

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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Afghans are "on the verge of death"

A United Nations chief warns that millions of Afghans are 'on the verge of death', urging the international community to fund the UN's 5-billion-dollar humanitarian appeal: release Afghanistan's frozen assets and activate its banking system to avoid economic and social damage collapse.

Secretary-General António Guterres **told reporters** on Thursday that "freezing temperatures and freezing assets are a deadly combination for the Afghan people" and that "in this emergency, the rules and regulations on the use of money to save lives and the economy must be suspended."

Afghanistan's aid-dependent economy was already faltering when the Taliban seized power in mid-August amid the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops after 20 years.

ALGERIA

Revolutionary Othmane Belouizdad dies at 92

Algeria lost **Othmane Belouizdad** on the 12th of January, the last survivor of the revolutionary group that initiated the armed fighting for the Algerian War of Independence in 1956. Belouizdad was born in 1929 and was a member of the so-called "Group of 22": the fundamental starting point of the Algerian armed struggle against the French colonial yoke.

The Belouizdad family was particularly involved in the Algerian Revolution. His brothers and his father, as well as Othmane himself, were tortured and imprisoned by the French troupes. He had always refused to participate in any political activity, as he once stated: "I haven't fought for power, but for future generations. Our mission ended with independence".



Image Source: [Algerian Press Service](#)

Tenth year anniversary of the beginning of the 2011 uprising

This week, Bahraini activists commemorated the tenth anniversary of the 2011 uprising in Bahrain, states [Human Rights Watch](#) on January the 13th. These protests met heavy repression and use of torture on children. Ten years after the repression, there are still severe restrictions in any space of opposition. Moreover, as Human Right Watch reports, health and sanitary conditions in Bahrain prisons remain very worrying. Prisons are crowded and the limited or non-access to proper healthcare led to two major COVID-19 outbreaks and to the death of three detainees, probably due to unsanitary health care.

Lastly, freedom of speech and of expression is restricted as attested to the Press Law amendment. News and broadcasting sites are required to register and obtain approval from the Ministry of Information Affairs, explains Human Rights Watch.

EGYPT

Activist gets arrested after "emergency landing" airplane

On Wednesday, January 12th, human rights activist Hossam Sallam was flying from Sudan to Turkey, when his plane was called to make a sudden halt in Egypt. According to [Middle East Eye](#), the 29-year-old is facing a lifetime in prison in Egypt, his hometown.

What happened exactly to Sallam is not known. The Turkish human rights organisation WeRecord calls it an enforced disappearance, as Egyptian officials have not verified Sallam's imprisonment and no one has heard from the man since. Sallam was a known supporter of Egypt's main opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, which the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has designated as a terrorist organization. The man was arrested on the allegations of having weapons, but no firearms were found.

The airline states that the need for an emergency landing was because of a warning coming from the luggage room. However, this warning proved false when no problem could be identified after landing. When Sallam had to go through a security check again at Luxor Airport, upon boarding the next flight, he got arrested.

In response to the arrest, some human rights defenders now call for a boycott of Badr Airlines. They claim that the airline had no right to hand over Sallam to the Egyptian authorities.

[Middle East Eye](#) states that while holding Sallam after his aircraft was redirected to Egypt is unprecedented, capturing activists at airports has been a frequent tactic since Sisi took office in 2014.

Death of Baktash Abtin in custody due to lack of proper medical care in jail

On January 8 2022, the Iranian Writer Association (IWA) reported the death of **Baktash Abtin**, Iranian's writer and poet. He was detained since September 2020 because of politically motivated charges of "assembly and collusion to act against national security" and "propaganda against the state". The IWA stated that the cause of death was the lack of proper care. Indeed, Abtin did not receive medical care for four days in prison, before being transferred to Taleghani hospital. Abtin had health issues that COVID-19 may have exacerbated. As explained by **Human Right Watch**, Abtin tried to apply for medical leave due to his issues, since the beginning of his sentence. It was never accepted.

Abtin is the second Iranian prisoner to die in 2022 because of unsanitary or restricted access to healthcare. Kian Abdelpour died in the Ahwaz prison, under "ambiguous circumstances", after going on a hunger strike. Tara Sepehri Far, Senior Officer of HRW, is holding the Iranian Justice responsible for Abtin's death. Firstly, she explained that Abtin should never have been imprisoned for his work, adding that he suffered from the lack of healthcare access in Iranian prison.

After the announcement of Baktash Abtin's death, Human Rights Watch renewed the call for a Joint Statement concerning unjustly detained prisoners in Ervin Prison, who face difficult and unsafe conditions.

IRAQ

Rocket attack in Iraq

A **rocket attack in Baghdad's Green Zone** on Thursday injured three people, including two children. One of the rockets hit a school, two others broke into the U.S. embassy, Iraqi security sources said.

The Supreme Court suspended a newly appointed speaker amid renewed political tensions in the war-torn country. Dozens of rocket attacks or drone bombings have targeted U.S. troops and Iraqi interests in recent months. No group has claimed the attack.

Constitutional reform: changes for women?

On January 12th, the Jordanian Senate approved **constitutional reforms** in order to restore public trust after failures to reduce corruption and fix the economy. With this change, the Prime Minister will be chosen by the leading party in the Parliament. Until now, the King was the only one able to choose who would lead the government. The reforms also include a reduction to 25 years as the minimum age required to become a member of parliament. Furthermore, Jordanian women are now recognized in the Constitution.

However, feminists claim that this reform is not relevant, since it does not recognize any further rights to women. Also, conservatists fear that by recognizing women in the constitution, the Jordanian nationality might be accorded to too many people. Indeed, in many MENA countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, the nationality can only be transmitted through the father.

The opposition affirms that this reform reinforces the King's power since he does not need the approval of the Prime Minister anymore to appoint ministers, senators, judges, and other key actors of the political system. The opposition also underlines the temporality of the process, initiated quickly after the arrest of Prince Hamzah after an alleged coup attempt in April 2021.

LEBANON

Kenyan migrant workers protest in front of consulate

Over the last few days, in the week of January 10th, Kenyan migrant workers have been protesting day and night in front of the Kenyan consulate in Beirut. The twenty women who originally all arrived to become housemaids in Beirut have been waiting to be repatriated, after being forced to abandon their jobs in the middle of the economic crisis. As last week's Press Review presented, loss of jobs is an ongoing reality for migrant workers living in Lebanon at the moment, due to the ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon.

Middle East Eye states that some of the women claim to have been waiting for repatriation since the harbour blast of August 2020, but without success. The need for going home comes as a result of the lack of income and thus no money to send home nor to live off themselves. However, also cases of sexual assault have been reported. **Middle East Eye** states that this is the case because of the exclusion of migrant workers under Lebanese labour laws, which makes them prone to abuse.

A representative of the consulate states that the women will be sent home soon, but that their protest is keeping them from doing their job, and that the sooner the women return to their shelters, the sooner they will get repatriated.

Mass arrest and inhuman treatment of 600 migrants in Tripoli

On the 12th of January, Gabriele Ganci, Head of Mission for Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Libya, **denounced** inhumane treatments towards more than 600 migrants in the country. The asylum-seekers and refugees were peacefully protesting for relocation, protection and evacuation, when they were arrested and brought to the prison of Ain Zara, in South Tripoli.

According to **MSF**, Ain Zara is an extremely overcrowded facility, in which detainees' standards of living are completely inadequate; the MSF team is allowed to visit the prison once a week and to deliver medical aid to the prisoners. After the raid, the organisation reports treating patients with stab wounds, beating marks and signs of shock/trauma resulting from the forced detention. Moreover, some of the migrants had been beaten and separated from their children during the arrest.

Ellen van der Velden, MSF Operations Manager in Amsterdam, pointed out that "not only does this once again prove how migrants are subject to random and arbitrary detention - something that applies to virtually all migrants currently in Libya - but these people are additionally detained for speaking up for basic protection, safety and treatment in-line with humanitarian law."

MOROCCO AND WESTERN SAHARA

Creation of toolbox to make Magreb women aware of their rights

On Monday January 10th, a report was released on the right to inheritance in Morocco and other Arab North-African countries.

The report describes the joint action taken by, among others, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). The joint action was set up between women's movements in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Several projects have been organized since 2018.

First, a general seminar about the right to inheritance in the Maghreb region was organized by FIDH. All of the observations contributed to the creation of a global report. Its main goal is to become a "toolbox" for Maghrebi women to know their rights and argue in favor of equality in inheritance. Until now, for example, nationality can only be passed on through the father. This is something that these women are trying to change.

80-year-old Palestinian killed by Israeli soldiers

Omar Abdelmajeed Asaad, 80 years old, was found dead in a village near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. The old man was arrested on his way home by Israeli soldiers who were looking for terrorists. Asaad was dragged out of the car, beaten up and left unconscious by the soldiers. The Palestinian authorities affirm that the old man was already dead when transported to the hospital and that he might have suffered a heart attack as a result of the assault.

The head of the village where the victim used to live, said to [Middle East Eye](#) that "Asaad's death reflects the policies of the Israeli government, which thinks that it can violate our lives and dignity with impunity."

SAUDI ARABIA

Uighur detainees soon to be deported to China

Saudi Arabia is about to violate the non-refoulment principle, in view of the imminent deportation of two Muslim Uyghurs back to China, [Human Rights Watch](#) reports. Since November 2020, Nurmemet Rozi and Hemdullah Abduweli have been detained arbitrarily, without any legal proceedings, in the high-security prison of Dhabhan, Jeddah. According to an informed source, HRW denounces that a Saudi official recently communicated to one of the Uyghur men to be "mentally prepared to be deported to China" shortly. Abduweli's daughter, a religious scholar based in Turkey, denounced the situation publicly through a [video posted on Twitter](#), asking the Saudi government to permit the two men to go back to Turkey, the country in which they were residing.

The conditions under which Uyghurs live in China are infamously known all over the world. Uyghurs are a Muslim, Turkic-speaker minority living in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, in the North-West of the country. The Chinese government has been committing countless human rights abuses towards them with the excuse of counter-terrorism practices, so much so that human rights groups have [denounced](#) the occurrence of crimes against humanity in Xinjiang. Regardless of all this, in 2019 and 2020 Saudi Arabia took part in [joint letters](#) to the United Nations aimed to support Beijing's efforts to combat "terrorism and extremism" in Xinjiang.

Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at HRW, stated that by deporting the two Uyghur men, Saudi Arabia would be sending a clear message about standing arm-in-arm with the Chinese government and their crimes against humanity targeting Turkic Muslims. "Deporting people to places where they would face arbitrary detention, torture, or worse, risks further tarnishing Saudi Arabia's global human rights image".

Continued anti-coup confrontations in Sudan

Anti-coup protesters continue demonstrations in the streets of Sudan. The demonstration started after the United Nations tried to facilitate talks with rival Sudanese factions. Since October 25, there have been 63 deaths and numerous injuries by the Sudanese authorities. However, the authorities deny the use of live ammunition to confront the protesters.

[Arab News](#) reported that on Thursday, January 13, a police officer was stabbed to death during the demonstrations. General Ali Bareema Hamad was fatally stabbed by groups of protesters, trying to secure the protests. On the other side, security forces responded to protesters in Khartoum and Omdurman by throwing stones and tear gas.

Also in October, medical facilities were attacked while demonstrators and wounded were assaulted and arrested inside hospital wards by security forces, according to [Arab News](#).

SYRIA

Universal laws bring justice and respect for human rights

A German court has found Anwar Raslan guilty on 27 of 58 accounts of murder, rape and sexual assault, committed in a Damascus prison, run under President Bashar al-Assad. The trial was conducted under German universal jurisdiction law, which allows courts to prosecute crimes committed by anyone, anywhere in the world, according to [The National](#). This is a landmark ruling, as it brings the numerous Syrians who were abused by President Bashar al-Assad hope in their journey towards justice.

The European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights has collected evidence since 2016 from nearly 50 Syrian torture survivors living in Germany. [Reuters](#) reported, many Syrian families headed outside the court in search of justice. Some Syrian families express their concern about the loss of relatives during interrogations by Syrian government agents after being kidnapped, killed and tortured in Syria.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, expressed her content in the search for justice for human rights violations in Syria.

Police brutality in Tunisia

On Friday, January 14th, hundreds of people gathered in the city centre of Tunis, on the avenue Mohamed V, to protest against President Kais Saïed, who suspended the Parliament last July, controlled by the Islamist party Ennahda. The protests were not authorized, due to a recrudescence of Covid-19 in the country. However, the opposition maintained its call to protest. According to [Reuters](#), a large police presence was deployed to disperse the potential protesters, and truncheons and tear gas were used.

A French journalist from the daily newspaper Libération was arrested and brutalised by the police, while he was covering the protests. He was beaten up by policemen in uniforms and his camera was taken away. The violence observed last Friday is said to be the most brutal since the 2011 Revolution.

TURKEY

Alarming increase of hate crimes towards Syrians

On the 12th of January, the Turkish police arrested 8 alleged offenders for the stabbing and killing of [Nail al-Naif](#), a 19-year-old Syrian refugee in Istanbul. The young man was sleeping in his room at night, when a group of men burst into his apartment and stabbed him to death.

According to [AlJazeera](#), this attack is one of many recent acts of violence against Syrians in Turkey. Indeed, in the past year, several hate crimes took place. [Last August](#), a furious mob destroyed shops and cars belonging to Syrian refugees in Ankara and on January 9th, a big group raided a shopping mall frequented by Syrian nationals in Istanbul, shouting "This is Turkey, not Syria". Allegedly, the episode was triggered by the refusal of a Syrian man to hand over a cigarette to a Turkish man. Also, last November, three young Syrians, working in construction, were [burned to death](#) in Izmir. The police had initially labelled it as an accident due to a malfunctioning heater. Nevertheless, human rights activists insisted on further investigations, and it emerged that the suspect, now found guilty, had previously gone to the police to announce that he was going to kill the above-mentioned Syrians.

Turkey currently hosts more than 5 million migrants, of which around 3.7 are Syrian refugees. The country is facing a severe financial crisis, which causes a big increase in poverty amongst the population. Several political figures have recently started to blame Syrian refugees for the economic instability in the country, using them as scapegoats for the growing unrest. One example is the decision taken by Tanju Ozcan, the mayor of the northern province of Bolu, whose administration passed a law last November enforcing large increases in water bills and in fees for performing marriages for foreigners. Ozcan is currently under investigation over charges of misconduct in office and hate and discrimination.

Intensification of fights in Marib

After taking back three districts to the Houthis, the entire Shabwa governate has returned under the control of the Saudi-led coalition. The Yemeni government forces and their allies now **focus their attention on the governate of Marib** in central Yemen. The Saudi airplanes have significantly bombed Marib by targeting rebels' equipment and killing 190 Houthis in just 24 hours on Sunday.

The pro-Yemeni government, supported by Saudi Arabia, and the Southerners, supported by UAE, have stopped fighting and all weapons are now against the Houthis, which might eventually weaken the rebels.

Turki al-Maliki, the spokesperson for the Saudi-led coalition, announced the launch of a new operation called "Freedom of Happy Yemen" with the aim to erase the Houthis.



Image Source: [La Croix](#)



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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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