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Freedom of expression was restricted. Measures to control the spread of COVID-19 limited many people's access to food. Access to health care was restricted. Early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) continued in violation of the law. Armed groups committed human rights abuses against the population.

Background

The security situation remained precarious, particularly in the Lake Chad area where Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) operated. Deadly inter-communal violence continued including in Batha and Sila provinces.

Legislative elections were postponed for the fifth year and scheduled for 2021 because, according to the Electoral Commission President, the census was delayed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of October, for several days, police units surrounded offices of political parties and civil society organizations who had refused or not been invited to participate in a governmental national forum on institutional and political reforms.

The government adopted measures to control the spread of the pandemic, including a ban on gatherings, a curfew, and heavy fines and prison sentences for not wearing face masks; they also took steps to address hardship.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

In January, Baradine Berdei Targuio, a human rights defender, was taken from his home in N'Djamena, the capital, by armed men wearing balaclavas. He was believed to be held incommunicado at the National Security Agency in N'Djamena. In February, the Justice Minister confirmed he had been arrested for "subversive activities on social media". In violation of the law, he was not presented to a prosecutor and an investigative judge until August. He was charged with breaching national security, illegal possession of weapons, and assault and battery. He remained in arbitrary detention pending trial.

On 27 November, police arrested and detained Alain Kemba Didah of The Time, a citizen movement, at the FM Liberté radio station in N'Djamena, apparently in connection with the authorities' ban on an alternative forum on reforms, initiated by political parties and civil society organizations. He was charged with "disturbing public order" and "acts of rebellion". He was released on 11 December after a tribunal acquitted him.

Freedom of expression

The rights to freedom of expression and access to information continued to be violated. In March, the Union of Chadian Journalists said two national television journalists and their driver were beaten by the police in N'Djamena while they were reporting on COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings. They were interrogated for three hours before being released without charge.

Since 22 July, social media platforms were partially blocked after a video was circulated showing an army colonel in a fight with some men in N'Djamena. The Minister of Communication said that the measure, which remained in place at the end of the year, was taken to prevent people from sending hate messages.

In September, the High Authority for Broadcast Media suspended 12 perceived opposition newspapers for three months on grounds they did not comply with the press law which required them to employ a director of publications and editor-in-chief who were trained journalists and university graduates.

Torture and other ill-treatment

On 14 April, during a military operation against armed groups in the Lake Chad area, known as “Bohoma Anger”, 58 suspected members of Boko Haram were arrested and detained at the N’Djamena Gendarmerie Legion 10. By 16 April, 44 of them had died in their cell. The Public Prosecutor said autopsies concluded that they had died after consuming a poisonous substance. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) investigated the case and said poor detention conditions could have contributed to their deaths, and rejected claims that they had committed suicide. The men were held in cramped cells, forced to sleep on the floor without bedding and were denied water and food.

The Chadian League for Human Rights (LTDH) reported that more than 200 people, including dozens of women, were arrested in the streets and workplaces in May. Many were beaten with batons in detention, for violating the curfew in the Mayo-Kebbi West and Oriental Logone provinces.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Right to food

In July, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS-NET) said that COVID-19 measures had led to increased economic hardship among those living in poverty, rendering many food insecure. In the north and east, the cost of staple foods increased by 21%. The armed conflict in the Lake Chad area also caused widespread hunger. FEWS-NET said that 39 of the 107 departments were affected, among which 15 were in crisis, and nearly 4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance.

Right to health

Access to health care was limited. According to government data people travelled around an average of 45km to access health centres. There was a ratio of one doctor to 28,531 people and one midwife to 5,902 women.

Medical equipment and facilities were inadequate to deal with the influx of COVID-19 patients. In May, the WHO said that the COVID-19-related death rate was 6% higher than the average in the continent.

In June, the LTDH said that 68 health workers were reported to have been infected due to lack of PPE. The government’s quarantine facilities for patients or others at risk of having contracted COVID-19 did not provide for necessary isolation to prevent the spread of infection. According to the LTDH, hygiene standards were poor, water was scarce and medical care insufficient.

Women’s rights

Media continued to report cases of early marriage, a practice which violated a 2015 law prohibiting child marriage. According to UNICEF, the child marriage rate was one of the highest in the world.

Women’s rights organizations said that more than 200 girls were subjected to FGM in July and August in the Mandoul and Logone Oriental provinces. In September, the NHRC expressed concern about the increase in FGM which was illegal under national law.

Abuses by armed groups

Boko Haram and ISWAP committed serious human rights abuses against the population in the Lake Chad area which resulted in dozens of deaths. According to the International Organization for Migration, 298,803 people were internally displaced in April in the region, rising to 363,807 in September; 64% of them had left their villages to escape the violence.

In one case, reported by the UN Secretary-General, 10 people were killed in August when Boko Haram attacked their village, Tinana, in the Kaya department. According to local authorities, during the night armed men surrounded the village, fired on civilians and looted houses.

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