year, the remains of 1,023 missing people (732 Greek Cypriots and 291 Turkish Cypriots) were identified by the Committee of Missing Persons in Cyprus in its mission to establish the fate of individuals who were forcibly disappeared during the inter-communal fighting of 1963-1964 and the events of 1974.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Republic

Head of state: **Miloš Zeman**

Head of government: **Petr Fiala (replaced Andrej Babiš in December)**

There were concerns over the independence of public broadcasting media. Parliament voted for a bill to compensate thousands of Romawomen who were unlawfully sterilized in the past. Authorities denied that police officers were responsible for the death of a Roma man during a police intervention against him.

BACKGROUND

Throughout the year, the government adopted socio-economic measures to support individuals affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. They included 14 days' compensation of wages for those undertaking compulsory quarantine.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Authorities restricted the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in response to Covid-19. In December 2020, Parliament announced a state of emergency which lasted until 11 April. During this period, gatherings were restricted to a maximum of 500 people. The decision led to protests in January under the slogan "Let's open the Czech Republic".

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

There were concerns over the independence of public broadcasting media. In March, the European Broadcasting Union stated that it had observed increasing politicization of the