

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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Women rights activists arrested by Taliban

Several women were arrested after protesting for equal rights. Parawana Ibrahimkhel and Tamana Zaryabi recorded their arrest. In the video one can hear the protesters begging for help, while the Taliban are at their door: "Help, please, the Taliban have come to our home. Only my sisters are home." They were arrested afterwards, as well as other women.

The activists took part in a protest where dozens of women claimed their rights to study and work. The protest was violently repressed, with beatings reported. While returning home, some of the women were followed and armed men arrested them. While the Taliban claims not to be responsible for the arrests, the group has largely denied women's rights since the Islamic fundamentalist movement took power last summer. Women have been forbidden to travel long distances without being accompanied by a close male relative and movies broadcasting female actors are not allowed anymore.

The neighbours of the two women's rights defenders confirmed that the two women were taken away by a group of men. Nobody has seen them since then.

Human Rights Watch stated that the Taliban "have rolled back the rights of women and girls, including blocking access to education and employment for many". According to observers, the Taliban have intensified attacks on protesters and have banned and repressed unauthorized protests. ([BBC](#), [HRW](#))

ALGERIA

Algeria singled out for forced displacement of sub-Saharan African migrants in desert

On January 28th, several NGOs, including Human Rights Watch, warned about the alarming situation of migrants in the Algerian desert, on the border with Niger. They reported on the racist policy that affects migrants and asylum seekers in Algeria. Hespess explained that thousands of migrants are separated from their children and stripped of their belongings. The majority of them are sub-Saharan refugees, who are trying to cross Algeria to reach Europe. The Algerian authorities are pushing them back in the Algerian desert, in the south of the country. The desert represents 90% of the Algerian territory with nearly two million square kilometres of desert expanses.

In their last report, concerning the situation in Algeria in 2021, HRW claimed that the Algerian authorities have continued their policy of collective expulsion of thousands of migrants, of more than 20 nationalities, to Niger and Mali. Moreover, the NGO Alarm Phone Sahara said, according to its census, that more than 18,000 people had been deported by Algeria to Niger until October 2021. ([Hespess](#), [HRW](#))

Political dissident extradited from Serbia to Bahrain

Ahmed Jaffer Muhammad was extradited on January 24th. The 48-year-old man got sued by Bahrain for terrorism and murder. However, several NGOs – including Human Rights Watch – have stated that Muhammad is a political dissident who was arrested and tortured by Bahraini authorities after several protests he took part in.

Muhammad left Bahrain after the 2011 uprising, which led many young Bahrainis to the street. The protests were severely repressed by the government, killing 93 civilians, arresting 2,929, and forcing 500 to exile. Muhammad was sentenced to life in prison twice by a Bahraini court, which also stripped him of his citizenship.

He was arrested by Serbian police, a country where he found shelter after fleeing Bahrain. The European Court of Human Rights called Belgrade authorities to suspend Muhammad's extradition who could face "possible risks of torture and/or ill-treatment". However, Muhammad was extradited on January 24th. The Serbian authorities arrested the Bahraini political dissident based on an Interpol Red Notice. The international police organization is ruled since November 2021 by Emirati general Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi, who is accused by HRW of ignoring criticism of the abusive use of the Interpol Red Notice by authoritarian regimes. ([AlJazeera](#), [HRW](#))

EGYPT

Preparations joint bid Egypt and EU: leading next Global Counterterrorism Forum

On January 25th, Claudio Francavilla, Human Rights Watch's EU Advocate, made a public post on Twitter stating that the EU was planning a joint bid with Egypt to chair the next Global Counterterrorism Forum. Claudio Francavilla cites a leaked document of the Council of the European Union: the HRW's EU advocate decided to make the information public to raise awareness and to urge the EU to change its position regarding this bid. He states that "given Egypt's abhorrent record of human rights violations in the name of counterterrorism, the EU should seriously reconsider its move".

For the Human Rights defenders, this union between Egypt and the EU about a subject as touchy as counterterrorism is unwelcomed by the European Union. Indeed, since President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power in 2013, Egypt has multiplied repressions and reforms unrespecting Human Rights, in the name of counterterrorism. NGOs and newspapers have pointed out the large number of people jailed for being perceived as Muslim Brothers, classified as a terrorist group by the government in 2013 and the Egyptian military actions in the Sinai.

However, the EU didn't make the bid official yet, and this decision may be reconsidered as the next UN Human Rights Council is about to take place in less than one month, starting on February 28th. ([AlJazeera](#), [HRW](#), [Twitter](#))

French tourist incarcerated for 'propaganda against the regime', sentenced to 8 years

An Iranian court recently sentenced Benjamin Briere to spend 8 years in prison, based on spying charges. The French tourist has been detained in Iran since May 2020 and was held after flying a helicam - a small helicopter used to take pictures or motion images, in the desert near the border with Turkmenistan.

Philippe Valent, Briere's lawyer, reported that the latter Briere is currently "more and more weakened" due to the hunger strike he has been carrying out for a month. Moreover, Valent denounces that Briere was also given an extra 8-month sentence because of his "propaganda against Iran's Islamic system". Valent commented that "this verdict is the result of a purely political process that is [...] devoid of any basis". The lawyer labelled the trial, which began on January 20th, as a "masquerade", denouncing the lack of a "fair trial in front of impartial judges". Also, he claims to not have been granted access to the entire indictment against Briere. France's foreign ministry stated that the verdict is "unacceptable", as Briere was simply a tourist travelling in the country - not surely a spy.

In recent times, Iran has been arresting dozens of dual nationals and foreigners, for the most part over accusations linked to security reasons and espionage. This fits into the context of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal, of which France is a party, too. Indeed, on January 24th, the US nuclear negotiator stated that Washington is not likely to save the agreement unless Teheran releases the US citizens detained as "hostage" in the country. For this reason, Briere's lawyer stated that "It is not tolerable that Benjamin Briere is being held hostage to negotiations by a regime which keeps a French citizen arbitrarily detained merely to use him as currency in an exchange". ([AlJazeera](#), [BBC](#))



Image Source: [AlJazeera](#)

HRW: Many waves of abuse of Iraqi human rights highlighted

On January 25th, Human Rights Watch published a Memorandum about their main concern about the human rights situation in Iraq. It was sent to the United Nations Human Rights Committee for its review of Iraq in March 2022. Their recommendations are divided into several parts. Firstly, HRW gave an overview of the domestic violence situation in Iraq. They highlighted that the Iraqi Criminal Code enables impunity for violence against women, including domestic violence. The second part of the review concerns the rights of people with disabilities to vote and run in elections. Indeed, people with disabilities are most of the time excluded from the election process and their right to vote is denied. Also, a recommendation has been made on the extrajudicial killings during anti-ISIS operations. HRW also raised the issue of gender identity, sexual orientation and morality laws in Iraq's Penal Code. Finally, the NGO calls for more rights for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. HRW hopes it will be used as a tool for making the general report on the Iraqi situation of 2021. ([HRW](#))

JORDAN

Protests over detention for critique on King

Osama al-Ajarmeh, tribal leader and former member of the Jordanian Parliament, was sentenced to 12 years of hard labour for insulting King Abdullah II. The decision was followed by furious demonstrations all over Amman. Young people wearing masks burned down the tribe's headquarters, accusing Ajarmeh's leaders of failing to protect the former politician. Meanwhile, a videotape of people throwing stones at a picture of the Jordanian monarch, in the proximity of the state security court, quickly spread on the internet. The protests were rapidly smothered by the arrival of security forces.

Ajarmeh's case dates back to May 2021, when he was suspended from office due to his participation in public demonstrations, triggered by the fact that he was denied to address the five-hour power cut in the kingdom during a parliamentary sitting. In the protests, he was seen brandishing a gun and a sword while threatening the King. After the videotape went viral, 109 out of 130 MPs voted for his removal from office, and Ajarmeh was charged with treason, terrorism and plotting to kill the king. According to former judge Loay Obeidat, now part of Ajarmeh's defence team, "the state prosecutor didn't present tangible evidence for the charges" of which his client is accused. Moreover, a petition shared by 63 public figures against the sentence was shared, stating that "the state security court doesn't provide the basis of a just trial", as it "violates the very basis of the separation of powers that is the bedrock of the constitution", claiming that the sentence has been "politicised".

Alaa' Fazza, a Jordanian journalist who received political asylum in Sweden, stated in an interview to Middle East Eye that Ajarmeh's popularity among the public "touched a nerve", claiming that "Osama did make a mistake during his work, but it was not a sin. The issue is not a legal one. It is clear that the regime wanted to kill any person with a new charisma that appears on the streets". ([Middle East Eye](#))

Expats over 60 years old were finally allowed to work in Kuwait

Since a 2020 law, it was forbidden to renew a work permit for people over 60 years old and people who hold only a secondary school certificate or less in Kuwait. This ban led more than 4000 expatriates to unemployment, because of their age. This week, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of State put an end to this ban, allowing people aged 60 years old or more to obtain a permit.

However, the permit costs \$826 and cannot be granted without full-health insurance. The decision follows the country's economic situation, hit by a budget deficit of nearly 175% for the 2020-2021 financial year, the Arabian business says.

The government's policy in front of this deficit is to diversify the workforce, to limit "budgetary inflation and further spreading bureaucracy, poor performance, low productivity, and disguised unemployment". ([Arabian News](#))

LEBANON

Kenya refugees able to go home after spending weeks in the streets of Beirut

About 30 women domestic workers slept and lived in front of Kenya's honorary consulate in Beirut during the last two weeks. They ended up on the streets because the families they worked for as domestic workers couldn't afford their wages due to the economic crisis.

The International Organization for Migration, IOM, announced that three of the Kenyan refugees are going to be repatriated to their home country. The Lebanese and the Kenyan governments are already planning 69 more repatriations within the days to come.

This news puts the light on the issue of the continuing Kafala system in Lebanon, which puts the departure of domestic workers in the hands of their employers, who detain the workers' passports. This very common practise tends to be legislated according to Claudine Aoun, president of the National Commission for Lebanese Women. She stated that she will "submit her remarks to the Labor Ministry". ([L'Orient Today](#))



Image Source: [L'Orient Today](#)

Appalling Treatment of Libyan refugees without response from European governments

An EU observer reported that Libya is forcing and abandoning people into deserts, into "no man's land". They are left there without water and often in disastrous conditions. Benjamin Lewan, an officer at the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, explained on January 27th, that these schemes appear to be linked to the "efforts to strengthen Libya's external border enforcement to prevent migrants from eventually arriving in Europe". The expulsions and the ran of centres of detention are being carried out by Libyan authorities. This article recalls the alarming situation of these centres where many cases of abuse, rapes and acts of torture were documented.

Several NGOs and media warned about the humanitarian catastrophe concerning the treatment of refugees in Libya. The International Rescue Committee published earlier in January a press release showing their concern about the detention of more than 600 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Tripoli, at the former Community Day Centre. Also there the conditions are disastrous and alarming for the protection of the fundamental rights of the people detained. (EU Observer)

MOROCCO AND WESTERN SAHARA

#MeToo wave hits Moroccan universities

Moroccan women students in universities are initiating what is referred to as the commence of the Me Too movement in the country. Social media are being used as spaces to break the silence regarding sexual violence in academic institutions, as a consequence of a scandal concerning educators requiring sexual favours in return for positive evaluations.

24-year-old student Nadia reports being expelled by her university under the pretext of having cheated on an exam, she claimed in an interview by AFP. "The truth is that I had just refused to submit to sexual blackmail from one of my professors", she says. Ultimately, she was re-admitted at the Hassan I University in Settat. The institution is currently implicated in a scandal involving five professors. So far, one of them has been convicted with a two-year sentence over demanding sexual favours in exchange for good grades.

The current social media campaign results to be crucial in raising awareness on the scale of this phenomenon: many cases had already been denounced in recent years but no official action followed. The scandal initially broke after the online publication of screenshots in which professors were requesting sexual favours from students. As a wave, thanks to activists and civil society organisations, women victims of harassment started sharing their stories on social media. All this resulted in suspension and investigations of academic personnel, as well as several universities launching hotlines to report cases of sexual harassment and establishing teams to investigate such matters. (Africa News, France24)

Death of Omar Muhammad Assad - family calls for thorough investigation

On January 26th, Middle East Eye published a press release about the death of Omar Muhammad Asaad, an 80-years-old Palestinian American. He died on January 12th, 2022. Asaad was driving home, on Jaljulia road, in the north of Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank. There he was violently arrested, dragged out of the car and left lying unconscious on the ground. He was blindfolded and handcuffed before falling to the ground.

A new article was released this week about his death because there were calls for a thorough investigation. Indeed, Asaad's daughter, Hala Hamad had told the Washing post last week that "[they] want a thorough investigation from the US government and the UN because [Israel] can't investigate their crimes." Last Sunday, the Human Rights group B'Tselem reported that it is not likely for Israeli soldiers to be blamed or held accountable for Asaad's death. Middle East Eye published another press release on this topic to highlight even more the flaws of Israeli military investigations. However, Palestinians and lefts-winged groups say it rarely brings results. ([Middle East Eye](#), [Middle East Eye](#))

QATAR

FIFA president assures evolution of Qatar's respect for Human Rights in preparation of World Cup

On January 25th, the FIFA president Giovanni Infantino addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) the situation on the next football World Cup, taking place in Qatar, winter 2022. He underlined a huge evolution of human rights in Qatar within the frame of the 2022 Football World Cup preparation. He mainly referred to workers' legislation, saying that Qatar "has evolved in a record time of only a few years".

This statement and FIFA's commitment to protecting Human Rights during this World Cup was quite expected by the Council of Europe, in a context of growing critics about the Human Rights situation in Qatar. Indeed, a lot of human rights defenders and newspapers highlighted the terrible conditions of workers involved in this World Cup's preparation. The infrastructures welcoming the supporters have been built by workers mainly coming from migrations, with low wages and unrespectful work conditions, whereas the tickets for the events are the most expensive a World Cup has ever reached.

Therefore, human rights associations are keeping an eye on the country's adaptation and evolution facing such an event. ([FIFA](#))

Increase of violence in Darfur

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recently published a flash update regarding the situation in Darfur, as from late 2021 the region has witnessed high instability, resulting in “the situation in the area remaining tense and unpredictable”. Indeed, on January 20th increasing tension, sub-national conflict and violence were reported in the areas of Ag Geneina and Kereneik, in the Western Darfur. In fact, in the surrounding areas of Ag Geneina, the rise of violence caused the displacement of 11,100 people, as a result of an attack on behalf of armed nomad groups, who allegedly killed nine residents, including two children, while raiding and burning parts of the village. UNHCR estimates that, following these episodes, around 4,500 people crossed the border to Chad.

According to the Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview, the situation in Darfur continues to be highly dramatic, with around 6.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022 - whether they are IDPs, returnees, refugees or vulnerable residents. Nowadays, more than two million people continue to live in camps in the aftermath of the Darfur conflict that started in 2003. ([Reliefweb](#))



Image Source: [Aljazeera](#)

Prison attacked by ISIS, at least 332 fatalities

The detention centre of Hassake in North-Eastern Syria is held by Kurds of the Syrian Democratic Forces. The attacks and fights to regain control of the jail led to the death of at least 332 people.

The attack consisted of two kamikazes that exploded in front of the jail while simultaneously 200 jihadists invaded the prison and mutineers took control of the detention centre. The coordinated attack aimed at liberating hundreds of ISIS supporters. The former school reconverted in jail hosted around 5.000 prisoners. The overcrowding of the prison and the weak security facilitated the attack. The Syrian Democratic Forces control a total of 12.000 prisoners in the country, mostly Syrian and Iraqi jihadists.

The provisional assessment following the violence is the death of 246 jihadists, 79 Kurd fighters, and 7 civilians. The intense fights also led more than 45.000 people to flee their houses. The intervention of US helicopters and armoured vehicles was determinant to regain control of the jail. However, less than 100 jihadists are still controlling a small part of the prison.

With these attacks, the ISIS leader, Abu Omar al-Turkmani, likely seeks to consolidate its forces and to show the strength of its terrorist organization. ([New York Times](#))



Image Source: [New York Times](#)

ECHR condemns Turkey for imprisonment Deniz Yücel

On January 25th, the European Court for human rights (ECHR) condemned Turkey for the imprisonment of journalist Deniz Yücel.

In February 2017, Turkey arrested the German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yücel, after he covered the failed 2016 overthrow, against President Erdogan. The journalist has been jailed for one year in Turkey, increasing the tense relations between Germany and Turkey.

In July 2020, the Istanbul tribunal condemned Deniz Yücel to 2 years and 9 months jail for 'terrorist propaganda', in favour of the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, classified as a terrorist group by the Turkish government. According to the European Court for Human Rights and many Human Rights defenders organizations, this condemnation is severely affecting the freedom of speech. Therefore, on January 25th the European court condemned Turkey for 'interference in the freedom of speech', and ordered Ankara to pay a 13,300 euros compensation to Deniz Yücel. ([L'Orient Today](#))



Image Source: [FR](#)

YEMEN

2,000 child soldiers killed in battlefield

According to the UN Security Council's report that circulated on January 29th, approximately 2,000 children were recruited by Yemen's Houthi rebels. All children died on the battlefield. UN experts report evidence on Houthi usage of summer camps and mosques as locations to spread their ideology and recruit minors to fight against the government. The UN Panel, composed of four experts, reported that "children are instructed to shout the Houthi slogan 'death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews, victory to Islam'".

In one of the camps, children as young as seven years of age were taught to clean weapons and evade rockets. Moreover, the UN Panel claims to have received a list of 1,406 child soldiers recruited by the Houthis that were killed on the battlefield in 2020, and another 562 minors were murdered between January and May of last year. According to the experts, the children were aged between 10 and 17 years old. ([AlJazeera](#))



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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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