

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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-
- PAGE 4** **AFGHANISTAN**
Afghan professor arrested for criticizing rule of Taliban
- ALGERIA**
Authorities drop charges against a minor involved in anti-government protest
- PAGE 5** **EGYPT**
Release of arbitrarily detained Ramy Shaath
- PAGE 6** **IRAN**
Poet Baktash Abtin dies in arbitrary detention
- IRAQ**
Drones shot down in Baghdad
- PAGE 7** **JORDAN**
Jordan condemns Israel's new settlements in Palestine
- LEBANON**
Kafala: the harsh reality of Lebanon's migrant domestic workers
- PAGE 8** **LIBYA**
Suspended elections
- PALESTINE**
Palestinian prisoner ends 141-day hunger strike when deal reached with Israeli authorities
- PAGE 9** **QATAR**
Qatari activist turns up on Twitter after speculations of being dead
- PAGE 10** **SAUDI ARABIA**
Non-stop deportations of Tigrayan Migrants to Ethiopia
- PAGE 11** **SUDAN**
Three Sudanese killed fighting for democracy
- SYRIA**
Syrian trial in Germany
- PAGE 12** **TUNISIA**
Call for release of Nourreddine Bhiri
- TURKEY**
Two students freed from prison due to protests - not yet cleared from charges
- PAGE 13** **UAE**
The UAE retaliates publication of letter from prison describing mistreatments of prisoners
- PAGE 14** **YEMEN**
Rights groups reveal French involvement in Emirati crimes in Yemen

Afghan professor arrested for criticizing rule of Taliban

A prominent Afghan university professor and outspoken critic of the Taliban leadership, Faizullah Jalal, has been **arrested in Kabul**. The professor of law and political science at Kabul University has appeared on TV talk shows several times since the U.S.-government stepped down in August, blaming the Taliban for worsening the financial crisis and criticizing the Taliban for using force rule.

In a TV show, Jalal called Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem a "calf," a serious insult to Afghanistan. Clips of his impassioned criticism went viral on social media, sparking fears of retaliation.

The human rights organization Amnesty International condemned the arrest of the lecturer for "exercising freedom of speech and criticizing the Taliban" and called for his immediate and unconditional release. Human Rights Watch Asia Deputy Director Patricia Gosman responded to the arrest in a **tweet**: "Because in the Taliban world, you have no right to complain or criticize. Autocratic dictatorships do not tolerate dissent."

The arrest of Faizullah Jalal has raised fears that the Taliban will re-impose draconian rules on freedom of speech.

ALGERIA

Authorities drop charges against minor involved in anti-government protest

Algerian authorities have **dropped charges** against a minor for participating in an "unmanned gathering", namely a protest organised by the pro-democracy and anti-government movement Hirak. The 14 years-old girl was initially placed **on trial** alongside 20 other suspects, regardless of the fact that minors, according to Algerian law, must be judged in juvenile courts, as criminal responsibility is only acquired at the age of 18. On the 28th of December, the Algerian persecutors labeled the episode as "an error", after the case had provoked outrage online.

The Hirak movement began in 2019, as a result of former-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's candidacy to a fifth term in office. Regardless of Bouteflika withdrawal, the movement persisted, claiming a complete reorganisation of the Algerian ruling system, which traces back to the country's independence from France in 1962. The authorities have been repressing the protests, and according to the National Committee for Liberation of Detainees (CNLD). Around 300 people are imprisoned at the moment due to their participation in the Hirak movement. Many of them solely over social media publications.

Release of arbitrarily detained Ramy Shaath

On the 8th of January, Ramy Shaath was released, after 2,5 years of arbitrary detention in Egypt. The human rights defender stood up for the rights of mainly Egyptians and Palestinians and was originally held captive for exercising his right to assembly and freedom of expression.

More than 100,000 people from numerous countries signed petitions urging Egyptian authorities to release Shaath. Hundreds of parliamentarians from France, the United States, Germany, Belgium, and the European Parliament joined his supporters in publicly demanding Shaath's release.

While NGOs, such as the [Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies](#) and [Amnesty International](#), celebrate his release, they are outraged that Shaath was forced to relinquish his Egyptian citizenship in order to be released. This, while official procedures should have released him unconditionally and with reparations for the harm done to him.



IMAGE SOURCE: CAIRO INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES

Poet Baktash Abtin dies in arbitrary detention

On January the 8th, Iranian poet and political prisoner Baktash Abtin **died** in prison after having contracted COVID. Abtin, a human rights defender and film director, **was sentenced to six years in prison in 2019** on charges of "illegal assembly and collusion against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the state". This happened after his joint authorship of a book on system-critical Iranian Writers' Association.

According to the **Center for Human Rights in Iran**, Iranian prisons' overcrowding, lack of COVID measures procedures on testing, separation and treatment of prisoners, and the fact that the prisoners are unclean, highly expose prisoners to COVID. The organisation argues that

Abtin is the second Iranian political prisoner to have died in prison in 2022: on January the first, Adel Kianpour **died** in Seiban Prison in southwest Iran after a hunger strike protesting his imprisonment without a fair trial.

IRAQ

Drones shot down in Baghdad

Two armed drones were shot down as they approached an Iraqi military base housing U.S. troop near Baghdad International Airport, Iraqi security sources said, adding that no one was injured in the incident.

An official from the U.S.-led international military coalition stationed there said the base's defenses were linked to "two fixed-wing suicide drones ... they were shot down without incident". There was no immediate claim to responsibility for the attack.

The attack came as Iran and its allies in Iraq **marked the second anniversary** of the assassination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in 2020.

Jordan condemns Israel's new settlements in Palestine

The Hashemite Kingdom has **condemned** Israel's approval for new settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. The plan for building 3,557 new units was approved on 5th January by the local committee for planning and construction of the Jerusalem municipality.

The Jordanian spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Haitham Abu al-Foul**, has declared the construction plan as arbitrary and illegal. He added that it annihilates any chances to achieve a sustainable peace. According to al-Foul, this unilateral Israeli step violates international law, especially the UN Security Council Resolution 2334 that claims that Israel's settlements have no legal validity and demands Israel to stop its settlement activities.

LEBANON

Kafala: the harsh reality of Lebanon's migrant domestic workers

"Lebanon's restrictive and exploitative kafala system traps tens of thousands of migrant domestic workers in highly abusive conditions amounting, at worst, to modern slavery", states **Human Rights Watch** on the 4th of January.

The country hosts up to 250.000 migrant workers who fall under the Kafala system. This system is also called the sponsorship system. It means that a migrant domestic worker is **purposely excluded** from the national Labour Law, which includes a minimum wage, work-hour limitations, a minimum rest day, overtime compensation, and freedom of assembly. Lebanon created separate rules for these workers, legally tying them to their employer. In this sense, the worker cannot change their job freely but needs permission from the employer to leave. If they do leave, they risk losing their legal status and being detained and deported.

With the pandemic leaving so many people jobless and children out-of-school, many domestic workers have had to work extra hours, often unpaid. At the same time, many families have also let their workers go, however often without money, passports, their own possessions, or plane tickets to go home.

HRW states that many domestic workers have committed suicide or died while attempting to flee their employers as a result of systematic abuse under the kafala system.

Suspended elections

The presidential elections were not held on the 24th of December and a new ultimate date has not been set yet. The situation in the country remains highly unstable, and there is still a lack of general agreement on the "rules of the game" in view of the elections. Indeed, the leading Libyan political figures, supported by different armed groups, strongly differ not only on the electoral process itself but also on the aftermaths of it - namely, the modality of the transfer of power, as well as assuring that the results would be unanimously recognised.

In the meanwhile, according to the [Libya Observer](#), on the 9th of January Khaled Al-Mishri, head of the High Council of State, and Aqila Saleh, Speaker of Parliament, met in Rabat, Morocco, in order to discuss the matter. Allegedly, they endorsed to prioritise the "constitutional path" to solve the issue, as an attempt to avoid another failure as the one of last December.

PALESTINE

Palestinian activist ends 141-day hunger strike

A Palestinian prisoner can now [end his hunger strike](#), after a deal has been reached with Israeli authorities and he is released from prison on February 26th. Hisham Abu Hawwash has protested against his 'administrative detention' in an Israeli prison. His physical state has been on the verge of death multiple times, leading to him being hospitalized.

Administrative detention means that the man had been held in prison indefinitely without charge or trial. People sitting in these circumstances are arrested on 'secret evidence' and therefore not aware on which grounds they have been charged.



SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE EAST NEWS CENTER

Qatari activist turns up on Twitter after speculations of being dead

On the 9th of January, after being missing for months, Noof al-Madeed reappeared on social media, posting a video about her wellbeing. The young activist left Qatar two years ago to flee alleged domestic violence. After her announcement to return to Qatar last October, she vanished. Al-Madeed posted daily updates about her well-being. She expressed she had reported the threats to the authorities and said that if she did not continue posting on social media, she should be considered dead. Her following disappearance then led to a lot of questions to one to the Qatari government. It also resulted in a viral hashtag on Twitter: #WhereisNoof. As a response, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights **assumed** her to be killed on her arrival back to Qatar.

However, in response to Noof's reappearance on Twitter, **Doha News** and **Middle East Eye** both published an article. The activist uploaded various videos to reassure her followers of her safety. She is currently in Doha.



IMAGE SOURCE: DOHA NEWS

Non-stop deportations of Tigrayan Migrants to Ethiopia

Human Rights Watch has recently reported the continuous violation of the non-refoulement principles on behalf of Saudi Arabia regarding Tigrayans. According to them, thousands of ethnic Tigrayans have been arbitrarily imprisoned, as well as subjected to ill-treatment and enforced disappearance once deported from Saudi Arabia back to Ethiopia.

The report states that Tigrayans suffer from terrible conditions in Saudi Arabia and are not granted any kind of protection, despite the current situation in the Tigray region. **HRW** reports Tigrayan migrants being subjected to "horrific abuse in Saudi custody" and "locked up in detention facilities upon returning to Ethiopia".

In the last ten years, hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians have fled the country and reached Saudi Arabia through the Red Sea, due to severe economic hardship, as well as human rights violations, taking place in Ethiopia. Starting from January 2021, the Ethiopian government started cooperation with the Saudi kingdom in order to repatriate 40,000 of their nationals detained in the Arab country. During the summer, deportations dramatically boosted, as over 30,000 cases were registered - of which 40% of Tigrayans. Concomitantly, the conflict in the region of Tigray severely intensified, and this brought to an enhancement of profiling, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearance of Tigrayans on behalf of Ethiopian authorities.

HRW interviewed several Tigrayan deportees who report being detained for six months up to six years in overcrowded facilities across Saudi Arabia, in which they suffered from beating and torture, inadequate living and sanitary conditions and a lack of food and medical care.

Saudi Arabia is known for the abuses committed towards migrants, states **the report**, including continuously violating their right to seek asylum, perpetrating inhumane conditions and torture in detention facilities and incarcerating unlawfully - as well as being responsible for countless abuses towards migrant-workers employed in the country.

Three Sudanese killed fighting for democracy

This January 7th, activists protested against the coup d'état in Sudan last October. Sudanese security forces shot at least three people causing their death.

Since October 25, the military takeover has cast doubt on the democratic transition in Sudan. According to [Arab news](#), since then, deaths have reached at least 63 deaths from clashes in protests.

The Sudanese constitutional document states that the military group will be in power until a new government is elected, scheduled for July this year. Sudan has been politically governmentally paralyzed since the coup. Moreover, the enforced military power threatens and violates human rights and public freedoms.

[Sudan Tribune](#), mentions that the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) have witnessed the violence in Sudan and summon the UN Security Council to establish an investigation into human rights violations since the coup d'état of the October 25.

SYRIA

Syrian trial in Germany

On January 6, [Human Rights Watch](#) said a court held in Germany would render a verdict in a trial, involving charges of crimes against a suspected former state intelligence officer in Syria. The verdict focuses on the fight for justice for Syrians.

Anwar R., a former Syrian government official, is on trial in Europe for serious crimes in Syria. He fled Syria and was arrested in Germany in 2019. German prosecutors accuse him of supervising the torture of detainees while he was chief at the al-Khatib detention centre of the Directorate General of Intelligence in Damascus, between 2011 and 2012, according to [DW](#).

[Human Rights Watch](#) has conducted investigations with Syrians and others associated with the trial since April 2020. A questionnaire on the defendants emerged during the trial and it highlights the efforts in Germany to investigate and prosecute serious crimes under international law. Balkees Jarrah, an international judge, said the trial is a reminder that "Germany will not harbour war criminals."

Germany recognizes universal jurisdiction for serious crimes under international law, allowing the prosecution of crimes regardless of where they have committed the crime and regardless of their nationality.

Call for release of Nourreddine Bhiri

Human Rights Watch calls for the release of the former justice minister, Nouredine Bhiri from detention they state January 6th. Nouredine Bhiri was **arrested** on December 31st 2021, after which his family did not receive any news concerning Bhiri until January 2nd 2022 when he was taken to a hospital. A former Interior Ministry employee was exposed to similar detainment on December 31st and has yet to be heard from.

Bhiri is the vice president of the Ennahda Party, the main opposition of the current government, and therefore one of the most critical against the government. The Interior Ministry states that the two people were detained as a: "preventive measure dictated by the need to protect national security". Bhiri is the highest-ranking politician to be detained since Ben Ali, the former president being thrown in 2011.

A HRW representative sees the arrest as a sign of a growing threat of human rights violations committed by the government since the power grab in July 2021. Since the power grab, several repressive measures have been implemented by the government, such as the prosecution of peaceful criticism, house arrests and travel bans. The Human Rights Watch representative sees the detainment of both cases as intimidation of those who are critical of the government.

TURKEY

Students freed from prison due to protests - not yet cleared from charges

On the 7th of January, students Enis Berke Gok and Caner Perit Ozen were **released** after 94 days of imprisonment due to their participation in the protests that took place at Istanbul's Bogazici University, against the government appointment of the rector. The students were **accused** of "violating the law regarding demonstrations, preventing public officials from doing their duty and intercepting a vehicle among other crimes".

The students' protests started when Melih Bulu, former candidate of Erdogan's party AKP, was appointed rector. Both professors and students opposed the nomination. Protests kept going even after Bulu was replaced. In the past year, thousands of students have been incarcerated, around ten professors have been fired, and the university group dedicated to LGBTQ rights was shut down. Following these events, the Turkish president accused protests of being of terrorist nature.

Gok and Ozen were imprisoned after protesting last October in the university campus, where a group of students blocked the car in which Naci Inci, the contested rector, appointed by president Erdogan, was travelling. The students are now free, but have not been acquitted of the charges yet; they have to be present in court on the 21st of March, together with 12 other students.

The UAE state retaliates publication of a letter from prison describing the mistreatments of prisoners

A human rights defender, Ahmed Mansoor, currently an inmate in a United Arab Emirate prison, managed to have a letter smuggled out of prison, describing the inhumane treatment inside the prison and his unfair trial. The letter was published in regional media says [Gulf Center for Human Rights](#). Following the publication, Mansoor was transmitted to a smaller and more isolated cell as a punishment for his actions. Both [Gulf Center for Human Rights](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), are demanding the United Nations, UAE's allies, the United States and the United Kingdom to take action and call for an immediate end to Mansoor's isolation and his unconditional release.

Mansoor has been mistreated for more than 10 years inside the prison and is a victim of an unfair trial, verdict, and several human rights violations within the prison, including indefinite solitary confinement, deprived of basic necessities such as bed or mattress, and human contact. While Mansoor is just one case, HRW and GC4HR have documents of systematic human rights violations throughout the country for several years.

Above this, the UAE has been elected to serve in the UN Security Council in 2022-2023. While in October 2021 UAE won membership of the UN Human Rights Council, no UN special rapporteur has been granted permission to enter the country since 2014. Taking this into account, HRW and GC4HR are urging the international environment to hold UAE accountable for the human rights violations happening and to improve the conditions to meet the international standards of human rights laws.

Houthis target Emirati forces

On January 3rd, Houthi rebels seized an Emirati vessel off al-Hudaydah (Western Yemen), states [ALJazeera](#). The Houthis claimed to have arrested a ship heading to Jazan in the South of Saudi Arabia on which military equipment was found. Moreover, an Emirati surveillance aircraft was **allegedly destroyed** on January 5th by Houthis in Shabwah (Central Yemen). However, this information has not yet been confirmed by Saudi or Emirati authorities.

These attacks happened in a context of a strategic change, operated by the Saudi-led coalition at the end of December, with the launch of a large-scale military operation in Yemen that seems to be, at the moment, successful. Some cities and governates have already been taken back from the Houthis by the Saudi-led coalition, **such as the Shabwah governate** that has been taken through a joint operation from the Saudi-led forces and the Hadi-led government (the internationally recognized government of Yemen).

Last week's attacks, led by the Houthis, were supposed to commemorate the two-year anniversary of Qasem Soleimani's assassination. The Iranian military officer was killed on January 3rd 2020, in Baghdad, Iraq, in a drone strike on the orders of former US President Trump. Soleimani was the head of the Quds Force, responsible for Iran's extraterritorial operations including the military and financial assistance to Houthis.



IMAGE SOURCE: DW



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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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