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Vol:18 Issue 03 - MARCH 2024



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Drone Attack Collapses Odesa Residential Building

Explosive Weapon Kills 12, Including 5 Children in Ukrainian City



On March 2, Andriy Sidak raced to his sister's apartment building fearing the worst. Earlier, a Russian drone had struck the building in the north part of Odesa. What he found was rubble and dust, the mangled remains of what had been a nine-story residential building. Witnesses say the drone hit the building at the sixth-floor level, causing concrete slabs of the upper floors of the building to collapse on the lower levels.

Serhii Gaidarzhi watches as rescue workers search for the bodies of his wife Anna Gaidarzhi and their four-month-old son Tymofii, both killed in the drone attack. Odesa, March 2, 2024. Click to expand Image

Serhii Gaidarzhi watches as rescue workers search for the bodies of his wife Anna

Gaidarzhi and their four-month-old son Tymofii, both killed in the drone attack. Odesa, March 2, 2024. © 2024 Andriy Sidak

Sidak entered what remained of the apartment where his sister Anna Gaidarzhi lived with her husband Serhii and two children, a four-month-old son Tymofii and a three-year-old daughter Lizzi.

"The living room ..., where they had a piano and a sofa, was gone. The huge concrete slab blocked the doorway to the bedroom where Anna and Tymofii slept," said Sidak. "Their bodies were found last ... in the basement. They died in their sleep, flattened by the rubble."

Serhii and Lizzi survived.

In total, 12 people were killed in the attack, five of them children, the youngest of them

Tymofii Gaidarzhi. The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine called it "the deadliest incident for children in more than nine months."

Mykhailo Voitov, who lived on the seventh floor, was also killed in the collapse. His wife, Angelina, had fled to Germany in 2022 with their 11-year-old daughter because she was distressed about the war. The couple had been married for 33 years, and before the war started, had never been apart for more than one day.

"Our daughter was very frightened," Angelina said after her husband's funeral. "She has only just begun to settle down. I don't know how her father's death will impact her."

Ukrainian authorities stated that the defense forces shot down seven drones launched

by the Russian forces into Odesa that night. One drone hit a residential building. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether Ukrainian forces attempted to intercept the drone.

Russia's full-scale invasion has killed and injured tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians. According to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, most of the casualties have been from the use in populated areas of explosive weapons, such as missiles, drones, and artillery. Use of such weapons in populated areas should be avoided because of the heightened risk of indiscriminate and often devastating impact on civilians and infrastructure and, in the long run, post-conflict reconstruction.

Canada: All 10 Provinces To End Immigration Detention in Jails

Newfoundland and Labrador Joins the Rest; Federal Government Should Follow Suit

All 10 of Canada's provinces have now committed to ending their immigration detention agreements and arrangements with the Canada Border Services Agency, a major victory for migrant and refugee rights, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International Canada said today. Newfoundland and Labrador, the last remaining province, has now confirmed that it will no longer allow the federal government to detain migrants and asylum seekers in local jails.

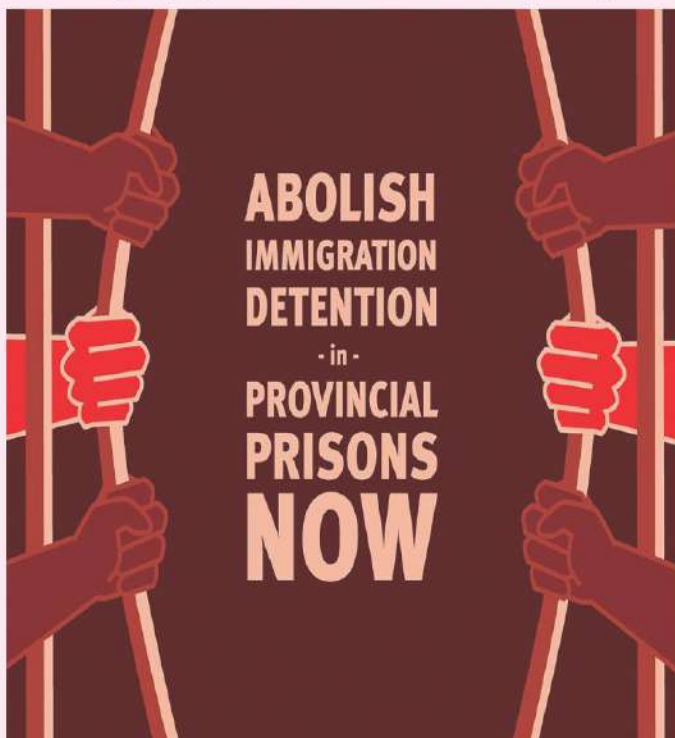
The two organizations created the #WelcomeToCanada campaign in October 2021 to urge provinces to stop the practice. The use of provincial jails for immigration detention is inconsistent with international human rights standards and devastating to people's mental



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Prince Edward Island	☒
New Brunswick	☒
Nova Scotia	☒
Newfoundland & Labrador	☒
Federal	☐

 Welcome to Canada

health. The federal govern-



ment should follow the provinces and take meaningful steps to end immigration detention across the country.

"Newfoundland and Labrador's decision is a momentous human rights victory that upholds the dignity and rights of people who come to Canada in search of safety or a better life," said Samer Muscati, acting disability rights deputy director at Human Rights Watch. "With all 10 provinces now having cancelled their immigration detention agreements and arrangements, the federal government should finally guarantee through a policy directive or legislative amendment that the border agency will stop using jails for immigration detention once and for all."

List of expiration dates of immigration detention agreements or arrangementsClick to expand Image

Over the past five years, the

border agency has incarcerated thousands of people on immigration grounds in dozens of provincial jails across the country, on the basis of agreements and arrangements with provinces. Conditions in provincial jails are abusive, and these facilities are inherently punitive. On March 12, 2024, the Newfoundland and Labrador government sent official notice to the border agency that as of March 31, 2025, its provincial jails will no longer hold people detained solely under immigration law. So far, the agreements in five provinces have expired following notice-of-termination periods, with the remaining five provinces' agreements due to expire by March 2025. The border agency has sought to extend the agreements in some provinces.

In a 2021 report, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International documented that



racialized people, and in particular Black men, are confined in more restrictive conditions and for longer periods in Canada's immigration detention than other detainees. People with disabilities also experience discrimination throughout the immigration detention process.

People in immigration detention are regularly handcuffed, shackled, and held with little to no contact with the outside world. Canada is among only a few countries in the Global North with no legal limit on the duration of immigration detention, meaning people can be detained for months or years with no end in sight.

Sara Maria Gomez Lopez experienced immigration detention firsthand after she arrived in Canada as an asylum seeker in 2012. The border agency incarcerated her for three months in British Columbia. "I remember that deep pain I felt in jail," she said. "Canada can and must stop multiplying such pain and instead give way to the humane welcome that has

helped heal so many who found refuge in this country. This development gives me hope that others will be spared the pain that I experienced."

Image in shades of red with a fence in front of seated people. #WelcometoCanada

Our #WelcomeToCanada campaign is going coast to coast. The federal government has contracts with provinces across Canada that allow for immigration detainees to be held in provincial jails. Call on the federal government of Canada to cancel these contracts!

TAKE ACTION

Since the #WelcomeToCanada campaign began, hundreds of advocates, lawyers, healthcare providers, and faith leaders, alongside people with lived experience in immigration detention, as well as dozens of leading social justice organizations, have called on provincial and federal authorities to end the use of provincial jails for immigration detention. More than 30,000 people across Canada have also participated in the campaign by writing

directly to provincial and federal authorities.

Under the agreements and arrangements, the border agency paid provinces hundreds of dollars daily for each immigration detainee incarcerated in a provincial jail. For example, according to the border agency, in the fiscal year ending March 2023, the agency paid CAD\$615.80 per day for each woman detained in a New Brunswick jail. That same fiscal year, the agency spent \$82.7 million on detention, more than in any of the previous four years.

Under immigration law, the border agency has full discretion over where people in immigration detention are held, with no legal standard guiding the agency's decision to hold a person in a provincial jail rather than an immigration holding center. Once agreements and arrangements with the provinces expire, the agency will no longer have access to provincial jails for immigration detention. It also operates three immigration holding centers, which resem-

ble and operate like medium security prisons, with significant restrictions on privacy and liberty, rigid rules and daily routines, and punitive measures in response to failures to follow rules and orders. There are viable alternatives to detention across the country. Instead of funding detention facilities or punitive non-custodial practices such as electronic trackers, the federal government should invest in rights-respecting, community-based programs that are operated by local nonprofit organizations independently of the border agency.

"We commend the provinces for their decisions to stop locking up refugee claimants and migrants in jails solely on immigration grounds," said Ketty Nivyabandi, Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada's English-speaking section. "There is now clear pressure for the federal government to stop this rights-violating system across the country."

Cameroon: Government Bans Opposition Coalitions

Solidifies Crackdown on Free Association, Expression Ahead of 2025 Vote

A declaration by Cameroon's territorial administration minister to make two opposition coalitions illegal is part of a government crackdown on opposition and dissent, Human Rights Watch said today.

On March 12, 2024, the minister, Paul Atanga Nji, said in a statement that the Political Alliance for Change (Alliance politique pour le changement, APC), led by Jean-Michel Nintcheu, and the Political Alliance for Transition in Cameroon (Alliance politique pour la transition, APT), led by Olivier Bile, are "illegal," calling them "clandestine movements." The minister also referenced a recent meeting at a prison in Yaoundé between Nintcheu and Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, a leader of the Anglophone separatist group Ambazonia.

Interim Government, as a factor in the decision to ban the coalition.

"The government's move against these coalitions shows how the Cameroonian authorities are moving to close down space for the opposition and for public debate ahead of the 2025 presidential elections," said Carine Kaneza Nantulya, deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The authorities should immediately lift the ban and allow opposition parties to continue working without harassment."

In December 2023, a prominent opposition leader, Maurice Kamto, was reelected as the leader of the Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun, MRC), one of the most prominent opposition groups in the country. Kamto used his reelection to announce the creation of the APC.

The current president, Paul Biya, has been in power since



1982 and is serving out his seventh term. Biya, 91, was last reelected in 2018 after a contested vote-counting process. Kamto challenged the official results and declared himself winner of the election. Biya's 2018 election sparked a wave of political repression. After the 2018 vote, opposition-led protests occurred across the country, and the government responded with a heavy crackdown and the use of excessive force by the police, army, and gendarmes. In January 2019, Kamto and over 200 of his supporters were arrested and detained. Kamto was charged with insurrection, hostility against the homeland, criminal association, threats to public order, rebellion, and inciting insurrection, crimes that can carry the death penalty. He was freed on October 5, 2019, and the charges were dropped, though the crackdown on the opposition continued.

In early September 2020, Cameroon authorities banned demonstrations across the country after Kamto's MRC encouraged people to take to the streets over the government's decision to call regional elections in December 2020. Opposition parties had expressed concerns that the elections could not be conducted freely and fairly without reforming the electoral code and addressing the lack of security in the country's minority Anglophone regions, where separatist groups and security forces have repeatedly clashed.

On September 22, 2020, Cameroonian security forces fired tear gas and water cannons and arrested over 550 people, mainly opposition party members and supporters, to disperse peaceful protests across the country. Many peaceful protesters were beaten and mistreated while being arrested and in detention.

While the majority of Kamto's supporters who were arrested in 2019 were eventually released, 41, including Olivier Bibou Nissack and Alain Fogue Tedom, two of the group's leaders, remain behind bars after being sentenced to seven years.

When initiating the APC in December 2023, Kamto said that the opposition should rally behind one candidate for the next presidential elections, slated for late 2025. Biya has not announced if he will run again for reelection.

Opposition groups simply coordinating activities and forming alliances cannot be considered "clandestine movements;" instead, this coordination should be considered a normal and important feature of the democratic process, Human Rights Watch said.

Activists have expressed doubts over the legality of the government's ban. "This decision is not based on any legal



texts,” Emmanuel Simh, a prominent rights activist and lawyer for the MRC, told Human Rights Watch. “No law in Cameroon prevents legally

established parties getting together to establish a coalition. It’s just repression and another attempt to muzzle the opposition, to prevent it from

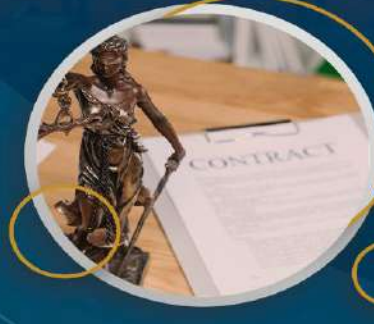
organizing ahead of the next presidential elections.” The government’s decision to ban the two political coalitions violates the rights to freedom

of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and the right to participate in political life. These rights are guaranteed under international human rights law including expressly in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, both of which Cameroon has ratified.

“Cameroonians have watched Biya weaken any meaningful political opposition over the course of the last four decades and this ban is yet another example of the government’s repression,” Nantulya said. “He should consider his legacy and encourage authorities to facilitate and deliver a credible election process with full respect for fundamental rights and freedoms.”

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Child Marriages Act in Pakistan

Nadeem Ahmed advocate

Child marriage has become a norm in Pakistan, especially in rural areas, with the highest rate of this scourge in rural areas being in Sindh province, and this practice disproportionately affects girls.

According to a 2018 UNICEF report, about 18 percent of girls in Pakistan are married before the age of 18, which is the second highest rate of child marriage in South Asia after Sri Lanka.

Child marriage often occurs in rural areas and in low-income households with little education, the main cause of which is poverty.

The first Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed by the Imperial Legislative Council of India on 28 September 1928, and became a formal law on 1 October 1929. This law fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 and for boys at 18. In 1949, after the subcontinent's independence, it was revised to 15 for girls, and later in 1978 to 18 for girls and 21 for boys.

Punishment for marrying children under the age given in this law included imprisonment for one month or fine of one thousand rupees or both.

Even after the creation of Pakistan, this law remained nominal and the implementation of the law and the rate of punishments were never considered.

Because in Pakistan, child marriages were mostly performed in rural areas and there were many marriages that were arranged as retribution for murder.

And the area chiefs, vaders and jagirdars are operated this system, who also represented their areas in the parliament, so they never allowed any progress regarding this law.

With the passage of time, when such incidents came to light through the media, then the policy makers of this country first drafted a bill to be presented in the National



Assembly in 2016 to show it to the outside world.

After all, in 2019, these amendments were approved by the Senate and became the Child Restraint Act 2019.

The specific changes that were made in them were only related to the punishments given in Clause No. 5, in which the punishment of the offense was increased from one month to a maximum of three years and a minimum of two years, while the rate of fine was increased from one thousand. A maximum of two lakhs and a minimum of one lakh have been made.

These crimes were not taken seriously and these crimes were declared as bailable provisions because in the Penal Code of Pakistan all crimes punishable up to three years are bailable.

Since in the UNICEF report, the scourge of child marriages was declared to be the highest in Sindh, the Sindh government drafted the Sindh Child Marriages Act 2013 at the provincial level in this regard, which was approved by the Sindh Assembly on April 28, 2014, And the Governor of Sindh on 10 June 2014 ratified it and promulgated it a provincial law.

This Act can actually be considered a copy of the Child Restraint Act at the national

level, and it also contains the same penalties as those set out in the 2019 federal amendment-

And in it, the marriage of both men and women under the age of 18 has been declared a crime - in the Sindh Child Marriages Act, however, this crime has been declared cognizable, non-bailable - and also irreconcilable.

In light of Section 190 of the Code under this Act, no court other than a Court of First Class Judicial Magistrate shall proceed the case.

In violation of this act, i.e. if a marriage is going to take place below the prescribed age, the court will issue a stay order on the application and whoever violates this order will be imprisoned for one year separately and shall be liable to a fine-

When the court issues a notice in this matter, all the parties will be given the right to appear before the court in person or with their lawyer - and the court has been given time to conclude this process in 90 days and issue a decision -

In the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, a person who marries an underage girl is liable to three years imprisonment and a fine, if his facilitators i.e. the parents, even if they are the girl's parents, the marriage registrar and other

facilitators will also be given the same punishments if found guilty- In the context of early marriage, poverty, illiteracy, social and cultural practices against human rights are its factors.

The implications of the prevalence of early marriage and the subsequent pregnancy of this young mother, ultimately affect the health of the adolescent girl. There is usually a lot of pressure on brides to bear children. In developing countries, early pregnancy is the leading cause of death for young girls between the ages of 15 and 18. There is a law against child marriage, but as long as the system of landlords, vaders and chiefs continues in rural areas, there will be no one to report these crimes.

And even if the report is made from somewhere, it is the Jagirdars, Vaders and Sardars who are present in the assemblies who make an example to those who challenge their writs in their respective areas but do not allow the implementation of the law.

This is the reason why till date no such notable case has come to light in which those responsible for child marriage have been really punished.

In our country too, such laws and amendments are made just to throw dust in the eyes of international organizations and developed countries and get foreign aid under this pretext and then digest them and they live only on paper, in practice don't exist-

Ecuador's Uptick in Violence Heightens Risks for Schoolchildren

Investigate Sexual Violence Against Students, Protect School Staff

The escalation of violence and organized crime activity throughout Ecuador is having a dire impact on children's rights. A temporary switch to online learning, as well as threats by criminal groups, have particularly impacted their right to learn in a safe environment.

After President Daniel Noboa declared on January 9 an "armed conflict" against gangs, Ecuador's education ministry temporarily suspended all in-person classes and switched to online learning across the country, affecting nearly 4.3 million children, according to UNICEF. In previous months, the ministry had already transitioned to online learning in cities like Guayaquil and Durán, among the worst affected by gang violence.

But as the world learned during the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning can expose children to sexual violence both online and offline.

Civil society representatives I interviewed over the last year said that online learning makes it difficult for school staff to



detect sexual violence cases among children and for children to report these incidents. The education ministry's protocols guide staff on identifying symptoms of violence in survivors, which may be difficult to do if children are not regularly in contact with school staff.

In some of Ecuador's provinces, during online classes, unknown, masked individ-

uals—in one case armed—reportedly entered online classes to threaten students and teachers.

As of last week, all schools are back in person, but the heightened organized crime activity is making it harder to address sexual violence.

Ecuador has long had high levels of impunity for people who commit sexual violence against children. Young sur-

vivors and their families are often threatened into silence by perpetrators, who then may avoid reporting or withdraw complaints. Sexual violence cases may also be underreported due to threats or extortion against school staff, who may fear repercussions or lack of support from authorities if they do report such offenses.

According to one civil society representative who worked in Guayaquil's schools, when perpetrators are linked to drug trafficking or other crimes—as when organized crime is involved—victims do not wish to report violence against them.

Whether Ecuador's children are learning online or offline during this period of instability, children have a right to learn in a safe environment. The government should ensure that survivors can safely report sexual violence, that threats and violence against staff who report cases are thoroughly investigated and prosecuted, and that survivors are able to find justice.



Women with Disabilities are Rights Holders, Not Passive Recipients of Care

Care Legislation in Mexico Should Go Further



Olga, a 45-year-old woman with cerebral palsy, seldom leaves her home to participate in gatherings with friends or other social activities. Besides going to the same school she's attended since childhood, the only other outing she makes is to a summer camp. To take control over her life, Olga needs a support system that would enable her to study for a career, develop professionally,

fully exercise her political rights, live independently, and be included in the community. These are fundamental rights everyone should have, including women with disabilities. Since 2017, policymakers at the state and federal levels in Mexico have been discussing care and support policies that are key for addressing gender inequalities affecting women like Olga, as well as those fac-

ing older women. Additionally, women's rights advocates in Mexico have pushed politicians to start taking issues around care and support seriously. Recently, Jalisco was the first Mexican state to pass a law on care. While the adoption of this legislation is an achievement, it doesn't align with the rights of people with disabilities and older people to live

independently and be included in the community. This is especially important for women with disabilities and older women because of the greater risks they face of discrimination in the absence of legal protections.

Additionally, the legislation problematically portrays people with disabilities as dependent beings in need of care, despite existing international standards on how to create a respectful and rights-based care and support system. Jalisco's congress did not adequately consult with organizations of people with disabilities to gather their input on the law's content. Consultations are key to ensuring a comprehensive support system that rights holders can access, manage, and control, that also responds to gendered needs.

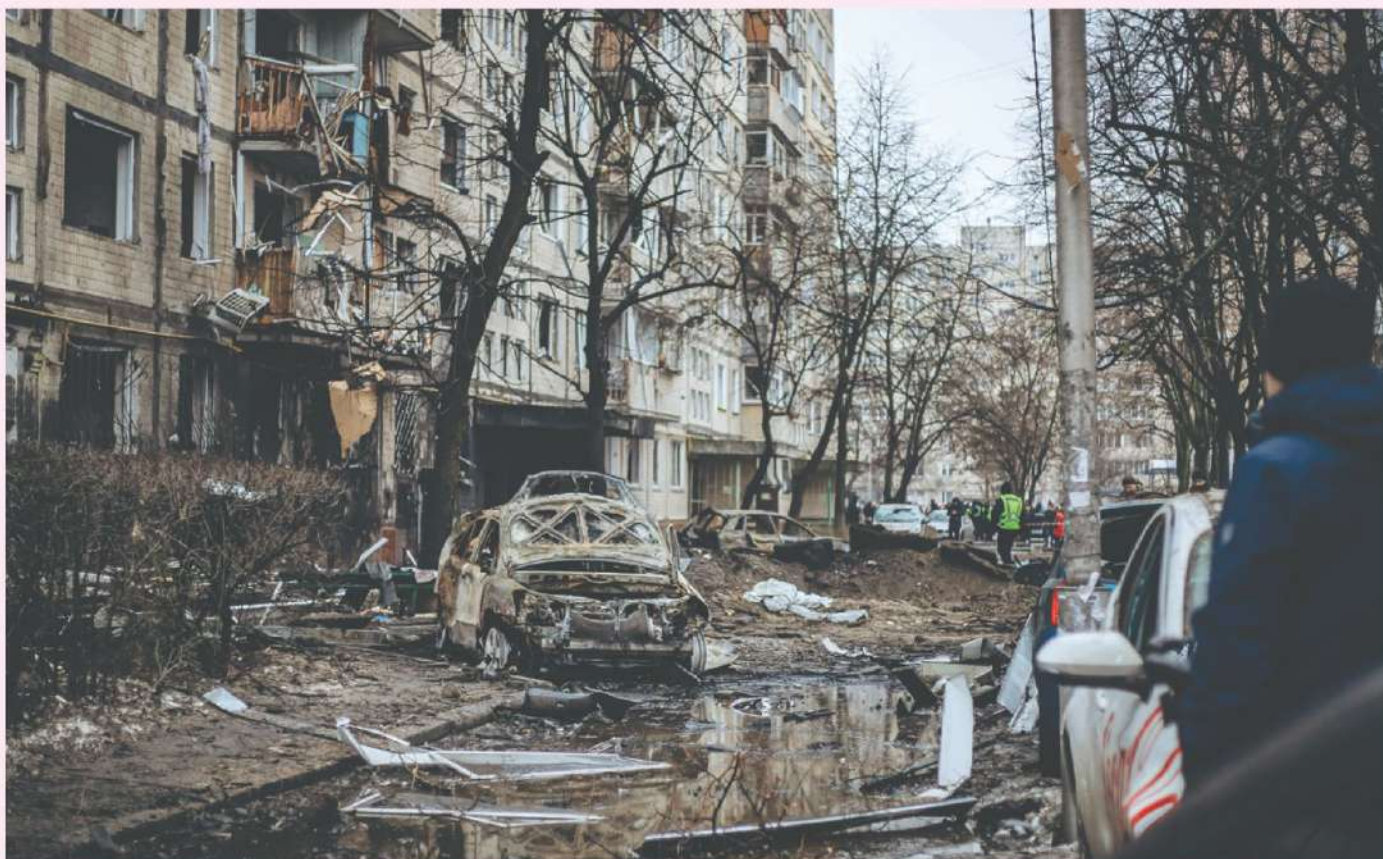
Organizations of people with disabilities know best how to address different support needs, like Olga's.

This International Women's Day, policymakers should center the rights, needs, and voices of women with disabilities

and older women – as well as consulting with and listening to them – in order to build strong public policies that uphold everyone's rights to live independently and be included in their community. That way, care policies won't go against good practices but will respond to the demands of those who will be impacted.

Confronting the Rising Civilian Toll from Explosive Weapons

Youth Workshop Explores How Countries Can Reduce and Remedy Harm



Susan Abocid

In late February, I joined youth from 14 countries for a four-day seminar on the rising civilian toll caused by bombing and shelling with explosive weapons in towns and cities during armed conflict. The event was hosted by Mines Action Canada, a co-founder—along with Human Rights Watch—of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW). The Political Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, adopted in Dublin, Ireland on November 18, 2022, provided guidance for the meeting. A

total of 85 countries have endorsed the declaration, committing to prevent and provide remedies for the devastating humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The declaration calls on countries to adopt “policies and practices to help avoid civilian harm, including by restricting or refraining as appropriate from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, when their use may be expected to cause harm to civilians or civilian objects.”

The seminar brought together young advocates, campaigners, and workers from countries affected by the use of

explosive weapons, including Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine. Rooting their interventions in their experiences, they exchanged community-sensitive best practices for local advocacy, education, and rebuilding efforts.

Participants challenged the idea that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is an inevitable part of modern-day conflicts and discussed ways to encourage states to join the declaration and promote adherence to its tenets.

The meeting also established the group’s message ahead of an international conference on

the declaration, which Norway is convening in Oslo next month. During the conference, the youth attendees will urge endorsing states to adopt an effective approach to implementing the declaration and to ensuring it meets the long-term needs of affected communities. With the increased use of explosive weapons in towns and cities, youth participants will also call upon both states that have endorsed the declaration and those that have not to condemn all use of explosive weapons in populated areas as a moral imperative and a demonstration of solidarity with affected communities.

Out of Sight, Afghans Are Going Hungry

Taliban Abuses Exacerbate Impact on Women and Girls

“The situation is getting worse every day,” Ahmad, a former journalist in Herat, Afghanistan, told me. “I don’t think anyone can afford to buy enough food anymore.”

Afghanistan has been in the throes of an economic crisis for more than two years, after donors cut foreign funding in response to the Taliban takeover in 2021 and suspended Afghanistan’s Central Bank from the international system. The Taliban’s violations of women’s rights in areas including employment, education, and freedom of movement have exacerbated the situation, intensifying its effect on women and girls. The humanitarian response is incapable of addressing the crisis, especially because levels of humanitarian aid have decreased since 2023 as donors’ reduced aid in response to the Taliban’s actions.

According to the United Nations, in 2024, 23.7 million people – more than half of the



country’s population – will need humanitarian assistance. The statistics are startling: 69 percent of people do not have enough food; 67 percent have trouble accessing water, worsened by a prolonged drought linked to climate change; the economy has contracted by 27

percent; and only 40 percent of the population has access to electricity. On top of this, the healthcare system is on the verge of collapse.

Women are bearing the brunt of the crisis. Alia, who used to work at a beauty salon in Kabul before the Taliban

ordered their closure, told me: “After losing my job, I have no other means to afford my daily expenses. It’s obvious that women in Afghanistan are suffering the most in losing their rights and means to survive.”

In its 2024 humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan, the UN has requested \$3 billion to address the growing crisis but has received less than 3 percent of the required funds. Donors need to up their response to the appeal, but aid will not be enough on its own. Governments should support measures to normalize payments and other transactions through Afghanistan’s banking system; restore public services in the areas of water management, electricity, and agriculture; address income-related poverty; and improve climate adaptation.

They also need to work in a coordinated and unified way to ensure the Taliban are held accountable for their ongoing violations of the rights of women and girls.



Sudan: Urgent Action Needed on Hunger Crisis

Security Council Should Act on Access for Aid Deliveries

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is expected to alert the Security Council in the coming days that Sudan has entered a downward spiral of extreme conflict-induced hunger, Human Rights Watch said today. The council should immediately take action, including by adopting targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for obstructing aid access in Darfur.

"The Security Council will be formally put on notice that the conflict in Sudan risks spurring the world's largest hunger crisis," said Akshaya Kumar, crisis advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. "The Council just broke months of silence by adopting a resolution on Sudan last week, and should build on that momentum by imposing consequences on those responsible for preventing aid from getting to people who need it."

The alert will be sent to the Council as a so called "white note," drafted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in accordance with its mandate under Security Council resolution 2417 to ring the alarm about "the risk of conflict-induced famine and widespread food insecurity." OCHA's alert follows warnings by international aid experts, Sudanese civil society leaders, and Sudanese emergency responders that people across Sudan are dying of hunger. It also comes on the heels of Sudan's Armed Forces (SAF) brazenly escalating its efforts to restrict the movement of humanitarian aid.



In a 2023 presidential statement, the Security Council reiterated its "strong intention to give its full attention" to information provided by the secretary-general when it is alerted to situations involving conflict induced food insecurity. The council should honor that commitment and convene an open meeting to discuss OCHA's findings. That could pave the way for decisive action, including sanctions on individuals responsible for obstructing aid delivery, Human Rights Watch said. Since conflict broke out between Sudan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023, both warring parties have restricted aid delivery, access, and distribution. Ninety percent of people in Sudan facing emergency levels of hunger are in areas that are "largely inaccessible" to the World Food Programme.

"Communities (in Sudan) are on the brink of famine because we are prevented from reaching many of the children, women and families in need," according to UNICEF executive director, Catherine Russell.

In February, Sudan's military leader, Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, said the authorities would no longer allow aid to reach areas under RSF control. Aid organizations have repeatedly said that the SAF is obstructing their delivery of aid to RSF-controlled areas. Aid groups face a maze of bureaucratic impediments, including delays, arbitrary restrictions on movement, harassment, and outright bans on some supplies.

On March 4, Sudan's foreign affairs minister added to the restrictions, announcing that the government opposed cross-border aid delivery from Chad to areas under RSF control. On

March 6, Sudanese authorities informed the UN that they would allow limited cross-border movement exclusively through specific crossings under the control of forces allied to the military. Sudanese authorities have also blocked cross-line aid movement to RSF-controlled territory, which has put Khartoum under a de facto aid blockade since November 2023 at least, aid groups told Human Rights Watch.

The UN welcomed the Sudanese authorities' announcement identifying aid crossings. The medical charity, Doctors Without Borders, however, raised concerns that this would leave "vast areas in Darfur, Kordofan, Khartoum and Jazeera states still inaccessible."

Aid operations have also been choked by limited funding. As of the end of February, the UN's appeal was 5 percent

funded. That gap is exacerbated by widespread looting of warehouses, including a December 2023 incident in which Rapid Support Forces fighters looted stocks in a World Food Programme warehouse in Wad Madani that would have been used to feed 1.5 million hungry people and attacked an MSF compound, forcing the organization to evacuate its team. There have been widespread attacks on aid workers, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, including killings, injuries and detentions. The Security Council's latest resolution 2724 on Sudan calls "on all parties to ensure the

The Security Council's Sudan Sanctions Committee met in February, announcing that it "wishes to remind the parties that those who commit violations of international humanitarian law and other atrocities may be subject to targeted sanctions measures in accordance with paragraph 3 (c) of resolution 1591 (2005)." The World Food Programme and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization found in a recent report that food security in Sudan had significantly deteriorated even faster than anticipated, and that there is a risk of "catastrophic conditions" hitting the states of West and Central Darfur "dur-

insecurity and malnutrition, catastrophic conditions are the fifth and worst phase. The program determines that famine is occurring when over 20 percent of an area's population are facing extreme food gaps, and children's acute malnutrition and mortality exceed emergency rates.

According to new figures released by the Nutrition Cluster in Sudan, nearly 230,000 children, pregnant women, and new mothers could die in the coming months due to hunger.

In Darfur, civil society and local leaders have repeatedly sounded the alarm about hunger among displaced peo-

the site of horrific RSF attacks in June 2023.

In January, Doctors Without Borders raised the alarm on malnutrition in Zamzam camp in North Darfur, warning that "an estimated one child is dying every two hours." A camp leader from Kalma camp in Nyala (South Darfur) told Human Rights Watch that 500 to 600 children and at least 80 older people have died in the camp since the start of the conflict because of what he believed was the result of lack of food and medical supplies. "People [are] dying every day," he said. He said that the RSF has also been limiting the amount of food supplies entering the camp since it took control of the city in October.

In Khartoum, a communications blackout has forced hundreds of communal kitchens run by Sudanese emergency response rooms, a grassroots mutual aid network, to pause operations, leaving many people without food, and reports of people dying alone in their homes of hunger. "The shutdown has a significant impact on food access and distribution," a member of one of the emergency response rooms in Khartoum told Human Rights Watch in mid-February, "it is happening while we are facing growing food insecurity and risk of famine in the capital."

This is the first time Sudan has been spotlighted in this kind of an alert from the secretary-general to the Security Council. Guyana, Switzerland, the US, and other Security Council members have pledged to make combating food insecurity a priority for the UN's most powerful body. "Council members should show leadership by holding open discussions to develop a plan that averts the risk of mass starvation in Sudan and imposing targeted sanctions on the individuals responsible for obstructing aid," Kumar said. "The people of Sudan need more than words. They need food."



removal of any obstructions to the delivery of aid and to enable full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access, including cross-border and cross-line, and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law." The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has said that "the apparently deliberate denial of safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian agencies within Sudan itself constitutes a serious violation of international law, and may amount to a war crime."

ing the lean season in early 2024," roughly from April to July.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network, a US government-funded group that monitors food insecurity, said in February that the "worst-affected populations ... in Omdurman (in Khartoum state) and El Geneina (in West Darfur state)" were expected to soon see "Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) outcomes." Under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system, a globally recognized scale used to classify food

ple living in camps in areas under RSF control. Leaders shared that their communities have resorted to eating ants, tree bark, and animal feed. People currently in West Darfur include survivors of waves of attacks by the RSF and their allied militias, which Human Rights Watch has described as "having all the hallmarks of an organized campaign of atrocities against Massalit civilians." A local government official reported in early March that 22 children had died of hunger in Murnei, a town in West Darfur that was

Prosecution Seeks Crimes against Humanity Charges in Guinea Massacre Trial

Proceedings Suspended Pending Defense's Response

Earlier this month, in the landmark trial of Guinea's former president and 10 others, including former ministers, who are accused of responsibility for a massacre and rapes in a stadium, the prosecution team requested the reclassification of charges to crimes against humanity. The trial is currently suspended until March 18, 2024, to allow for the defense's response.

The trial examines one of the most brutal events in Guinea's history. On September 28, 2009, Guinean security forces opened fire on peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators who had gathered in a stadium in the country's capital, Conakry. At least 150 people died and many more were injured. Security forces raped more than 100 women.

Security forces later engaged in an organized cover-up, disposing of the bodies in mass graves.

So far, judges have heard from each of the 11 accused, more than 100 victims, and just over



a dozen witnesses, including high-level government officials, called by all parties in the trial. Judges have also considered video and audio evidence captured around the 2009 events.

It was in response to the video and audio evidence that the prosecutor's representative, El Hadj Sidiki Camara, took the floor and requested reclassifi-

cation of the charges. He has now made a formal submission to the court in writing. Though shared with the parties in the trial, this submission is not publicly available.

According to trial monitoring organized by Human Rights Watch and media reports, when making the reclassification request, the prosecutor invoked Guinean criminal procedure law, arguing that reclassification is permitted, and relied on crimes against humanity provisions incorporated in Guinea's 2016 criminal code.

The civil parties, that is, victims who have joined the case as formal parties to the proceedings, supported the prosecution's request in court.

After hearing from

the defense, the judges will decide whether the reclassification of the charges is appropriate. If they allow the reclassification, it would be the first time that crimes against humanity are prosecuted in Guinea.

A Human Rights Watch investigation into the event indicated that the abuses surrounding the event rose to the level of crimes against humanity. An international commission of inquiry and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court reached similar conclusions. However, it will be up to the judges to rule on the reclassification request, addressing the specific allegations concerning the individuals on trial.

Reclassifying the charges could mean that the justice process will have greater impact, particularly in being seen to be responsive to the experience of victims, survivors, and the communities most affected by these crimes.



Brazil: Comply with Rulings on Police Violence

Inter-American Court Orders Improved Oversight, Investigations of Killings

The Brazilian government should comply with two new rulings by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that found Brazil responsible for serious human rights violations by the police, Human Rights Watch said today.

The decisions, published on March 14, 2024, in cases involving police killings in

ago, yet the problem of unlawful use of lethal force by police continues to this day,” said César Muñoz, Brazil director at Human Rights Watch. “Brazilian authorities should take immediate steps to comply with the court’s decisions and halt police abuses, which undermine public security and take a huge toll on the commu-

reform in Curitiba. Officers used “less lethal” and lethal weapons against the crowd. Military prosecutors failed to press charges, and civilian prosecutors filed charges, but a civilian court dismissed them. The second case involved an ambush by at least 53 police officers on March 5, 2002, that killed 12 suspects on a road

the suspects and charged the 53 military police officers with homicide, but state courts rejected the charges, ruling that they acted in self defense. The Inter-American Court found serious failures in police investigations into both cases and said that Brazil should ensure independent investigations. In the Castelinho case



São Paulo and Paraná states, come as São Paulo police are in the midst of ongoing raids in low-income neighborhoods that have left at least 45 people dead in the past month and a half. Brazil has not yet fully carried out the ruling on police killings issued by the court six years ago.

“The Inter-American Court’s rulings are about cases that happened more than 20 years

nities suffering the violence, and on the police force itself.” The Paraná case focuses on the May 2, 2000, military police killing of Antonio Tavares Pereira, a member of the Landless Rural Workers’ Movement, and injuries to at least 69 other members. Police had blocked a road near Campo Largo to prevent about 1,500 rural workers from joining a march for agrarian

near Sorocaba, a municipality in São Paulo state. Two police informers had allegedly convinced the men to rob a plane carrying cash, which in fact did not exist, and the men were on their way to the airport. Military police fired hundreds of rounds during the operation, known as “Castelinho.” One officer was slightly injured. Prosecutors said that the objective of the operation was to kill

the Court found that “the police and judicial authorities acted with such a degree of negligence in the preservation and collection of evidence that it leads the Court to the conclusion that they sought to prevent the investigation of the facts and secure absolute impunity for the extrajudicial execution of 12 people in a police operation.”

In the Tavares Pereira case, the

Court ordered Brazil to ensure that military jurisdiction is not applied to crimes committed against civilians by police. In the Castelinho case, the Court ordered Brazil to ensure that prosecutors in São Paulo have adequate resources to investigate killings by military and civil police; to provide prosecutors and police internal affairs' offices with body camera footage and geolocation of officers; and to temporarily remove officers involved in

ombudsperson and other civil society organizations during visits to the affected neighborhoods. Human Rights Watch found strong evidence of unlawful use of force in some cases, and received credible reports of intimidation, threats, tampering with evidence, and police obstruction of investigations.

Brazilian police killed 6,381 people in 2023, the vast majority of them Black. While some killings are in self defense,

ures required," and that they lacked "diligence and independence."

The court in 2017 ordered the Brazilian government, among other measures, to publish an official annual report with data on killings by police and the investigations conducted into each incident. It also ordered Brazil's government to ensure that police killings, torture, and other police abuses are investigated by "an independent body, distinct from the

Silva published nationwide data about killings by police in 2023, but it doesn't include information about investigations. Civil police continue to investigate killings by police, and forensic experts are either part of the states' public security secretariat or part of the civil police itself, which does not guarantee independence.

Brazil has an obligation to comply with Inter-American Court of Human Rights rulings. While state governors

oversee the state police, the federal government has the authority to coordinate states' efforts and develop nationwide public policies. The Lula administration should promote reforms to ensure that forensic experts are fully independent and work with the Attorney General's Office to publish complete data on killings by police and investigations into those cases.

A resolution that would ensure that prosecutors lead investigations into all killings by security forces, instead of letting police investigate themselves, is under discussion at the National Council of Attorney

General's Offices. The Council should approve it, Human Rights Watch said.

State governors should also take immediate steps to halt police abuse, including by requiring police to use body cameras and abide by protocols, and enacting guidelines to prevent retaliation operations after the killing of a police officer.

"The São Paulo state government has shown callous disregard for the lives of people killed during police operations," Muñoz said. "The governor should respond to the Inter-American Court decision by designing a new public security policy that prevents crime and protects the health and lives of residents and police officers."



killings from street duty.

The rulings come as police continue deadly raids in Baixada Santista, a metropolitan area on the coast of São Paulo state. In 2023, 28 people were killed there during a 40-day police operation after the killing of a police officer. Human Rights Watch found important failures in the initial investigation of the killings by police.

After the killing of another officer on February 2, 2024, police carried out new raids in low-income neighborhoods in the area, killing at least 45 people so far in ongoing operations.

Human Rights Watch heard statements by family members and witnesses to the recent killings, some of them in the presence of the police

many result from illegal use of force. Human Rights Watch has documented scores of cases in which police failed to conduct adequate investigations, including by not visiting the crime scene; and forensic analysis did not comply with international standards. The poor quality of investigations is a longstanding problem.

In 2017, the Inter-American Court found that Brazil had failed to ensure independent and impartial investigations into the killing of twenty-six people in the Nova Brasília neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro during two civil police operations, in 1994 and 1995. The court found that the investigation by civil police was beset by "omissions and negligence," that investigators failed to take "minimum meas-

public force involved in the incident," with the support of forensic experts "unrelated" to the law enforcement agency that allegedly committed the abuse.

In a 2021 decision assessing Brazil's compliance with the judgment, the Inter-American Court said that both the Brazilian government and victims' representatives agreed that the prosecutor's office was the independent body that should investigate police killings and other abuses in Brazil.

The measures ordered by the Court in the Nova Brasília case would substantially improve investigation of killings by police, yet to this day, Brazil has not fully complied with them. The administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da

India Activates Discriminatory Citizenship Law

Fast-Track Legislation for Refugees Violates Rights of Muslims

This week, India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government began implementing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which parliament had enacted in 2019. The law fast-tracks citizenship requests from non-Muslims fleeing religious persecution from India's Muslim-majority neighbors – Pakistan, Afghanistan, and

thousands of people across India protested the law, fearing it could be used to disenfranchise Indian Muslims and strip them of their citizenship rights. They had reason to be alarmed: in Assam state, citizenship screening ultimately rendered stateless over a million people.

Indian authorities on Tuesday

sonnel in Delhi and Assam. Previously, police used excessive force to crush protests against the law, and communal clashes killed 53 people in New Delhi, most of them Muslim. The Supreme Court has yet to hear petitions challenging the amendments for religious bias and for violating fundamental rights.

ple fleeing persecution. Those persecuted often are members of minority religious communities or ethnic groups, and India is doing right to welcome them. But members of the majority can also face persecution, such as Afghans at risk fleeing the Taliban.

India should demonstrate that



Bangladesh – but excludes Muslim refugees from those countries.

Before the government enacted the law, Home Minister Amit Shah explained the BJP government's broader plans for a proposed nationwide citizenship verification process, called the National Register of Citizens, that would identify irregular immigrants.

When the CAA was passed,

published a press release of questions and answers outlining the "positive narrative" of the law, but it was taken down hours later. The statement unconvincingly asserted that "Indian Muslims need not worry as CAA has not made any provision to impact their citizenship."

Fearing further demonstrations, the authorities deployed a large number of security per-

The United Nations high commissioner for human rights expressed concern over the law, calling it a "breach of India's international human rights obligations." Several leaders from Indian opposition parties criticized the government for enforcing a law that fosters religious discrimination.

Over the years, India has provided protection for many peo-

ple fleeing persecution. Those persecuted often are members of minority religious communities or ethnic groups, and India is doing right to welcome them. But members of the majority can also face persecution, such as Afghans at risk fleeing the Taliban. India should demonstrate that

EU Deal with Egypt Rewards Authoritarianism, Betrays “EU Values”

Migration Control Obsession Ignores Abuses, Entrenches Oppression

The European Union is about to reward Egypt's autocratic leader, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, for preventing migrants' departures towards Europe.

Visiting Cairo on March 17, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, along with the Prime Ministers of Italy, Greece, and Belgium,

Human Rights Watch has previously documented arbitrary arrests and mistreatment of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees by Egyptian authorities, as well as deportations to Eritrea constituting refoulement. Recent reports of deportations of Sudanese should be investigated.

personal risk.

Egypt is the epitome of this. Since taking power in a 2013 coup, and becoming president of Egypt in 2014, Sisi's governments have ruled Egypt with an iron fist. They have been responsible for massacring protesters and jailing and torturing thousands of per-

migrants.

At the same time, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Arab Emirates have provided billions for Egypt's depleted reserves. The IMF funds are linked to economic reforms supported by the EU, although some of the reforms are detri-



will officially upgrade the EU-Egypt relations to a “comprehensive and strategic partnership”, paving the way for a package of EU aid, grants, loans and investments in the country estimated at between four and eight billion Euros.

Key in this partnership will be the EU's support for Egypt's border control. While details are under negotiation, the blueprint is the same as the flawed EU deals with Tunisia and Mauritania: stop migrants, ignore abuses.

Human Rights Watch has long criticized the EU's cash-for-migration-control approach, crystalized under von der Leyen, which exposes the EU to complicity in abuses, contradicts the EU's founding values, erodes its credibility as a principled global player, and emboldens the far right's demagogic narrative across Europe. It strengthens authoritarian rulers while betraying human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, and activists whose work involves great

ceived critics and opponents – often holding them in protracted pre-trial detention or sentencing them in grossly unfair trials. Independent media and civil society have been stifled and the judiciary is an obedient arm of government repression. The ruling military has expanded its powers over civilian life.

Now this abysmal repression is being rewarded with fresh support from the EU, including funds that will likely directly support the repression of

mental to the Egyptians' economic rights, amid increasing poverty.

Without pushing for genuine human rights reforms or reining in Egyptian government abuses, the EU's support is unlikely to stop the next economic or political crisis from erupting in Egypt. Ordinary Egyptians, businesspeople, migrants, and refugees will continue paying the price for this approach, while their oppressors thrive on impunity and renewed support.

Mali Deepens Crackdown on Civil Society

Reinstate Dissolved Groups; Respect Freedoms of Association, Assembly, Expression



Mali's minister of territorial administration's order to dissolve a student association is just the latest in a series of government actions to crack down on freedom of association.

The minister said that the Association of Pupils and Students of Mali (L'Association des Elèves et Etudiants du Mali, AEEM) was responsible for "violence and clashes in schools and universities," and that in 2017 and 2018 the security forces had arrested some of its members who had been found with "lethal weapons, narcotics and large sums of unjustified money."

The AEEM is the

fourth organization to be dissolved in less than four months. On March 6, authorities dissolved the Coordination of Movements, Associations, and Sympathizers of Imam Mahmoud Dicko (Coordination des Mouvements, Associations et Sympathisants de l'Imam Mahmoud Dicko), which had

been calling for presidential elections as part of a transition back to civilian democratic rule, accusing it of "destabilization and threat to public security." On February 28, authorities dissolved the political organization Kaoural Renouveau (Kaoural Renouveau), citing "defamatory and subversive remarks"



against the military junta. And on December 20, authorities dissolved the Observatory for Elections and Good Governance (Observatoire pour les élections et la bonne gouvernance), a civil society group that monitored the fairness of elections, accusing its chairman of "statements likely to disturb public order."

Since the military coup in 2021, Mali's junta has increasingly cracked down on peaceful dissent, political opposition, and the media, shrinking the country's civic space. On March 4, authorities forcibly disappeared gendarmerie Col. Alpha Yaya Sangaré, who recently published a book about abuses by the Malian armed forces.

Mali's National Human Rights Commission recently issued a statement expressing concerns about "serious threats to the exercise of certain civic and political rights, especially freedom of association," and said it was "outraged by the systemic trend of dissolution and/or suspension of political parties and/or associations." The United Nations Human Rights Office spokesperson, Seif Magango, echoed those concerns this week.

As Mali passes three years with an unelected government, a free and safe civic and political space where people can organize, express their views, and demonstrate is more crucial than ever. The authorities should immediately reinstate the dissolved organizations and commit to upholding fundamental rights and freedoms.

Jordan: Ensure Accountability, Compensation for Syria Strikes

Cross-Border Counter-Smuggling Operations Kill Syrians

Jordan should ensure accountability for airstrikes in south-east Syria that killed 10 people on January 18 and compensate the victims and their families, Human Rights Watch said today. The strikes, which killed women and children, appear to amount to extrajudicial executions.

The airstrikes were part of an intensified campaign by the Jordanian Armed Forces against drug and weapons traffickers following recent clashes on its border with armed groups reportedly carrying narcotics, arms, and explosives that it suspects are tied to pro-Iranian militias. On January 23, the Syrian government responded, saying there was no justification for Jordan's attacks. The Jordanian Foreign Ministry retorted, neither denying nor confirming the attacks, but emphasizing the threat posed by drug and weapons smuggling, its impact on Jordan's national security, and the lack of effective action by the Syrian government to combat such operations in its territory. Human Rights Watch wrote to Jordan's Foreign Minister on January 31 detailing its findings, but received no response as of the time of publication.

"Cross-border airstrikes that kill civilians demand scrutiny regardless of the threat posed by drug smuggling from southern Syria," said Adam Coogle, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Jordan should halt military strikes against non-military targets and compensate victims of previous attacks and their fam-



ilies."

Destruction to the Talab family house located in the eastern part of Orman town. Click to expand Image

Destruction to the Talab family house located in the eastern part of Orman town. © Private. On January 18, at around 1 a.m., airstrikes on the town of Orman in the southern governorate of Sweida struck a house in the eastern part of the town, destroying the house and killing its owner, Omar Talab; his mother, Amal Zein Eldin; and his aunt, Etihad Talab. 500 meters west, two munitions struck two of four connected houses in the center of the town, causing significant damage and killing the owner of one of the houses, Turki al-Halabi; his wife, Fatin Abu Shahin; and their two young daughters, 3-year-old Farah

and 5-year-old Dima. It also killed their relatives Nazih al-Halabi, who owned another one of the houses, his wife Iqbal, and a relative, Roza al-Halabi. Three of the four connected houses belong to the al-Halabi family.

Human Rights Watch interviewed two relatives of the al-Halabi family who live nearby, and an activist and researcher at the local Suwayda24 news website. Researchers reviewed and confirmed photos, videos, and satellite imagery showing extensive damage to both sites, as well as photos of remnants collected from the site of the four connected houses that housed members of the al-Halabi family.

These photos, alongside evidence of a large crater, allowed for a positive identification of one of the weapons used: a

500lb-class JDAM satellite guided bomb. Jordan acquired 198 JDAM kits from the United States in February 2017.

Destruction to a cluster of four houses in Orman town. A large crater is visible on the south part of the cluster where a house stood and was completely destroyed. Click to expand Image

Destruction to a cluster of four houses in Orman town. A large crater is visible on the south part of the cluster where a house stood and was completely destroyed. © Private.

"At 1 a.m., I was at home in Orman," said one relative. "I was with my wife and newborn girl. We heard warplanes and then a very big explosion nearby.

The relative said that he immediately went outside to see