



GLOBAL UPDATE

Key Events in Human Rights in 2013

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Since the Amnesty International Report went to press on 31 December 2012, some key moments in human rights have made headlines around the world. This is a summary of those events.

January

French and Malian forces launched a counter-offensive against armed Islamist groups in **Mali**. Human rights violations by both Malian and armed opposition forces increased significantly in the aftermath of the international armed intervention.

Unrest erupted across **Egypt** following the anniversary of the 2011 uprising as opposition clashed with security forces and Muslim Brotherhood supporters. Sexual violence and discrimination against women were again brought to public attention following a series of horrific sexual attacks on women during January protests in Tahrir Square.

President Morsi has been accused of reprising Mubarak-era tactics clamping down on freedom of expression. Journalists, bloggers and broadcasters have been questioned for criticizing the authorities and opposition activists arrested on trumped-up or politically motivated charges. Egypt's parliament is pushing through new laws to restrict freedoms of assembly and association, with strict new regulations for human rights organizations.

As **China's** new generation of leaders took office, proposed reforms to systems of administrative detention including re-education through labour camps, used to detain people without charge or trial for up to four years, fall short of required international standards. Hundreds of thousands continue to be held in such facilities.

February

On 12 February a Milan court sentenced two former senior **Italian** intelligence chiefs to 10 and nine years in prison for the 'kidnapping' of Egyptian national Abu Omar. A total of 26 US nationals and three Italians have been convicted for their role in Abu Omar's rendition.

March

On 1 March, former **Haiti** 'president for life' Jean-Claude Duvalier appeared in court on charges relating to human rights abuses. His trial offers a glimmer of hope to the victims and families of those subjected to extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and torture during his years in power.

A decade after the US-led invasion, **Iraq** remains mired in human rights abuses. Under the guise of the 'anti-terrorism law' people continue to be subjected to arrest without charge, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment. Hundreds of people, many civilians, continue to be killed every month in bombings and other attacks carried out by armed groups. In April the highest number of violent deaths since mid-2008 was recorded amid increasing incidents of violent clashes between Sunni Arab armed groups and security forces.

Presidential elections in **Kenya** passed without major human rights violations. Amnesty International urged the newly elected President, Uhuru Kenyatta, to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into the widespread violence that occurred after the disputed 2007 election.



Fighting continues in eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo** with increased levels of sexual violence and displacement. M23 rebel leader, Bosco Ntaganda handed himself into the US embassy in the Rwandan capital Kigali on 18 March. He was transferred to The Hague to face trial at the ICC for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Communal violence between Muslims and Buddhists in **Myanmar** continued. On 20 March at least 20 people were killed in the central Mandalay Division, showing that tensions from last year's Rakhine state violence has spread.

On 21 March, the UN Human Rights Council voted to set up a Commission of Inquiry into grave, systematic and widespread human rights violations in **North Korea**.

The UN Human Rights Council also passed a resolution highlighting past and present human rights violations in **Sri Lanka**, but failed to call explicitly for an international investigation into alleged conflict-era war crimes by the government and the Tamil opposition armed group LTTE.

The brutal gang rape of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012 sparked a nation-wide debate on violence against women in **India**. On 22 March, Parliament introduced a new set of laws to curb violence against women, which include alarming provisions such as calling for the death penalty for certain extreme acts of violence.

April

Governments at the UN agreed a historic **Arms Trade Treaty** that puts human rights at its heart. The treaty prohibits states from transferring conventional weapons to countries when they know those weapons will be used to commit or facilitate genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. Days earlier, Iran, North Korea and Syria – three human rights-abusing countries under some form of UN sanctions – staged a cynical move to try and block it.

Indiscriminate bombings in South Kordofan by **Sudan** Armed Forces exacerbated an already precarious humanitarian situation, forcing an estimated 100,000 to flee.

Violence and intimidation marred April's presidential elections in **Venezuela** following the death of former President Hugo Chávez.

Scores of detainees went on hunger strike at the **US** naval base in Guantánamo Bay. President Obama reiterated his promise to close the detention facility. Five years since he first made the promise, 166 people remain in detention there.

Violence against women continues to be endemic in **Afghanistan**. On 22 April a father shot dead his daughter in front of a crowd of 300 people, after she was accused of running away with a male cousin.

Russia widened restrictions on independent non-governmental organizations and in late April, a Moscow court fined the Association in Defence of Voters' Rights Golos (Voice) 300,000 rubles (almost US\$10,000) for allegedly violating a repressive new "foreign agents" law. They were the first charges brought since a wave of inspections in recent weeks targeted more than 200 organizations across the country – including the Moscow offices of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.



May

With the rainy season starting in **Sudan**, indiscriminate bombings by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) carried out during key planting and harvesting periods have placed civilians in Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile in an extremely precarious situation. The majority of internally displaced people are likely to face a food crisis in the coming weeks. UN officials anticipate that the number of refugees at the remote Yida camp in Southern Sudan will pass 100,000 this month.

The conviction of **Guatemala**'s ex-president General Efraín Ríos Montt for genocide and crimes against humanity during his time in office in 1982-83 marked a historic step in the nation's long struggle for justice.

The campaigning period ahead of 11 May general elections in **Pakistan** was marred by a wave of attacks on election workers and mainly secular political parties by militant groups like the Taliban. At least 140 people were killed and scores others injured.

The crisis in **Syria** deepens. Forces and militias loyal to the government continue to carry out indiscriminate and targeted attacks on civilians, particularly those living in areas controlled by armed opposition groups. Arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment remained rife in prisons and detention centres. Some opposition groups continue to hold hostages and carry out summary killings, including of civilians, based on their nationality, political views or sectarian identity. More than 1.4 million refugees have fled the country and some 4 million are internally displaced. So far the UN Security Council has failed to act on calls to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC.

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