

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

In April, Rwanda marked the 30th anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi population, in which an estimated 800,000 people were killed, including Hutu people and others who opposed the genocide and the extremist government that orchestrated it.²

In April, Huye Intermediate Court convicted Beatrice Munyenyezi of murder as a genocide crime, complicity in genocide, incitement to commit genocide and complicity in rape, and sentenced her to life imprisonment. She was acquitted on the charge of planning genocide. She had been deported from the USA in 2021.

In May the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals announced that the remaining fugitives indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Charles Ryandikayo and Charles Sikubwabo, were deceased.

A Belgian court sentenced Emmanuel Nkunduwimye to 25 years in prison in June after finding him guilty of war crimes and genocide for murder, rape and attempted murder.

On 31 July, Wenceslas Twagirayezu was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity by the Court of Appeal in the capital, Kigali. In January he had been acquitted by the High Court Chamber for International Crimes (HCCIC) after being extradited from Denmark in 2018.

In September, Venant Rutunga was found guilty as an accomplice to genocide and complicity in extermination as a crime against humanity. The HCCIC sentenced him to 20 years in prison. He had been extradited from the Netherlands in 2021.

On 30 October a Paris court found Eugene Rwamucyo guilty of complicity in genocide, complicity in crimes against humanity and conspiring to prepare those crimes but acquitted him of genocide and crimes against humanity. He received a 27-year prison sentence.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The CEDAW Committee considered Rwanda's periodic report in May. While recognizing the government's efforts to promote gender equality, it raised concerns about inequalities faced by disadvantaged groups, including women and girls with disabilities, and rural, Batwa and refugee women. It noted the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes that constitute an underlying cause of gender-based violence against women, recommending that the lesser penalty for marital rape should correspond with the standard penalty for the crime of rape. The Committee welcomed measures to increase women's financial literacy and access to financial credit, but remained concerned about the significant gender gap in access to loans and barriers to accessing credit, including collateral requirements, and women's limited agency to manage land resources jointly owned by both spouses.

1. *Rwanda: Repression in the Context of Elections*, 8 July 1

2. "Rwanda: 30 years on, justice for genocide crimes more urgent than ever", 5 April 1

SAUDI ARABIA

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Human rights defenders and others exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials leading to lengthy prison terms, and travel bans. Despite some limited labour reforms migrant workers, in particular domestic workers, continued to be subjected to forced labour and other forms of labour abuse and exploitation, and lacked access to adequate protection and redress mechanisms. Thousands of people were arrested and deported to their home countries, often without due process, as part of a government crackdown on individuals accused of violating labour, border and residency regulations. Saudi

Arabia carried out executions for a wide range of crimes, including drug-related offences. Courts sentenced people to death following grossly unfair trials. Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice. Saudi Arabia failed to enact measures to tackle climate change and announced plans to increase oil production.

BACKGROUND

Saudi Arabia and the EU held their fourth human rights dialogue in the capital, Riyadh, on 17 December. The EU acknowledged progress on women's rights but raised serious concerns about the rise in executions, including for non-lethal and drug-related crimes, as well as concerns about restrictions on civil and political rights, referring to long prison sentences imposed for online expression on social media.

On 11 December, FIFA confirmed Saudi Arabia as the 2034 men's football World Cup host. Civil society organizations condemned the decision, highlighting risks of exploitation, discrimination, forced evictions and repression.

Between 15 and 19 December, Saudi Arabia hosted the 19th Annual Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum in Riyadh. An Amnesty International delegation called for the release of individuals detained for their online expression.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

The authorities continued to arbitrarily detain individuals without giving them any opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of their detention, and in many cases sentenced people to lengthy prison terms or the death penalty on vague, over-broad charges that criminalized peaceful expression as "terrorism", in violation of their fair trial and due process rights, as well as their right to freedom of expression. The Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), established to try terrorism-related crimes, continued to convict and sentence individuals to lengthy prison terms following grossly unfair trials solely for exercising their rights to freedom of

expression and association, including online on X (formerly Twitter).

The leaked draft of Saudi Arabia's forthcoming Penal Code criminalized freedom of expression by codifying as crimes and prescribing punishments for defamation, "insult" and "questioning the integrity of the judiciary". It also included vaguely worded provisions for crimes including "indecent acts" and "words affecting honour".

Unfair trials

On 9 January the SCC sentenced Manahel al-Otaibi, a fitness instructor and women's rights activist, to 11 years in prison in a secret hearing for charges related solely to her choice of clothing and expression of her views online, including calling on social media for an end to Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system. Manahel al-Otaibi's sentence was only revealed publicly several weeks after the court judgment, in the government's formal reply to a joint request for information about her case from several UN special rapporteurs. Her family could not access her court documents, nor the evidence presented against her. In November, she told her family that the SCC Court of Appeal had upheld her sentence.

On 29 May the SCC sentenced teacher Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi to 20 years in prison for social media posts criticizing the government's Vision 2030 social and economic programme and expressing condolences for the death in prison of a prominent human rights defender.¹ Two months later the SCC Court of Appeal reduced his sentence to 15 years in prison. Asaad al-Ghamdi's brother, Mohammad al-Ghamdi, a retired teacher, was convicted and sentenced by the SCC Court of Appeal to 30 years in prison after his death sentence was quashed in September. He also had been charged solely for his social media posts.²

In September the SCC reduced Salma al-Shehab's sentence from 27 years in prison to four years in prison and four years suspended. In March 2022 the SCC had sentenced her to six years in prison under the counterterrorism law solely for her writings and re-tweets on X in support of

women's rights. Following a series of appeals the sentence was increased to 27 years imprisonment in 2023.

The authorities continued to detain Yemeni-Dutch national Fahd Ramadhan without charge or access to legal representation. After arresting him on 20 November 2023, authorities held him incommunicado from 21 November 2023 to 1 January 2024. He told Dutch officials that he believed he was detained for sympathizing online with a critic of the Saudi royal family. In January, Fahd Ramadhan's family appointed a lawyer who was prevented from visiting him and told by prison authorities that he should not interfere in the case.³

Travel bans

Prominent human rights defender Loujain al-Hathloul, who was released in February 2021 after serving two-and-a-half years in prison on charges related to her human rights work, continued to be subjected to an arbitrary travel ban despite the expiry of her prison term and her judicially imposed travel ban. In September 2024 the Board of Grievances, an administrative court, agreed to address a judicial complaint filed by Loujain al-Hathloul against the Presidency of State Security for continuing to impose her travel ban. In December the judge closed the case, citing lack of jurisdiction.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

The authorities continued their crackdown on individuals accused of violating residency, border and labour regulations, including through arbitrary arrests, detentions and deportations often without due process solely due to their irregular immigration status. According to the Ministry of the Interior, during the year at least 573,000 foreign nationals, out of more than 994,000 arrested for such violations, were returned to their home country. More than 61,037 people, mostly Ethiopian and Yemeni nationals, were arrested for crossing into Saudi Arabia irregularly from Yemen.

Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia continued to be subject to the *kafala* sponsorship system and faced widespread abuses, some

of which may have amounted to forced labour, in various employment sectors and geographic regions. The national minimum wage continued to be applied to Saudi nationals only.

In June, Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI), a global trade union, filed a landmark complaint against Saudi Arabia at the ILO, accusing the country of violating ILO conventions on forced labour due to the exploitative living and working conditions faced by its large migrant workforce.

Migrant workers contracted to sites in Saudi Arabia franchised by Carrefour Group were deceived by recruitment agents and subjected to excessive working hours and wage theft by a local franchise and third-party labour suppliers. This treatment in some cases likely amounted to forced labour and human trafficking. Following Amnesty International's investigation, Carrefour Group instructed a third-party audit of its franchise partner's operations and took some steps to improve conditions.⁴

In February, in response to a 2023 Amnesty International report on the abuse of workers in Amazon warehouses, the company reimbursed unlawful recruitment fees for more than 700 workers. Amazon also introduced measures to improve worker accommodation, third-party inspections and grievance procedures.⁵

Migrant domestic workers continued to face labour abuse and exploitation. Rather than extending the protections of the labour law to include them, the government introduced a new regulation, which took effect in October. Its provisions stipulated a ban on passport confiscation, set a maximum number of working hours and outlined occupational safety and health regulations. However, the new law fell short of human rights standards by not mandating paid overtime, allowing the employer to negotiate with the workers their weekly day off, failing to set a minimum wage and lacking proper enforcement mechanisms.

The authorities announced further reforms for migrant domestic workers. In February the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD) launched a new

insurance scheme, ostensibly to protect the rights of domestic workers and their employers. However, the scheme favoured employers, offering them compensation in cases where the domestic worker dies or is absent or otherwise unable to work, as well as covering the cost of repatriation in the event of death. In contrast, domestic workers' salary payments were only guaranteed if the employer dies or becomes permanently disabled, but not where the employer otherwise fails to pay wages.

In March the MHRSD introduced a regulation allowing employers of domestic workers to terminate their contracts under certain conditions by filing a "discontinuation from work" report against them. The change, which had been previously introduced to the private sector, ostensibly removes the ability of employers to file abusive "absconding" charges. However, it continues to lack legal protections that would allow migrant workers to challenge such reports, leaving them at risk of arrest and deportation.

In May the MHRSD launched the mandatory Wage Protection Service, which required employers to use digital payment methods for domestic workers' salaries, with the aim of providing documented proof of wage payments. It remained unclear what penalties employers would face for non-compliance.

In July the Health Insurance Council and the Insurance Authority enforced a governmental decision to make insurance mandatory for employers with more than four domestic workers registered under their name. However, the policy created unequal protection as it excluded smaller households, leaving many domestic workers without health insurance.

In October, the MHRSD announced an insurance scheme to protect migrant workers' wages where employers failed to pay. However, the scheme's design and restrictive eligibility criteria limited its ability to provide comprehensive protection for all migrant workers in need.⁶

DEATH PENALTY

The authorities carried out a record number of executions for a wide range of crimes and in circumstances that violated international law and standards. Executions for drug-related crimes soared.

At least 50 men, the majority Egyptian nationals, remained on death row in Tabuk Prison convicted of drug-related crimes.

Seven young men who were below 18 years of age at the time of their alleged offences remained at imminent risk of execution. Six had been convicted and sentenced to death for terrorism-related charges; the seventh for armed robbery and murder. All seven had been subjected to unfair trials marred by the admission of torture-tainted "confessions" as evidence.

On 17 August the Saudi Press Agency announced the execution of Abdulmajeed al-Nimr, a retired traffic police officer, for terrorism offences related to his alleged association with the armed group Al-Qaida. According to court documents, he was initially sentenced by the SCC to nine years in prison on 25 October 2021 on charges which included "seeking to destabilize the social fabric and national unity by participating in demonstrations... supporting riots, chanting slogans against the state and its rulers" and joining a WhatsApp group that included individuals wanted for security purposes. On appeal, his punishment was increased to the death sentence. The SCC made no reference to Abdulmajeed al-Nimr's involvement with Al-Qaida in its initial judgment. Abdulmajeed al-Nimr was denied access to a lawyer for around two years during his interrogations and pretrial detention and was convicted solely on the basis of a "confession" he said was obtained under duress, including being detained in solitary confinement for one-and-a-half months.

A leaked draft of Saudi Arabia's forthcoming Penal Code for Discretionary Sentences analysed by Amnesty International showed that it codified the death penalty as a primary punishment for a range of offences alongside imprisonment and fines and continued to enable judges to use their discretion to hand down death sentences.⁷

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice, including in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.

In October the CEDAW Committee reviewed Saudi Arabia's fifth periodic report, identifying more than 20 principal areas of concern with regard to Saudi Arabia's implementation of its obligations under the CEDAW convention, which it ratified in 2000. The Committee issued recommendations regarding the targeting of women human rights defenders, use of the death penalty, lack of protection for women migrant domestic workers, the persistence of a de facto male guardianship system and other issues related to safeguarding women's rights in Saudi Arabia.

UNLAWFUL TARGETED SURVEILLANCE

In October the UK High Court issued an order granting permission to Yahya Assiri, a Saudi human rights defender living in the UK, to bring a case against the government of Saudi Arabia for using spyware against him.⁸ An August 2018 Amnesty International investigation revealed how Yahya Assiri and an Amnesty International staff member had been targeted with Saudi Arabia-related bait content by NSO Group's Pegasus spyware.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Saudi Arabia, a major fossil fuel producer, continued to be one of the world's top 10 carbon emitters per capita. Saudi Arabia blocked any reference to fossil fuel phase out during negotiations at COP29.

In June the energy minister announced that Saudi Arabia plans to increase its oil production capacity between 2025 and 2027, before returning to the 2024 level of 12.3 million barrels per day in 2028.

The government announced a 2060 net zero target in 2021 but had yet to release any additional information on this objective or enshrine it in law. Saudi Arabia's NDC target reflected minimal-to-no action and was inconsistent with the globally agreed 1.5°C temperature limit.

1. *Saudi Arabia: Teacher Sentenced to 20 Years for Tweets: Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi*, 16 July 1
2. "Saudi Arabia: Authorities must immediately release man convicted over social media posts after death sentence quashed", 9 August 1
3. "Saudi Arabia: Authorities must release arbitrarily detained Yemeni-Dutch national", 29 May 1
4. *Saudi Arabia: "I Would Fear Going To Work" Labour Exploitation at Carrefour Sites in Saudi Arabia*, 21 October 1
5. "Saudi Arabia: Amazon reimburses workers for unlawful fees following Amnesty International report highlighting abuses", 22 February 1
6. *Saudi Arabia: Insurance Scheme for Migrant Workers Falls Short of Protection Against Wage Theft*, 6 November 1
7. *Saudi Arabia: Manifesto for Repression: Saudi Arabia's Forthcoming Penal Code Must Uphold Human Rights in Line With International Law and Standards*, 19 March 1
8. "UK court says activist can pursue spyware case against Saudi Arabia", 21 October 1

SENEGAL

Republic of Senegal

Police fired at protesters during the pre-electoral period, killing four, including a child; more than 150 protesters were arrested, and journalists covering the protests were beaten. An amnesty law was passed in March, halting prosecutions for the killings of 65 protesters and bystanders between March 2021 and February 2024. The Family Code still contained provisions violating women's and girls' rights. The authorities failed to protect the rights of *talibé* children. More than 959 migrants who had departed from the Senegalese coast died at sea during the first five months of the year. The government suspended all mining along the Falémé river due to environmental degradation.

BACKGROUND

The first quarter of the year was marked by tensions linked to parliament's delay of the presidential elections, amid allegations of corruption against two members of the Constitutional Court. Elections finally took