

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The installation of a multinational company's data centre in Uruguay was confirmed, generating concern about its impact on human rights and the environment, as well as the possible tax exemptions that the company will receive. The Ministry for the Environment raised concerns over the data centre's potential environmental damage in terms of air pollution and water usage. Amnesty International requested access to information from the Ministry for the Environment on the tax benefits that the company will receive, but no information had been forthcoming by the end of the year.

UZBEKISTAN

Republic of Uzbekistan

The authorities continued to tighten their control over the right to freedom of expression and the media. Activists, bloggers and independent journalists faced politically motivated prosecutions for reporting on allegations of corruption and human rights abuses, including violations of housing and labour rights. Torture and other ill-treatment remained routine and pervasive, with impunity commonplace for those suspected of criminal responsibility. LGBTI people faced intimidation, physical assault, defamation on social media and arbitrary detention on false criminal charges. Many victims of forced evictions and expropriations remained without effective legal redress.

BACKGROUND

No genuine political opposition parties took part in the parliamentary elections in October. The ruling party won a majority of seats.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities continued to tighten their control over the right to freedom of expression and the media, suffocating any genuinely independent outlets. In the absence of free media, bloggers and social

media commentators faced politically motivated prosecutions for reporting allegations of corruption, human rights abuses and other politically sensitive topics. At least 10 were convicted of defamation and insulting the president online, and some also faced fabricated charges of extortion and fraud.

International human rights NGOs faced increasing restrictions to their legitimate monitoring and reporting activities. Human rights defenders and activists also faced intimidation, harassment and attacks. Activists Umida Niyazova and Sharifa Madrakhimova were threatened and physically assaulted in April by a pro-government blogger and an unknown man. The assailants were attempting to stop the two women monitoring cotton production and interviewing farmers and workers at the Indorama Agro cotton company about labour disputes. The police declined to press charges against the blogger and his accomplice. Shortly afterwards the blogger accused Umida Niyazova on social media of denigrating Uzbekistan's reputation.

In July, OSCE experts expressed concern that the most recent revised draft of the Information Code contained overly broad and discriminatory restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, such as prohibiting the dissemination of information that promotes "separatism" and "religious extremism" and shows disrespect towards the state and society. The draft code was pending adoption at the end of December.

In July, ethnic Tajik journalist Salim Inomzoda was arrested and charged with disseminating "information threatening public safety" for reposting on Facebook in 2022 a traditional Tajik song, which the authorities found to be "separatist". He faced up to eight years' imprisonment.

New amendments to the law on the status of foreigners and stateless persons, signed in November, granted the authorities the power to designate as "undesirable" any foreigner found to be damaging the reputation, culture, values, traditions or history of Uzbekistan. Penalties included fines and a five-year ban on entering the country.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In February the Supreme Court designated Alga Karakalpakstan, an unregistered political opposition party advocating for the independence of the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, as “extremist” and banned it.

On 30 May a court sentenced Parakhat Musapbarov to six years’ imprisonment for alleged membership of Alga Karakalpakstan. The conviction was based solely on his forced “confession” in pre-trial detention, which he retracted in court, and comments he had posted on social media while living in neighbouring Kazakhstan.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained routine and pervasive in places of detention, and impunity was commonplace for those suspected of criminal responsibility. There was no progress on proposals by the Prosecutor General’s Office on establishing independent mechanisms for monitoring torture and conditions of detention, and the authorities continued to stall relevant legal reforms that they had promised to a number of international monitoring bodies.

The parliamentary commission set up in 2022 to investigate the violent repression of protests in Karakalpakstan, including the alleged torture of dozens of detained protesters, finally presented a report to parliament in December. The full text had not been made public by year’s end. The authorities ignored calls for an international independent investigation.

In August, human rights defenders reported that the health of Karakalpakstan lawyer and editor Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov, was deteriorating. He had been sentenced to 16 years’ imprisonment after an unfair trial for his alleged role in the July 2022 protests. According to his mother, who had visited him in prison, he was forced to work in a lime factory in dangerous conditions without any protective clothing, had lost weight, had difficulty eating and breathing, and had rashes on his hands and face. The authorities failed to provide the necessary medical

assistance, and he had limited access to his lawyer and family.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

Following his visit to Uzbekistan in August, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing warned that there was a large gap between law and practice regarding the right to housing. He noted that “judicial independence remain[ed] a challenge” and that “an overwhelming majority of cases involving developers and residents seem[ed] to be decided in favor of developers”. The special rapporteur also expressed concern that victims of forced evictions, housing rights defenders, lawyers, bloggers and journalists reporting about arbitrary housing demolitions had been intimidated, prosecuted or detained on dubious grounds.

On 5 January a court decided to transfer Shahida Salomova, who had been an outspoken critic of human rights abuses in urban development and had defended victims of forced evictions, from an open to a closed psychiatric hospital. She was forbidden contact with her relatives and lawyer and subjected to compulsory medical treatment. She had been confined to a psychiatric institution in 2022 after accusing the president and his family of corruption on social media. The special rapporteur expressed regret that he had not been allowed to visit Shahida Salomova and called for an independent international medical assessment of her condition.

LGBTI PEOPLE’S RIGHTS

LGBTI people continued to be at risk of human rights violations and abuses by law enforcement officials and private individuals. They faced intimidation, physical assault, defamation on social media and arbitrary detention on false criminal charges.

The government persisted in refusing to decriminalize consensual sexual relations between men. Responding in April to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the authorities stated that the decriminalization of such relations contradicted “the traditions of the multi-ethnic people of Uzbekistan, the values of the

institution of the family and national customs.”

The authorities also warned of the danger of “homosexual propaganda” and insisted that sexual orientation and gender identity could not be included as protected characteristics in anti-discrimination legislation because they contradicted “the values of the institution of the family”.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Uzbekistan remained vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, overuse of water for agricultural purposes, desertification and air pollution.

The capital city, Tashkent, ranked among the 10 most polluted cities in the world. A World Bank study found that 83% of its inhabitants were exposed to levels of air pollution six times greater than the WHO’s recommended levels, accounting for around 3,000 premature deaths annually. Dust from construction sites and roads contributed to more than half of airborne pollutants.

In a bid to slow encroaching desertification, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated a programme to sow drought-resistant seeds over arid areas, including Karakalpakstan which had been particularly affected by the drying out of the Aral Sea.

VENEZUELA

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Protests following the announcement of the results of the presidential election in July were violently repressed with excessive use of force and possible extrajudicial executions. Thousands of arbitrary arrests were carried out against political opponents, human rights defenders and journalists; hundreds of children were among those detained. Detainees including women and children were allegedly tortured. Detention conditions continued to deteriorate. Impunity prevailed for human rights violations. The ICC authorized the resumption of the investigation into alleged

crimes against humanity. Journalists remained at risk of arbitrary detention and harassment and the government continued its attempts to obstruct independent media. Human rights NGOs were threatened with closure and human rights defenders remained at significant risk. By the end of the year more than 7.89 million Venezuelans had fled the country. Oil spills at El Palito refinery in Carabobo state severely impacted marine fauna. High levels of poverty persisted and people lacked access to adequate food, water and healthcare. Violence against women persisted and abortion remained criminalized. There was no progress in ensuring the rights of LGBTI people. Illegal mining and violence threatened Indigenous Peoples’ rights in the Orinoco Mining Arc area. OHCHR staff were expelled from the country. The mandate of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela was renewed.

BACKGROUND

The presidential election in July was fraught with controversy. Opposition parties to the government of Nicolás Maduro faced numerous obstacles to participating in the election, including obstructed registration, arbitrary detention of their members and torture.

Despite international pressure on the electoral authorities to publish detailed electoral results, including from the EU and other states in the region, such as Brazil and Colombia, the government rejected any form of inquiry and continued persecuting political opponents.

The Supreme Tribunal of Justice validated the appointment of Nicolás Maduro for a new term as president. Presidential candidate Edmundo González Urrutia, who had contested the results, fled the country in September and was granted asylum in Spain.

In February, staff of the , the UN human rights office, OHCHR were expelled from the country after reporting on Rocio San Miguel’s disappearance. By the end of the year, a small team of OHCHR staff had been readmitted into Venezuela.