

AMNESTY

INTERNATIONAL

REPORT 2021/22

**THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S
HUMAN RIGHTS**



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AMNESTY

INTERNATIONAL

REPORT 2021/22

GLOBAL ANALYSIS AND REGIONAL OVERVIEWS



ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Several countries in the Asia-Pacific region descended into full-blown human rights crisis during the year. In Myanmar, widespread opposition to the military coup in February was met by a ferocious response from the military in which hundreds of people were killed and thousands arbitrarily detained. The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August was accompanied by war crimes and the abrupt curtailment of women and girls' hard won fundamental rights and freedoms. In China, crimes against humanity persisted against Muslims living in Xinjiang, and the human rights situation deteriorated, particularly in Hong Kong. Failures over many years to embed respect for human rights and to hold perpetrators accountable for human rights violations directly contributed to these unfolding human rights catastrophes.

Many governments continued to use the Covid-19 pandemic as a pretext for clamping down on rights. New laws were enacted in several countries to criminalize the spreading of "fake" or "false" information about Covid-19, and existing laws used to silence critics and prevent and disperse protests.

This reflected a growing intolerance of dissent in the region. Controls on the media and internet tightened in many countries. Political opponents and others who criticized government policies or actions were subjected to increasingly harsh restrictions and punishments. Excessive force was frequently used against peaceful protesters, and governments across the region not only failed to protect the rights of human rights defenders, but actively prevented them from carrying out their vital work.

Many governments remained ill-prepared to respond to new surges in Covid-19 infections. Their failure to adequately fund health sectors, tackle corruption, and protect rights at work of health workers resulted in thousands of people being denied adequate access to healthcare and avoidable deaths.

Beyond Afghanistan, the situation of women and girls worsened in many countries in the context of the pandemic and related restrictions. In the absence of adequate social support, women working in the informal sector were among those plunged further into poverty. Across the region, women and girls continued to face high-levels of sexual and gender-based violence for which there was little or no accountability. Campaigns were waged against LGBTI people in several countries. Across the region, Indigenous people increasingly suffered the effects of environmental degradation.

Tens of thousands of people in Afghanistan and Myanmar were forcibly displaced or sought refuge across borders. However, many were unlawfully returned from neighbouring countries to situations where they were at serious risk of human rights violations. Elsewhere, governments refused entry to asylum seekers and detained and ill-treated refugees and migrants.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

The space for dissent narrowed in the Asia-Pacific region. The new military government in Myanmar sought to silence opposition to its coup by violently cracking down on country-wide protests, and arresting members of the former ruling party and pro-democracy activists. In the immediate aftermath of its takeover in Afghanistan, the Taliban curtailed media freedoms and used force to break up protests against its policies. In North Korea, anyone considered to be a threat to the country's leadership or political system was interned in prison or sentenced to

“reform through labour”. Authorities in many other countries harassed, arrested, detained and, in some cases killed, political opponents and others critical of them.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Governments continued to justify repressive laws and other measures that unduly restricted freedom of expression as necessary to prevent the spread of disinformation about Covid-19. The government of Malaysia enacted an ordinance giving it unfettered powers to silence critics under the guise of preventing “fake news” about Covid-19. In China, Bangladesh, Fiji and Viet Nam, authorities arrested and prosecuted individuals who criticized Covid-19 responses. Sri Lankan authorities issued threats of disciplinary action against health sector employees who spoke to the media about their concerns on the response there.

Independent media came under assault across the region. In Myanmar, the military authorities closed news publications, revoked the licences of media outlets and arrested journalists. Journalists were also detained, beaten and harassed in Afghanistan where new media regulations effectively prohibited any criticism of the Taliban; by October, more than 200 media outlets had closed down.

Defamation suits were brought against bloggers and journalists by the Singaporean authorities, and spurious accusations of financial irregularities used to shut down the independent news site The Online Citizen. Indian authorities raided offices of a Hindi-language news daily following its reporting on the mass dumping of bodies of Covid-19 victims along the River Ganges. In the Philippines, the work of journalist Marie Ressa was recognized when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but she faced decades in jail for pending cases brought against her for her criticism of government.

Many governments sought to further control access to and sharing of other online information. The Singapore government enacted a new law that gave it sweeping powers to remove or block online content where “foreign interference” was suspected. New legislation in Cambodia required all internet traffic to pass through an oversight body charged with “monitoring” online activity. In China, the authorities ordered internet service providers to sever access to websites that “endangered national security”, and blocked apps on which controversial topics such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong were discussed. In Pakistan, draconian legislation to censor online content was also enacted.

Authorities in many countries also used existing laws to arrest and prosecute dissenting voices, including journalists, activists and educators. In Indonesia, the Electronic Information and Transaction Law, which carries a prison sentence of up to six years, was used against at least 100 people for their legitimate criticisms of official policies or actions. The Chair of Amnesty International India, Aakar Patel, was arrested and charged with “creating communal disharmony” after tweeting concerns about hostility towards the Ghanchi Muslim community. Nepal authorities used the Electronic Transactions Act to arbitrarily detain those who criticized the government and ruling party leaders. After a two-year hiatus, the Thai authorities resumed their use of *lèse majesté* laws. A former civil servant, who was among over 116 people charged under these laws for criticizing the monarchy, was sentenced to 87 years’ imprisonment.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

Waves of protest took place throughout the region in response to political developments, the mishandling of Covid-19 responses, workers’ rights and other issues.

Regulations designed to prevent the spread of Covid-19 were used in some countries to prevent and disperse peaceful protests. In Malaysia, the authorities used Covid-19 control laws and other legislation to further intensify its crackdown on rights to peaceful assembly, including vigils for Covid-19 victims which were arbitrarily dispersed and participants

harassed, arrested and fined. In the Maldives, authorities also cited Covid-related health guidelines to break-up protests, particularly those organized by political opposition groups. In Mongolia, prohibitions on demonstrations under Covid-19 restrictions were also used to arbitrarily disperse peaceful protests and to arrest, detain and fine protest organizers.

Excessive force was used against peaceful protesters in at least 10 countries in the region. The military in Myanmar responded to country-wide protests against the coup with extreme violence using lethal tactics and weapons appropriate only for battlefield use against peaceful protesters. The numbers of protesters killed had reached close to 1,400 by years' end.

In India, police used batons in August to beat farmers who were peacefully protesting against contentious farming laws. Security forces in Indonesia used water cannons, rubber batons, and baton rounds to disperse peaceful demonstrations against the renewal in July of the Special Autonomy Law for Papua.

Riot police in Thailand repeatedly responded with violence to protests calling for political reform and improved handling of the pandemic, indiscriminately firing rubber bullets and tear gas canisters at short range at protesters, bystanders and journalists. In one incident, several children were injured and one died after live ammunition was used against protesters. Excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies in Pakistan against demonstrations, including in support of Pashtun rights, resulted in scores of people being injured and at least one death.

New blows were also struck to the right to freedom of association as governments across the region employed an ever-wider range of measures against political parties and activists, trade unions and NGOs.

In Cambodia, mass trials of members of the banned opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party, took place in which nine senior leaders were found guilty in their absence and sentenced to up to 25 years in prison. In Viet Nam, a citizen journalist who had applied to be an independent candidate in National Assembly elections was arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

The full and chilling effects of Hong Kong's 2020 National Security Law (NSL) became visible during the year. At least 61 civil society organizations disbanded due to the law, including Hong Kong's largest professional union. All possibility of organized political opposition effectively ended following the arrest of dozens of opposition party members in January. In October, Amnesty International announced the closure of its two offices in Hong Kong due to the risk of reprisals under the NSL.

Pressure on national and international NGOs in India also increased where dozens of organizations working on human rights and environmental-related issues had their licences suspended, registration cancelled or were required to seek government clearance for any funds received or disbursed. In the Maldives, a widely respected NGO, the Maldivian Democracy Network, continued to be investigated by the authorities.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders were killed in several countries, including in Afghanistan where they were the target of unlawful killings by non-state actors. Following the Taliban takeover, many fled the country or went into hiding, including commissioners and staff of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. In the Philippines, human rights and environmental defenders were among those accused of links to communist groups, or "red tagged", which effectively gave security forces licence to kill them.

The Chinese authorities intensified their crackdown on human rights defenders. Many were detained for lengthy periods, and reports of torture and other ill-treatment against them was common. Several human rights lawyers and activists detained in previous years remained

missing. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, 24 people were given prison sentences for peacefully commemorating the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.

Elsewhere, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka Thailand and Viet Nam, human rights defenders were harassed, threatened, detained, prosecuted and/or imprisoned. In Indonesia, physical assaults, digital attacks, threats and other forms of attack against over 357 human rights defenders were reported during the year. Human rights defenders, journalists and activists were among hundreds of people imprisoned in Bangladesh under the Digital Security Act. In Nepal, police detained 13 activists in October who were peacefully demanding impartial investigations into the death of one woman and the disappearance of another in Banke district.

The extent of surveillance of human rights defenders by some governments also became increasingly apparent. In India, where many human rights activists were officially designated “enemies of the state”, a massive unlawful surveillance operation against human rights defenders was revealed. In Viet Nam, an investigation by Amnesty International revealed a campaign of unlawful surveillance targeting human rights defenders both within the country and overseas.

In a positive development, Mongolia passed a law that consolidated legal protections for human rights defenders. However, rights activists, including herders working on environmental and land rights issues, continued to face threats, intimidation and prosecution for their legitimate activities.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Underinvestment and corruption contributed to the continuing inability of public health sectors in the region to respond adequately to the Covid-19 pandemic. In some countries, severe shortages of staff, beds and equipment meant that Covid-19 patients were unable to access adequate healthcare. This resulted in thousands of preventable deaths, including in India and Nepal, both of which experienced steep surges in infections during the year. In India, as well as the Philippines, there were concerns about lack of transparency or irregularities in the handling of government funds for the pandemic response.

Political turmoil in Afghanistan and Myanmar brought already fragile health care systems close to collapse. The suspension of aid to Afghanistan’s health sector by international donors resulted in the closure of at least 3,000 healthcare facilities, including Covid-19 hospitals. In Myanmar, access to healthcare was impeded by numerous attacks on health facilities and personnel.

Access to Covid-19 vaccines was problematic in some countries. Authorities in North Korea denied that Covid-19 existed in the country and turned down offers of millions of vaccine doses through the COVAX initiative. Nepal did not receive its expected supply of vaccines, and 1.4 million people had to wait for months to receive a second dose.

Misinformation also contributed to low uptake in some countries. In Papua New Guinea for example, where only 3% of the population had been vaccinated by the end of the year, the government failed to provide timely, accessible information about the virus and vaccine programme.

Authorities in some countries continued to ignore calls to reduce prison populations to limit the spread of Covid-19. Some 87,000 cases were recorded among detainees in Thailand’s unsanitary and overcrowded prisons. In Pakistan, vaccines were reportedly prioritized for prisoners, and some prisoners in Sindh state were released as a preventative measure. However, prison authorities in other states stopped reporting infection rates among detainees.

Harsh lockdown measures also undermined the rights to health and adequate food in some countries. In Viet Nam, residents in Ho Chi Minh City were not permitted to leave their homes

for weeks on end, leaving many in a position of severe food insecurity and hunger. Similar measures were imposed by the authorities in Cambodia in several cities, seriously impacting access by residents to food, healthcare and other essential goods and services.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

The pandemic continued to place enormous strain on health workers across the region. In many countries they worked in intolerable conditions without adequate protection or remuneration. In Mongolia, health workers were subjected to harassment by the authorities and physical assaults by frustrated and desperate patients. In India, community health workers were not given adequate wages or PPE. In Indonesia, disbursement of incentive payments to health workers in recognition of their work during the Covid-19 pandemic were delayed.

The socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and associated restrictions also continued to bite, disproportionality impacting those who were already marginalized, including people who lacked secure employment and regular incomes. In Nepal, for example, Dalits and people living in poverty, including daily wage earners, were hit by the worsening economic situation there. In Viet Nam, women migrant workers, including street vendors, suffered especially severe effects, with many reporting food insecurity and inability to meet other basic needs.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Events in Afghanistan and Myanmar led to new waves of displacement in the region. Following the chaotic evacuation from Kabul airport in August, many fled overland towards Pakistan and Iran, but the Taliban imposed restrictions on departures and border closures compromised their right to seek asylum in third countries. By year end, over one million undocumented Afghans had been returned from Iran and Pakistan, most of them involuntarily.

Asylum seekers and migrants from Myanmar were also forcibly returned or refused entry by other countries in the region. Thai border guards pushed back approximately 2,000 Karen villagers who were fleeing military air strikes. Authorities in Malaysia deported over 1,000 people back to Myanmar despite the serious risk of persecution and other human rights violations.

The human rights situation in Myanmar also made voluntary repatriations of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh impossible. However, their rights continued to be restricted in Bangladesh where they were also vulnerable to violence. More than 19,000 were transferred to a remote island, Bhasan Char, where they were denied their right to freedom of movement.

In several other countries, refugees and migrants were subjected to prolonged detention and ill-treatment. In Japan, asylum seekers and irregular migrants were held in indefinite detention. An investigation into the death of a Sri Lankan woman in immigration custody there found that her medical care had been inadequate. Australian authorities continued to indefinitely and arbitrarily detain refugees and asylum seekers both within the country and offshore. Detained asylum seekers in New Zealand were subjected to ill-treatment, although in a positive move, the government announced an independent review into the practice of detaining asylum seekers in criminal detention facilities solely on immigration grounds.

In countries including Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Viet Nam, Covid-19 preventive measures unfairly discriminated against migrant workers.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

There were major setbacks to the rights of women and girls in the region. In Afghanistan, 20 years of progress towards enhanced protection and promotion of women's rights was rolled back overnight. Women were excluded from representation in the new Taliban administration and prevented from working in many sectors. Girls' access to education was severely restricted, and women human rights defenders, journalists, judges and prosecutors faced threats and intimidation. Protests in support of women's rights were met with violence by the Taliban.

Sexual and gender-based violence, already endemic in many countries of the region, was exacerbated in the context of states' responses to Covid-19. Increased rates of gender-based violence were reported, for example, in Bangladesh, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka.

Demands for accountability for violence against women and stronger protections made little headway. The Chinese government conducted a smear campaign against exiled women formerly detained in the Xinjiang region who spoke out about sexual violence in so-called "re-education centres". In Pakistan, a domestic violence bill was passed by parliament but opposition from conservative parties reportedly led the government to request a religious advisory body to review it. In the meantime, lack of accountability for sexual and gender-based violence there remained common. No progress was made in Nepal towards reforming constitutional provisions which denied women equal citizenship rights, or removing overly restrictive statutory limitations for rape.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

LGBTI people continued to be persecuted or otherwise face discrimination in law and practice in many countries in the region. Consensual same-sex sexual relations remained criminalized in some countries.

Anti-LGBTI campaigns were waged in several countries. In Malaysia over 1,700 people were sent to government-run rehabilitation camps designed to change the "lifestyle" and "sexual orientation" of LGBTI people. Chinese authorities continued their campaign to "clean" the internet of LGBTI representation. Effeminate looking men were banned from appearing on television and the social media accounts of LGBTI organizations shut down. In Afghanistan, the Taliban made it clear that they would not respect LGBTI rights.

Small advances were made in the recognition of same-sex marriages in Taiwan, but LGBTI people continued to face discrimination.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Commercial interests and environmental degradation increasingly encroached on the traditions and livelihoods of Indigenous people in the region, and their legal protections were watered down in at least one country. In Bangladesh, Indigenous peoples experienced scarcity of resources because of increasing deforestation and land-grabbing. Indigenous people in Papua New Guinea protested the impacts of deep-sea mining for minerals and metals on their livelihoods and culture. An Indigenous community in Malaysia filed a judicial review against the Selangor state government challenging plans to evict them from their land to make way for a tourism project. In Nepal and Thailand, Indigenous peoples who had been forcibly evicted in previous years were not permitted to return or provided with alternative land or livelihoods.

In Fiji, parliament passed amendments to the iTaukei Land Trust Act which removed the requirement for consent for mortgages and leases issued on land owned by Indigenous peoples, leading to protests in which over a dozen people were arrested. Courts in Taiwan took

some steps to realize the rights of Indigenous peoples to their land and traditional hunting practices, but existing legislation still provided inadequate protections.

In Cambodia, Indigenous peoples and grassroots forest defenders were denied access to their traditional lands for conservation activities. There and elsewhere, efforts to protect their lands met with arrests and violence. In Indonesia, Indigenous peoples in North Sumatra and Riau provinces were violently assaulted by private security guards employed by paper companies when trying to stop eucalyptus trees being planted on their lands.

In the Philippines, Indigenous peoples and Indigenous peoples' rights activists were arrested and killed. Unknown assailants shot dead a village chief, Julie Catamin, who was a witness in a case relating to a police raid in December 2020 in which Tumandok community leaders were arrested and others killed. In India, Dalit and Adivasi (Indigenous) women remained at particular risk of sexual violence by men from dominant classes.

CRIMES UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

Amnesty International gathered conclusive evidence that the Chinese government committed crimes against humanity, including imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty, torture and persecution against predominantly Muslim ethnic groups living in Xinjiang. Despite their claims to the contrary, the government continued a campaign of arbitrary mass detention, combined with violence and intimidation to root out Islamic religious beliefs and Turkic Muslim ethno-cultural practices.

Parties to the conflict in Afghanistan committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes. Ethnic Hazaras were frequently targeted, including during the Taliban offensive and takeover. More than 100 former members of security forces were forcibly disappeared or extrajudicially executed by the Taliban and nine surrendered Hazara soldiers were executed in Daykundi alone. Several massacres by the Taliban of Hazara civilians also took place, including in Ghazni and Daykundi provinces.

In Myanmar, the military was responsible for indiscriminate attacks and attacks directed against civilians. It also blocked humanitarian access to internally displaced populations. Two humanitarian workers from Save the Children were among those killed by the military in eastern Kayah State in December.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Limited progress was made on preventing torture and other forms of ill-treatment which remained pervasive in a significant number of countries in the region. There were moves in both Pakistan and Thailand to criminalize torture. However, proposed legislation in the latter was not fully consistent with international standards. In Sri Lanka, new regulations issued under the Prevention of Terrorism Act potentially placed detainees at increased risk of torture.

Torture and ill-treatment continued to be reported in these and other countries. In Myanmar, the widespread use of torture or other ill-treatment against people detained for their opposition to the coup was documented, in some cases resulting in death. Chinese authorities continued to use torture against detainees in Xinjiang and beyond and prosecuted those who spoke out about their experiences. In Nepal, torture and other ill-treatment were widely used in pretrial detention to extract “confessions” and intimidate detainees. There had yet to be any convictions under the 2017 Criminal Code, which criminalized these practices. Deaths in custody or shortly after release remained all too common in Malaysia, attributable, at least in some cases, to beatings and other ill-treatment sustained while in detention.

IMPUNITY

Impunity for serious human rights violations and crimes under international law remained a serious concern in a significant number of countries.

Justice continued to be denied to victims of crimes under international law and other grave human rights violations committed during past armed conflicts in Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Nepal, transitional justice mechanisms failed to resolve a single case. Following repeated failures by the Sri Lankan government to advance justice domestically, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to establish a mechanism to gather evidence of international crimes committed by parties to the conflict.

In the absence of domestic-level progress, the International Criminal Court (ICC) proceeded with investigations in two countries. However, its investigation in the Philippines into crimes against humanity committed in the context of the “war on drugs” was suspended while the ICC considered a deferral request from the government. The ICC also resumed investigations in Afghanistan, but by focusing only on acts committed by the Taliban and Islamic State – Khorasan Province, while ignoring war crimes committed by the Afghan government security forces and by US military and intelligence personnel, it risked both its reputation and further entrenching impunity. Australian authorities failed to take any action against members of its Special Forces referred for investigation in 2020 in connection with alleged war crimes committed in Afghanistan.

Impunity continued to facilitate human rights violations elsewhere, including in India where enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment were committed on a widespread and systematic basis. In Pakistan, a bill proposing amendments to the Pakistan Criminal Penal Code to criminalize enforced disappearances was presented before parliament but was insufficient to protect against this crime. In Bangladesh, the government denied responsibility or claimed that the security forces were acting in “self-defence” rather than investigating cases of alleged disappearances and unlawful killings. Indonesian security forces continued to commit unlawful killings in Papua and West Papua largely with impunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite a few positive developments, the erosion of respect for and protection of human rights continued in the Asia-Pacific region. Afghanistan and Myanmar's tragic descents into crisis were unsurprising in a region where human rights are too often ignored, governments increasingly intolerant of criticism, discrimination against women and girls and marginalized groups pervasive, and impunity rife.

Governments must respect and facilitate the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Laws that limit these rights, including restrictive regulations on media, internet access and NGOs, should be revoked and the arbitrary arrest and detention of government critics ended. The legitimate work of human rights defenders must be respected and protected.

Governments must learn lessons from challenges faced in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and commit to higher levels of investment in healthcare systems and protecting the rights to health.

Increased concerted efforts are needed by governments across the region to reverse setbacks to the rights of women and girls in the context of the pandemic, and to tackle sexual and gender-based violence. Pressure must also be intensified on the Taliban government in Afghanistan to reverse its roll-back of rights and freedoms of women and girls.

Governments worldwide should refrain from returning any person to Afghanistan, or Myanmar, regardless of their immigration status, until human rights protections can be guaranteed. Detention of asylum seekers on the basis of immigration status alone must end.

Governments must bolster efforts to fight impunity by undertaking thorough, independent, impartial, effective and transparent investigations into crimes under international law and by bringing suspected perpetrators to justice. Full cooperation should be extended to international justice processes.

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A-Z COUNTRY ENTRIES



wiretapping of private communications and for placing criminal suspects in pretrial detention was insufficiently probing, and resulted in near-total approval. Safeguards envisaged in national law, such as the persons being wiretapped being compulsorily informed, were not observed.

At a press conference on 4 October, the Prosecutor General accused a former colleague and several NGOs of plotting to unseat him, and claimed he had seen the content of their mobile communications. He was arrested the following day on several charges, including abuse of authority.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

On 14 October parliament approved ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), which Moldova signed in 2017. Little tangible progress was made, however, in addressing domestic violence, which predominantly affected women.

TRANSNISTRIA REGION

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Critics of the de facto authorities faced criminal prosecution.

In July, pensioner Mikhail Yermuraki was convicted of “insulting the President” and fined the equivalent of US\$600. Two other charges against him, “denying the positive role of Russian peacekeepers” and “inciting national, racial, religious hatred”, were dropped.

In the same month, activist Gennadiy Chorba was sentenced to three years and three months’ imprisonment, for the same offence of insulting the President as well as on charges of “extremism” in connection with a peaceful picket a year earlier which he had attended. The de facto authorities accused him of inciting people to protest, as well as of making derogatory comments about medical personnel during the pandemic.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In August, the de facto Transnistrian authorities refused to reregister the Lucian

Blaga Theoretical High School, the only Romanian-language school in the regional capital, Tiraspol, and suspended its operations for at least three months. The reasons were not reported. The de facto authorities reversed the decision to suspend the school in the same month, after intervention by the OSCE and other international partners.

MONGOLIA

Mongolia

Head of state: **Ukhnaa Khurelsukh** (replaced **Khaltmaa Battulga** in June)

Head of government: **Luvssannamsrai Oyun-Erdene**

Covid-19 restrictions were used to repress the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Health workers were threatened and assaulted for protesting against poor working conditions. Authorities failed to adequately address allegations of torture.

BACKGROUND

Over 200 protests took place during the year, mainly against the negative impact on people’s livelihoods caused by government measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Restrictions introduced to control the spread of Covid-19 that prohibited demonstrations were used to as a pretext to arbitrarily and sometimes forcibly disperse peaceful protests. Some protest organizers were arrested, detained and fined.¹

WORKERS’ RIGHTS

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed long-standing weaknesses in the healthcare system. Frontline health workers were subjected to harassment by the authorities and physical assaults by frustrated and desperate patients. Protests about health workers’ treatment, including poor working

conditions and exhaustion, were met by threats from the prime minister.

Many health workers continued to work despite their own poor health for fear of losing their jobs. As of October, approximately one in five health workers had been infected with Covid-19.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Government-imposed school closures in response to Covid-19 severely impacted access to education for children of herders and other children living in rural areas or areas with limited or no access to the internet and television. Schools reopened in September after almost two academic years.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In July, the Law on the Legal Status of Human Rights Defenders entered into force. It consolidated legal protections for human rights defenders but also contained provisions that could be interpreted to arbitrarily restrict human rights defenders' voices and put them at risk of prosecution. Rights activists, including herders working on environmental and land rights issues and advocates, continued to face threats, intimidation and prosecution for their legitimate activities.²

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

There was no progress towards setting up a national mechanism for the prevention of torture, which was provided for under the 2020 revised law on the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, despite Mongolia's acceptance of relevant recommendations during its UPR.

Torture survivors and victims' families remained unable to access full and effective reparation. Investigations into allegations of torture were generally flawed and those suspected of being responsible were rarely brought to justice. According to statistics published by the Prosecutor General's Office in October, 53 alleged torture cases had been reviewed, but only three resulted in prosecutions.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

The government continued to block the establishment of "Citizens' Representative Organisations". Provided for in the Law on Urban Redevelopment, these bodies ensure the participation of communities in decisions relating to the projects affecting their land and housing. In October, the Supreme Court dismissed the case of Davaanyam Puntsag and his family who were forcibly evicted in 2018 when a property developer demolished their home in the Bayangol district of the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Online discriminatory comments posted by the Deputy Mayor of Ulaanbaatar in September led to an increase in threats and hate speech against LGBTI people, activists and organizations.

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1. "Mongolia: The right to freedom of assembly and expression is being suppressed", 12 May (Mongolian only)
 2. "Mongolia: The real situation of human rights defenders is a problem," 25 May

MONTENEGRO

Republic of Montenegro

Head of state: Milo Đukanović

Head of government: Zdravko Krivokapić

Impunity persisted for crimes under international law and attacks on journalists. Misogynist hate speech increased, while ethnic division and religious intolerance deepened. The government failed to deliver promised reforms.

BACKGROUND

The shaky multi-ethnic coalition government began to address past violations, including political control of the police, prosecution and judiciary, and complicity with organized crime.

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THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

From a human rights perspective, 2021 was largely a story of betrayal and hypocrisy in the corridors of power. Promises to “build back better” after the Covid-19 pandemic were little more than lip service, with some governments even redoubling their exploitation of the pandemic to bolster their own positions.

Hopes of global cooperation withered in the face of vaccine hoarding, reluctance to confront climate change and narrow self-interest. Promises of economic recovery were undercut by lacklustre debt relief and entrenched income inequality. Advances in science and technology were undermined by corporate greed and governments’ complicity or exploited to stifle dissent and keep refugees and migrants from crossing borders.

But hopes for a better post-pandemic world were kept alive by courageous individuals, social movements and civil society organizations. Their efforts and limited hard-won victories should prompt governments to live up to their promises.

The Amnesty International Report 2021/22 highlights the impact of these dynamics at a global, regional, and national level, covering the human rights situation in 154 countries in 2021. It presents Amnesty International’s documented concerns and recommendations for governments and others. It is essential reading for policy makers, advocates, activists and anyone with an interest in human rights.

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