



Weekly Press Review

19th of June – 25th of June

Latest human rights news from Northern Africa and the Middle East

1| United Arab Emirates

In Memoriam of Alaa al-Siddiq, a prominent human rights activist killed in a London car crash

2| Syria

Islamic State resurgence threatens human rights

3| Iran

Raisi's election victory & human rights implications

4| Bahrain

UN calls for release of three human rights defenders

5| Syria

UK aid budget cuts leave thousands at risk

6| Saudi Arabia

Operatives who killed Khashoggi received US training

1| Brief review

Israeli forces batter Palestinian protests; Ceasefire broken in Idlib, Syria

2| Brief review

Turkish court bans pro-Kurdish Party; TikTok influencer arrested in Egypt, violating freedom of expression

3| Brief review

French executives charged with complicity in Libya and Egypt; EU set to approve deal to keep refugees out

4| Brief review

Syrian NGOs urge UN to continue aid; Egyptian opposition media asked to stop broadcasting in Turkey

5| Brief review

Activist beaten to death in Palestinian Authority custody; Civilian nuclear facility stops sabotage attempt in Iran

In Memoriam of Alaa al-Siddiq



Image Source: ALQST

ACHRS joins other human rights organizations and activists mourning the death of Emirati activist Alaa al-Siddiq who passed away this week after she was involved in a car accident in Oxfordshire, U.K. Al-Siddiq was born and raised in the United Arab Emirates and is the daughter of activist and reformist Mohammad al-Siddiq. Since a very young age, Alaa has been surrounded by civil society advocates and activists. Her father, Mohammed al-Siddiq, was a prominent Shariah professor at the University of Sharjah which Ms. al-Siddiq attended as well. Emerging from an educated and religious family, al-Siddiq's academic interest led her to seek a bachelor's degree in Shariah Law from the University of Sharjah in 2010 and went on to obtain a post-graduate diploma in Education at the same institution.

In 2012, Ms. Al-Siddiq's father was arbitrarily detained by UAE authorities, and unfortunately remains in prison to this day. As persecution due to political opinion increased in the UAE, Ms. al-Siddiq and her husband fled to Qatar, where they resided until their relocation to the United Kingdom. In the U.K., al-Siddiq volunteered with the organization ALQST and eventually served as its executive director until her death. ALQST is a non-profit organization that advocates for greater freedoms and human rights in the UAE and the wider Gulf region of the Middle East.

The ALQST organization, along with the police and local authorities, looked into the details of the accident and found no suggestion of foul play. Law enforcement officials will continue in-depth investigations and are expected to publish their findings once they are completed. In a statement, ALQST described al-Siddiq as an "icon of the Emirati human rights movement". Her work on advocating for human rights in the Gulf will have a lasting impact, and we applaud her bravery, hard work and dedication for the work that she did. ACHRS extends its most heartfelt condolences to her family and friends. The world of human rights advocates has lost a great warrior. You will be forever remembered.

الله يرحمها

Brief review

Occupied Palestine – On Saturday, June 19th, Israeli forces battered Palestinians who had gathered at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem to protest the offensive chants far-right Jews carried out on June 15th during the “flag march.” Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) brutally attacked unarmed protesters with stun grenades, night sticks, and pepper gas. IOF detained at least two children at the gate, and footage showcases soldiers brutally assaulting a young man with force and poison gas. IOF proceeded to disperse non-violent protesters at the Damascus Gate by spraying skunk water.

Syria – The ceasefire deal that was brokered by Russia and Turkey in March 2020 in Idlib, Syria was once again violated as a heavy artillery force killed 9 individuals, including civilians. The artillery fire struck locations close to the ceasefire lines, where one Syrian soldier died in return fire. The occupation of Idlib stems from the Syrian government's crackdown after civilians began protesting the Assad regime, in support of a democratic government. In recent weeks, ceasefire violations have increased, mostly by regime forces.

Islamic State Resurgence in Northeast Syria



Image Source: AFP

While the conflict in Syria has begun to die down, certain areas within the country are still susceptible to instability and hostilities amongst opposing groups in the region. One of these cases can be found in northeast Syria in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor where the civilian population is being subjected to a resurgence in Islamic State (IS) influence.

IS has regained traction in areas like Deir ez-Zor, in which their religious police, known as the Hesba, have been threatening civilians in order to enforce their strict codes and also demand zakat (Islamic charity) payments from the local populations. This resurgence of IS in northeast Syria and other Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) controlled areas is the result of many things, one of which being the SDF's inability to maintain areas under their authority. IS forces have used this lack of capacity by the SDF to win over civilians and have invested much of their efforts into targeting the SDF and the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

This resurgence in IS control is a major threat to the already shaky human rights situation in Syria and can potentially lead to more refugee cases and dramatically slow down the reconstruction and reconciliation processes. Not only will civilians face further threats to their human rights, but they will also be forced to endure the strict measures, violence, and fundamentalist rule of IS forces yet again. Civilians of northeast Syria have already faced tremendous hardship over the course of the last decade and it is the duty of forces within Syria and the international community to ensure future security and stability.

Brief review

Turkey – On Monday, Turkey's Constitutional Court accepted an indictment from a top prosecutor seeking to ban the country's third-largest party in parliament, the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), on the ground of having ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a declared militant group. The HDP vehemently denies any ties to the PKK. Banning the HDP will take away the parliamentary representation of millions who have voted for them. In 2018, the HDP won 11.7% of the votes, which is about 6 million people.

Egypt – Haneen Hossam, an Egyptian TikTok influencer, was detained in Egypt this week after being convicted on human trafficking charges. The courts argued that the 20-year-old was acting "contrary to the principles and values of Egyptian society with the aim of gaining material benefits." Ms. Hossam was sentenced to ten years in prison and a fine of 200,000 Egyptian pounds. Egypt's crackdown on female social media influencers restricts women's freedom of expression, which is guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Raisi's Presidential Election Victory Impacts Human Rights in Iran



Image Source: Ebrahim Noroozi/AP

Raisi's victory in Iran's presidential election must be regarded with the potential for further human rights violations, given his history in the Iranian judiciary and his ties to various political and religious groups. Raisi's rise to power was not through election, as the seven contenders for the election were hand selected by a small counselor of clerics, disqualifying nearly 600 individuals that registered for the election, including prominent Iranian political figures. Raisi had a clear path to the presidency as a strict cleric with close ties to Khomeini and experience the head of the judiciary.

Raisi played a major role in the 1988 mass executions of Iranian political prisoners during his role as prosecutor, and up until his victory in the Presidential elections, head of the judiciary. Alleged to have been part of a four person "death committee" in 1988, Raisi promoted mass executions of political prisoners in Iran, constituting crimes against humanity and clear violation of international law. Raisi spearheaded the campaign of intimidation and imprisonment of journalists, advocates, and media that reported in opposition to Khomeini.

The judiciary that he has been at the forefront for decades, is a beacon of repression to Iranians. Appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini after his issue of two fatwas, he was chosen because he was expected to promote the executions, given his reputation as a hardline cleric and prosecutor.

Raisi's amassed power throughout the last four decades has allowed him to continue to act in violation of human rights unscathed. The Iranian government widely disregarded the mass executions of 1988, however in 2016, former Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri, condemned his actions.

His long career in politics has bolstered connections with various organizations, and with his role as a strict cleric, it is expected that the IRGC will continue to grow. Raisi is an emblem of the consolidation of corrupt power in Iran, and his role as president will likely further the oppression of Iranian citizens.

Brief review

Libya & Egypt – The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) successfully prosecuted four French executives on the charges of "complicity in acts of torture" and "complicity in acts of torture and forced disappearances," after four years of litigation. The French companies, Amesys and Nexa Technologies, sold surveillance technologies to the Libyan and Egyptian regimes which aided in the crackdown of dissidents. FIDH said in a statement that this win is a first step in holding companies accountable for the impact of their technologies on human rights violations.

Turkey – The EU is considering a \$4.18 billion package for Turkey to continue hosting Syrian refugees through 2024 as part of a \$6.87 billion package for Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, in an effort to keep refugees out of the EU. Turkey wants the funds paid directly to the government rather than humanitarian projects as planned, but EU leaders are concerned by Turkey's growing authoritarianism. Former bargaining talks resumed this week "to enhance cooperation," highlighting Europe's efforts to avoid taking in more refugees.

UN Expert Calls for Bahrain to Release Three Human Rights Defenders



Image Source: Aljazeera

UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Mary Lawlor called for Bahrain to immediately release three human rights defenders who are still serving long sentences and have been denied access to medical treatment. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, Abduljalil Al-Singace, and Najji Fateel are all political activists detained in retaliation for “legitimate and peaceful efforts to advocate for the rights of others in Bahrain.” This call comes at a time when Bahrain is under scrutiny for their detention practices, with Covid-19 outbreaks, overcrowding, poor sanitation, and mistreatment of prisoners coming to light.

Al-Khawaja previously served as president of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. He was arrested and sentenced to life in prison for “organizing and managing a terrorist organization” in one of the first high-profile arrests of the pro-democracy protests in 2011. The UN declared his detention arbitrary, and rights groups have repeatedly called his sentence unjust. He has reportedly suffered mistreatment and torture while detained.

Al-Singace was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2011, also on terrorism-related charges. Fateel was one of the founders of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights and was sentenced in 2013 to 15 years in prison for “forming illegal organizations.” Both Al-Singace and Fateel have also faced reported mistreatment and solitary confinement and have been denied basic medical care and the right to practice their religion.

Bahrain has come under close scrutiny this year over prison conditions, with Covid-19 outbreaks, a lack of transparency with detainees’ family members, a lack of medical care, overcrowding, and mistreatment. A Covid-19 outbreak at Jau prison resulted in Husain Barakat’s death this month, another activist serving a life sentence on arbitrary charges. Many family members still remain unsure of their loved ones’ status. Earlier this year, the UN accused Bahrain of violating international law in its treatment of prisoners.

Brief review

Syria – Following Russian threats to stop the provision of relief to the territories, eighty Syrian organizations have called on the United Nations Security Council to continue allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid to rebel-held northwest Syria beyond 10 July. An estimated 4.2 million people live in rebel-held northwest Syria, with more than two million of them displaced from other parts of the country. Aid groups have previously warned that more than one million of them were at risk of starvation.

Turkey & Egypt – Egyptian opposition TV channels based in Istanbul were ordered to suspend shows criticizing President Sisi. Sisi’s government already bans all political opposition and independent media, leading many journalists to flee and launch channels abroad, mainly in Turkey. Turkish authorities had asked the same programs to soften their criticism and stop criticizing Sisi directly. This week’s escalated request to suspend broadcasting completely comes as Ankara and Cairo attempt to strengthen ties. Cairo welcomed the move to suspend broadcasting.

UK Aid Budget Cuts Leave Thousands At Risk



Image Source: Ghaith Alsayed/AP

The UK government's recent reports on budget cuts to its Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) reveals a [67% reduction](#) in aid to Syrian refugees. This is a drastic cut that will leave hundreds of thousands of lives at risk, say several leading NGOs on the conflict. This year marks 10 years since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, which has since then left around [12.8 million](#) people either externally or internally displaced.

The UN has directly appealed to the UK to continue aiding Syrian refugees and not follow through with the cuts. The UN says the plight of Syrian refugees has gotten worse, and that the need for development aid has increased. The aid goes toward crucial paperwork and training for the refugees in education, employment, and housing, to integrate as productive citizens of host countries like in Lebanon or Jordan, in addition to providing access to clean water and sanitation to some [12.2 million](#) Syrians that do not have it.

Such a large cut in aid may put tens of thousands of lives at risk that depend on the UK for clean water and sanitation. It will also extend peoples' lives in tents and legal exclusion in host communities. The UN has stated that \$10 billion is required to fully support Syrian refugees this year, and now is too much of a critical time for Britain to withdraw its support for Syrians. From a governmental stance, the cuts will not only undermine the UK government's influence, but the move to cut aid can be massively [destabilizing](#), according to a UN official. It will also slow down civil society problem-solving towards the Syrian refugee crisis. The UK government should adhere to the UN's call to continue its aid while budget cuts are still not set.

Brief review

Occupied Palestine – Critic of Palestinian Authority Nizar Banat dies after being arrested and beaten. Palestinians have been protesting the Palestinian Authority's increasingly strict response to dissent, and Banat criticized the PA because of their violations of human rights and their shift to authoritarianism. Banat called upon Western nations to cut off aid to the Palestinian Authority because of their actions, yet aid is critical in repairing the economic collapse that Palestine faces, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Iran – According to state television channels, Iran faced an attempted sabotage against a civilian nuclear facility. Iran news agency said the attempted attack on the Karaj facility, belonging to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, did not result in any casualties. Iran has faced several suspected attacks on their nuclear program in recent months, with a blackout and fire damaging the Natanz nuclear facility. Israel is widely suspected of the sabotage as Tehran attempts to revive former deals but has not claimed either attack.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Operatives Who Killed Khashoggi Received US Paramilitary Training



Image Source: Ozan Kose/AFP

On 2 October of 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, a US-based journalist and critic of Saudi Arabia's government, walked into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, where he was murdered. A report released in June 2019 by Agnes Callamard, the special rapporteur, concluded that Khashoggi's death "constituted an extrajudicial killing for which the state of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is responsible".

However, Khashoggi's killing was internationally condemned and caused a diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and some of its closest allies, including in the U.S. After the murder was confirmed by Saudi, then US President Donald Trump described it as the "worst cover-up in history." According to US media reports, the CIA concluded with "medium to high confidence" that Prince Mohammed ordered Khashoggi's killing.

The New York Times reported on Tuesday that the four Saudis who were involved in the killing of the Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi received paramilitary training in the United States the previous year, under a contract approved by the State Department. The Times reported that the training was provided by Tier 1 Group, which is owned by the private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management, and was defensive in nature and devised to protect Saudi leaders. The State Department spokesman Ned Price said under the law the department cannot comment "on any of the licensed defense export licensing activity alleged in media reporting." Also, Price said US policy towards Saudi Arabia "will prioritize the rule of law and respect for human rights."

Even so, The New York Times report said there is no evidence that the American officials who approved the training, or the Tier 1 Group executives, knew that the Saudis were involved in the crackdown inside Saudi Arabia.

Amman Center for Human Rights Studies



Sharaf Complex,
Umayyah Bin Abd Shams St 6,
Amman, Jordan

+ 962-6-4655043

+ 962-6-4655043

achrs@achrs.org

[Website](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Facebook](#)