

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITOR



AMMAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES

**Weekly Press Monitoring of Human Rights News
in The Middle East and North Africa**

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Two killed in bomb explosion in district of Hazara community in Kabul

At least two have been killed and four injured **two separate bomb explosions** in Kabul on the 10th of December.

Taliban Interior Ministry spokesperson Said Horsti told reporters that a bomb exploded on a minibus in the Dasht-e-Barchi district of Kabul, killing two and injuring three others. Furthermore, another explosion in the same area injured one. Dasht-e-Barchi holds a high representation of the Shi'ite Hazara minority, which has long been a target of violence from both the Taliban and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISIS-K).

In November, a similar bomb attack on a minibus in Dasht-e-Barchi killed two people and injured five others. ISKP claimed the attack back then.

ALGERIA

Christian convert Foudhil Bahloul convicted

On the 5th of December, an Algerian appeal court **sentenced** the Christian convert Foudhil Bahloul to a six-month suspended prison term as well as a fine of 100.000 Algerian dinars (approximately 720 USD). Bahloul was convicted over a 200 Euro transfer, which was seen as an "unauthorized donation" in what Amnesty International calls a "discriminatory law used to crack down on religious minorities".

Amnesty has once again intimated the Algerian government to **quash the conviction of Christian convert Foudhil Bahloul**. According to Amnesty, Bahloul was arrested and sent to trial, without a lawyer nor witnesses in court, accused of having received money for his religious beliefs, guilty of "spread[ing] poisonous ideas to the unemployed youth" and that he "destabilized their faith in Islam" by distributing books. His house was raided and materials related to Christianity confiscated.

In Algeria, religious minorities face discrimination and their right to freedom of religion is undermined, on the basis of **Ordinance 06-03 on the Conditions and Rules of Practice of Faiths other than Islam**. The law requires non-Muslim religious groups to register - hence limiting, their spaces of practice; moreover, it is also forbidden to proselytize among Muslims and distribute material that aims to "shake the faith of a Muslim" (Art. 11). According to Amna Guellali, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, "This discriminatory law is being used as a weapon to repress those who do not follow Islam in an assault against their fundamental freedoms".

Patrik Zaki conditionally released

On the 7th of December, Patrick Zaki was released from an Egyptian prison, for now conditionally. The 29-year-old rights advocate and student at the University of Bologna could have been jailed for up to five years for writing an article about discrimination against Coptic Christians in Egypt, according to [Amnesty](#). Now, his case has been adjourned to February 2022.

Zaki had been held captive since the beginning of February 2020 for spreading 'fake news' and for inciting protests, violence and terrorist acts, while working at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. He was arrested in 2019 when he demonstrated against president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, calling for his resignation. At the time, the police acted harshly and, according to Egyptian human lawyers, more than 4000 people have been arrested, who allegedly took place in the demonstrations. In Zaki's trial, he has been questioned repeatedly about his work in human rights and has been tortured.

[Amnesty International](#) and the [Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights](#) celebrate his release. Yet, the outcome of his trial in February is still uncertain, states [Al-Jazeera](#).



Patrick Zaki and his sister

Image Source: EIPR

23 human rights organisations send joint letter demanding release of three health rights defenders

On the 9th of December, 23 human rights organisations jointly sent a letter to the Iranian authorities, who have been arbitrarily detaining Mehdi Mahmoudian, Arash Keykhosravi, and Mostafa Nili, three health rights activists, since August 14th, 2021. The letter is led by [Human Rights Watch](#) but supported by many other regional human rights organisations.

In the letter, the organisations do not only call on the Iranian authorities but also on the international community, as they should urge Iran to conform to the international human rights obligations.

In August, seven human rights defenders were planning on filing a complaint to the authorities on the way the country was handling the COVID-19 pandemic. However, before the complaint was made, the defenders were arrested. Four of the defenders have been released, though not in a timely manner, three of the defenders are yet to be released after three months in jail and are still facing criminal charges. According to the joint letter, the Iranian authorities arrested them because of disrupting public order.

[Iran Human Rights](#) states that already in October, Mahmoudian, Nili, and Keykhosravi sent an open letter specifying the human rights violations they experienced in prison, such as month-long solitary confinement and the pressuring for them to refrain from pursuing the complaint. This way, the organisations state that Iran is violating the right to a fair trial as ratified by Iran in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As they [state](#): "We, the undersigned organizations, condemn the arbitrary detention of Mahmoudian, Nili, and Keykhosravi, which we believe is connected to, and intended to curb their human rights activities in violation of international human rights law".

Several killed in explosion in Basra

On the 7th of December, a bomb **killed** at least four and wounded 20 in Basra in southern Iraq. The explosion was caused by a motorbike rigged with explosives near a hospital.

Even though **no one has claimed responsibility for the attack**, the Iraqi officials have said that they expect ISIS to be behind it. Basra, a predominantly Shi'ite city, has seen relative stability the last couple of years.

LEBANON

Explosion in Palestinian refugee camp results in shooting at funeral reception

According to The Lebanese **National News Agency** (NNA), an explosion has taken place in a Palestinian Camp in the Southern Lebanese city Tyre on the evening of the 10th of December. According to the NNA, the explosion caused several casualties and many wounded. However, **Al-Jazeera** says that many other news agencies do not speak of any fatalities. For now, it stays unknown whether the explosion caused a lot of harm.

While NNA claims that the blast erupted from a weapons depot of Palestinian Hamas, Hamas themselves states that this is not the case. According to their statement, the explosion was caused by an electrical failure in a warehouse storing detergents and disinfectants as well as oxygen and gas cylinders for coronavirus patients.

The disagreement about what happened caused an open dispute between Fatah and Hamas. The two groups have been in a conflict since 2007. On the 12th of December, grieving families were out on the streets of the Burj al-Shemali camp, yelling pro-Hamas chants. At the funeral reception for one of the casualties, Hamas official Raafat al-Murra tells **Al-Jazeera** that people from the Fatah movement shot at the funeral procession. However, a camp resident tells the news agency that it was unclear who was shooting at the crowd. In total, six people got wounded.

Presidential elections at risk

On the 24th of December, Libyan citizens are supposed to finally vote for their representative - after 7 years since the last elections took place in the country. Nevertheless, the elections appear to be, once again, at stake. On the 11th of December, the National Election Commission stated that **it is not possible to release the list of presidential candidates yet**, as some legal matters remain to be solved regarding the eligibility criteria.

Both national and international communities have openly called for the necessity to hold free elections as soon as possible, as the continuous delays jeopardize the complicated peace process in the country. At the same, it is fundamental to solve any controversy regarding the eligibility of the candidates, in order for the electoral process to be legitimate. Indeed, 98 people registered to run for the presidency and to carry out their campaigns across the country. However, with 10 days left before the elections, there is no time for everyone to get the same publicity, meaning that the most famous candidates will be highly advantaged.

Anas Gomati, director of the Libyan think-tank Sadeq Institute, interviewed by Al Jazeera stated that: **"The election law passed illegally, the constitutional void to determine the president's power and security conditions on the ground are not just electoral hurdles, they will derail Libya's peaceful and democratic transition"**.

The Libyan electoral context remains highly unstable, with two of the main candidates, Saif al-Islam Gheddafi and Khalifa Haftar, being accused of war crimes, and with armed groups still controlling big portions of the Libyan territory.

Sahrawi female activists attacked and assaulted

On the 5th of December, Moroccan security forces and paramilitaries assaulted human rights defenders Aminatou Haidar and Sultana Khaya as well as Khaya's sister Luara.

During the night, security forces **raided** Sultana Khaya's house, where she and her sister Luara were attacked and sexually assaulted. The forces stole Sultana's phone and threw trash, urine and black liquid into the family's water drinking storage, as well as they destroyed her family's belongings. Khaya and her family has been on house arrest in their house in Boujdour, occupied Western Sahara since November 2020. Sultana and Luara Khaya have been subject to several sexual assaults during police raids in house arrest.

On the same day, human rights defender Aminatou Haidar and four other activists **were physically assaulted** by Moroccan police and paramilitaries during a peaceful solidarity demonstration for Khaya. Haidar and four other members of the Sahrawi Organ against the Moroccan Occupation (ISACOM) **were surrounded and beaten** by Moroccan agents. Here, activist Mina Baali was stripped of her traditional Sahrawi dress.



Sultana Khaya (left) and Aminatou Haidar (right)

Image sources: Rights Livelihood and Front Line Defenders

Palestinian protester killed by Israeli troops

On the 10th of December, Palestinian protester Jamil Abu Ayyash man **was shot and killed** by Israeli troops during a protest against Israeli settlements on the **West Bank**. He was shot in the head and died on the way to the hospital. Four additional Palestinians were injured by Israeli fire.

The protest was a part of **weekly demonstrations** against the Israeli settlement outpost close in the village of Beita, south of Nablus. In May this year, **around 50 Israeli families** occupied Jabal Sabih in Beita, preventing Palestinians from accessing their lands. This has weekly resulted in confrontations between the Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters. According to Palestinian Media, Israeli forces has killed 9 Palestinians since the beginning of protests in Beita in May this year



Jamil Abu Ayyash

Image Source: Middle East Monitor

Norwegian Football Club stresses human rights concerns in Qatar

With just under a year to go until the beginning of the World Cup in Qatar, the Norwegian football club Tromsø Idrettslag (TIL) has created a special shirt with a QR-code, in collaboration with Amnesty International. When scanned, the code will bring one to a website that highlights the human rights conditions nowadays in Qatar.

The football club states: "We hoped Fifa and Qatar would listen but obviously money still trumps human rights and human lives. How many human rights violations will it take before the football community unites to demand better protection for migrant workers?"

Malcolm Bidali, one of the team's players, promotes the kit. The player is a former migrant worker and labour activist and has been imprisoned in Qatar before for writing a blog about the harsh conditions he faced while working in the country.

With this action, the club hopes to start a snowball effect and make more people aware of the current human rights conditions in Qatar, calling for an end to sportswashing of human rights abuses.



Jamil Malcolm Bidali

Image Source: Tromsø IL

Women's rights activist presses charges against former US contractors

Women rights activist, **Loujain al-Hathloul** has pressed charges against American former intelligence contractors, the spying software maker DarkMatter Group, and three of its former executives. This is **reported** by Al Jazeera. According to al-Hathloul, DarkMatter Group was involved with the Saudi government, helping the government to hack her phone, secretly tracking her messages and localisations up until her 2018 arrest and imprisonment.

Loujain al Hathloul was incarcerated for peacefully protesting for Saudi women's right to drive and ending the system of male guardianship, which essentially equated women to minors. **She spent more than 1000 days in prison, suffering from abuses, torture and sexual violence.**

Al Hathloul is one of the victims of an **illicit spying programme** organised by former U.S. intelligence units, hired by the Emirati government in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings, with the purpose to track down activists, journalists and political opponents.

The activist declared that "No government or individual should tolerate the misuse of spy malware to deter human rights or endanger the voice of the human conscious". Potentially, this lawsuit could be an important step towards accountability in the fast-changing world of privacy protection and digital rights.



Loujain al-Hathloul

Image Source: Amnesty International

Human Rights Watch: twelve civilians killed in unlawful military Syrian and Russian actions

Twelve civilians were killed and 24 injured Syrian and Russian shellings in the town of Ahira in Idlib in October. This was [documented](#) by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on the 8th of December.

According to HRW, the shellings hit homes, stores, schools, and markets and were highly likely to be an act of indiscriminate attack. HRW has interviewed witnesses to the shelling, including survivors, family members, and rescue and healthcare workers, as well as it has analysed 52 videos and 64 photographs from the attacks.

Belkis Wille, HRW senior crisis and conflict researcher said that "[o]nce again, Idlib's children are victim to callous and unlawful military actions."

The Syrian and Russian government has not responded to the findings by HRW or the organisation's questions about the attacks.

TUNISIA

Man dies after setting himself on fire in opposition party's headquarter

On the 9th of December, a party member of the Ennahda Islamist Party put himself on fire during a party meeting at the Ennahda headquarter. The man died and twelve other party members were injured. Although no official motives have been reported for the act, the Ennahda party Chief Rached Ghannouchi told reporters that "[\[t\]his is a martyr of marginalization and poverty. He is one of the Ennahda sons. He spent 10 years in prison against the dictatorship before the \(2011\) revolution](#)".

The Ennahda party is the biggest party in the parliament and had a major power in the country until July 25th this year, where the parliament was [suspended](#) by president Kais Saied, who has ruled by decree since then.

Erdogan labels social media as "a threat to democracy"

On the 12th of December, Turkey's President Erdogan labelled social media as one of the major threats to democracy. The declaration took place during a conference, in light of the incoming **legislation** that aims to render the spread of "fake news" and "disinformation" online criminal offences punishable with up to 5 years in prison. Moreover, the law intends to institute a social media regulator.

This legislation would strengthen the current limitations to freedom of speech, already strong due to **a law from last year**, that requires social media platforms with more than 1 million subscribers to establish a legal representative and store data in Turkey. Indeed, Freedom House's 2021 **Freedom on the Net report** defines Turkey as "not free". The report highlighted the arbitrary blocking of online content, government manipulation of social media, and anti-terrorism laws unjustly applied to online activities, which has resulted in multiple arrest sentences.

Being the main Turkish media companies directly linked to the government, the role played by social media is essential for guaranteeing pluralism and giving space to dissidents' voices.

WAR IN YEMEN

Attacks between Saudi Arabia and Houthi militia

On the 7th of December, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen **launched** air raids on Houthi targets in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa as well as the cities Marib and Juf. This was in a response to ballistic missiles fired by the Houthis against the Saudi capital Riyadh.

The recent attacks an escalation in attacks between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthi militia despite high-level efforts by e.g. the UN to make the parties agree on a ceasefire.



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ABOUT ACHRS

ACHRS is an independent non-governmental Think Tank center advocating for the enhancement of democracy and human rights in Jordan and the MENA region. The Center's five priorities are the right to life, the right to speak, the right to think, the right to participate and women's rights.

ACHRS has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

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