AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 2012
THE STATE OF THE WORLD’S HUMAN RIGHTS
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United against injustice, we work together for human rights.
Cells in Liberia’s Monrovia Central Prison intended for two prisoners are often crowded with up to eight inmates. Several people sleep on the floor, while others are on narrow hammocks made from empty rice bags tied to the cell bars and windows.
LEADING FROM THE STREETS/9
By Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International

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People light flares and celebrate in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, after hearing the news that President Hosni Mubarak had resigned, 11 February 2011.
Salil Shetty, Amnesty International Secretary General (centre), and Anmatyerr elders discuss the lack of basic services to remote Aboriginal communities. The Northern Territory, Australia, October 2011.
Change, courage and conflict all characterized 2011 – a year in which people rose up in protest against governments and other powerful actors in numbers not seen for decades. They protested against the abuse of power, lack of accountability, growing inequality, deepening poverty and the absence of leadership at every level of government. The contrast between the courage of protesters demanding rights and the failure of leadership to match that courage with concrete actions to build stronger societies based on respect for human rights was painfully apparent.

At first it appeared that protest and unrest would be restricted to countries in which discontent and repression were predictable. But as the year progressed, it was clear that the failure of governments to ensure justice, security and human dignity was igniting protest across the world. From New York and Moscow to London and Athens, from Dakar and Kampala to La Paz and Cuernavaca, from Phnom Penh to Tokyo, people took to the streets.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the initial spark was one young man’s outrage and despair in Tunisia which fed by the anger of thousands of protesters engulfed the country and brought down the government of President Ben Ali. As protests spread through the region, Western governments were caught off guard. They knew that the protesters’ outrage at repression and lack of economic opportunities was well-founded,
but they did not want to lose their “special relationship” with repressive governments which they saw as insurance against instability in a strategic region with significant oil and gas reserves.

Governments’ responses to peaceful protests in the region have been brutal and often deadly. The number of people killed, injured or imprisoned for exercising their rights steadily grew. Tens of thousands have been displaced and some made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea in search of refuge. The spectre of significant numbers of refugees from North Africa led to even more xenophobic rhetoric from some of Europe’s politicians.

In Egypt, it has been more than a year since former President Hosni Mubarak stepped down and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed control in what it pledged was a transitional role. Many believe SCAF are instigating or failing to prevent violence in order to legitimize the argument that only a state run by the military is strong enough to ensure security.

But perhaps what is most disturbing in Egypt is that more than 12,000 civilians have been prosecuted by the military or been brought before the military judiciary – more than during Mubarak’s 30-year rule. The lifting of the emergency law, a major tool of abuse, was a key demand of protesters. However, the interim government, like the Mubarak government, claim they need its special powers to ensure security.

Another practice carried over from the Mubarak government is the forced eviction of people living in informal settlements. The vast majority of deaths during the 25 January Revolution were among marginalized communities including those who live in informal settlements or slums. Egyptians have lived for decades with the government’s version of security – they deserve better.

Women in particular have fared badly under military rule. In March 2011, a group of young women who had been protesting in Tahrir Square were arrested by the security forces. They were then subjected to forced virginity tests and threatened by the military. In December, an Egyptian administrative court ruled the practice illegal and ordered an end to detainees being subjected to forced virginity tests. This was a positive step, but the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality has a long way to go even though women are playing a central role in the protests. When Amnesty International asked the various political parties in Egypt to commit to protect basic human rights principles such as freedom of expression and assembly, abolition of the death penalty, religious freedom, non-discrimination and gender equality – the two parties that won a majority in the parliamentary elections fell short. The Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, which won 235 seats (47 per cent), failed to respond to Amnesty International’s request. The Salafist Al-Nur party, which came second with 121 seats (24 per cent), declined to promote women’s rights or the abolition of the death penalty.

In Libya, Colonel Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi responded to street protests by vowing to destroy the protesters, whom he repeatedly called “rats.” He and his son, Saif al-Islam – previously the “champion of reform in Libya” – declared open season on anyone they deemed unfaithful to the regime. The UN Security Council’s unprecedented referral of Libya to the International Criminal Court sent a strong signal about the importance of
accountability. Nonetheless, the country spiralled into armed conflict. By the time
al-Gaddafi was killed in custody in October, his forces had abducted and tortured
thousands of captured opposition fighters and other detainees. Hundreds of thousands
of people had fled the conflict, resulting in mass displacement. Libya remains unstable:
the National Transitional Council is not in effective control of the country and torture,
extrajudicial executions, other forms of reprisals and forcible displacement continue.

Iran continued the crackdown that began after the 2009 elections and demonstrated
its willingness to arrest virtually anyone identified as challenging President Mahmoud
Ahmadinejad. The government closely control the media, newspapers are banned
and websites and foreign satellite television channels blocked. Protests against government
policies are violently dispersed and government critics are arbitrarily arrested and detained
yet people continue to defend their right to freedom of expression.

The world has witnessed this pattern of protest and deadly response in country after
country. In Bahrain, the government repressed demonstrations backed by the military
might of Saudi Arabia. In June, Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State, reiterated US
support for the country, calling Bahrain an “important partner” despite overwhelming
evidence of the government’s use of deadly force against peaceful protesters and
the imprisonment and torture of opposition leaders. Her muted criticism reflected the
US government’s desire to ensure that Bahrain continues to provide a home port for
the 5th Fleet, even if it means ignoring egregious human rights violations.

In Yemen, President Ali Abdullah Saleh also refused to relinquish power even
after being seriously wounded in a bomb attack. He repeatedly backtracked after
entering agreements for the transfer of power despite countrywide protests demanding
his removal. Finally, in November 2011, he ceded power in exchange for immunity
from prosecution for the crimes committed during his rule and the uprising against
it. Ali Abdullah Saleh left power in the hands of Vice-President Abd Rabbu Mansour
Hadi, who was installed as the new President during uncontested elections in
February 2012.

In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad stubbornly clung to power in the face of
widespread popular uprisings against his repressive rule. Thousands of civilians have
been killed or injured and many more displaced. The Syrian military’s use of tanks to shell
the city of Homs demonstrated a complete disregard for the lives of local residents.
Members of the Syrian army who have defected and fled the country report being ordered
to kill people who were engaged in peaceful protests or in some cases, just walking down
the street. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and
Armed Conflict reported in February 2012 that hundreds of children have been killed
during the uprising and children as young as 10 years old have been arrested, detained
and tortured.

The international community has a crucial role to play in establishing justice and
security for people of the region. Yet, to date, international action has been largely
inadequate.
POWER, RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The international community has struggled to respond effectively. Fear, opportunity, hypocrisy and good intentions all featured in the debate.

In 2011, the Arab League was thrust into the limelight as it sought to resolve issues in several countries in the region. Their support for the UN Security Council resolution on Libya was crucial in ensuring that none of the five permanent members exercised their veto. But, undoubtedly at odds with some of its members’ concern that the protests would spread to their countries, the Arab League failed to bring an end to repression and brutality.

As the situation in Syria deteriorated, the Arab League arranged for a monitoring mission to travel to the country. But the legitimacy of the mission was immediately called into question when the Arab League named General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, former head of Sudan’s military intelligence, to head the mission. Under al-Dabi’s watch, the military intelligence was responsible for the arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, and torture of numerous people in Sudan. The mission suspended its activities in late January 2012 because the violence made it impossible for the monitors to fulfil their role. A later attempt to introduce peacekeepers also failed. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was appointed as the joint UN-Arab League envoy on the Syrian crisis in late February.

When the Arab League called on the UN Security Council to fulfil its role of maintaining international peace and security, Russia and China, citing the principle of state sovereignty, vetoed a resolution that called for an end to the violence and for President al-Assad to step down. Russia also justified its veto by criticizing the NATO intervention in Libya for overstepping its mandate to protect civilians.

There is nothing new about veto power being used to subvert international peace and security. Russia (and earlier the USSR) and the USA have cast more than 200 vetoes between them - many with obvious political ramifications. Failure of the UN Security Council to act effectively on Syria, following hard on the heels of its failure to intervene in the case of Sri Lanka, raises serious questions about whether it has the political will to safeguard international peace and security. It also serves to remind those who seek the UN’s protection that the international system of governance is utterly devoid of accountability. It seems that the permanent members of the UN Security Council defend state sovereignty when it shields their own behaviour from scrutiny, or helps maintain their special (and profitable) relationships with repressive governments.

Russia’s veto of the UN Security Council resolution was followed by reports of continuing arms sales by Russia’s state arms trader, Rosoboronexport, to the Syrian government, including a deal to sell combat jets. A former Syrian Minister of Defence auditor who defected in January 2012 reported that the sale of Russian arms to Syria had increased sharply since the uprising began.

It is perhaps not surprising that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are also the world’s largest conventional arms trading countries. Together they accounted for at least 70 per cent of all major weapon exports in 2010: the USA (30 per cent), Russia (23 per cent), France (8 per cent), the United Kingdom (4 per cent) and China (3 per cent). Throughout the world, the irresponsible flow of arms from these five...
countries has led to countless civilian deaths as well as other serious violations of human rights and the laws of war.

Amnesty International documented how Western European governments, the USA and Russia authorized the supply of munitions, military hardware and police weapons to Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen in the years of brutal repression leading up to the popular uprisings. These exports could have been prevented if those supplier states had lived up to their declared policy of avoiding arms exports that could contribute to serious human rights violations.

The question remains, can the very countries that are able to veto any Security Council resolution be trusted to pursue international peace and security when they also are the largest profiteers from the global arms trade? As long as their veto power is absolute and as long as there is no strong Arms Trade Treaty that could prevent them from selling arms to governments that violate human rights, their role as the guardians of peace and security seems doomed to failure.

**FAILED LEADERSHIP GOES GLOBAL**

The failure of leadership that sparked and fuelled the popular protests in the Middle East and North Africa is not restricted to the UN Security Council or one region.

Anti-government protests filtered down from northern Africa into other parts of the continent. In Uganda, despite a government ban on all public protest in February 2011, people took to the streets in cities around the country to protest against the rising cost of fuel and other essential commodities. The police responded with force. Similarly, in Zimbabwe and Swaziland authorities attempted to quash protest by using excessive force. Showing the lengths some governments are prepared to go to in order to hold on to power, live ammunition has been used against protesters in countries such as Burkina Faso, Malawi and Senegal.

In Latin America too, people raised their voices. In Bolivia, social tensions are on the increase amid recurring protests over economic issues and Indigenous rights. When hundreds of people took part in a 360-mile protest march from Trinidad, Beni Department, to La Paz in mid-2011, President Evo Morales was forced to cancel plans to build a road through the Isiboro-Sécuré Indigenous Territory and National Park. The plans were in breach of constitutional guarantees on prior consultation and environmental preservation laws. Scores of people were injured during the protests when security forces used tear gas and truncheons to break up a makeshift camp en route. In Mexico, protesters repeatedly took to the streets to demand an end to violence, impunity and the militarization of the war on drugs, amid mounting civilian casualties.

In Russia, protest has been fuelled by frustrations over corruption, cronyism and sham democratic processes that are denying people the opportunity to use their votes and push through change. Opposition voices in the political arena have been systematically undermined and denied access to mainstream media ensuring that Vladimir Putin faced no real opposition in the presidential elections. Adding insult to injury, Putin referred to protesters as “Banderlog” after the lawless monkeys in Rudyard
Kipling’s novel Jungle Book, and likening their protest symbol, a white ribbon, to a condom. However, the protests herald a new era in Russia and mark a fresh set of challenges for Putin and those around him. They will have to find ways of addressing these demands now that political reform and respect for human rights have been put firmly on the agenda.

The Chinese authorities demonstrated their fear of the type of public uprisings seen in Tunisia by quickly moving to forestall protests. In February, Chinese security forces took to the streets in large numbers intent on preventing any small group from growing into a crowd in Shanghai. Despite China’s tight controls on digital communications and the flow of information, official sources reported thousands of demonstrations throughout the country. Forced evictions in both rural and urban settings were a major focus for protesters in China. In Tibet, where controls are even tighter, more than a dozen monks protested by setting themselves on fire and security forces shot and killed several protesters in January 2012.

Authorities in Myanmar, too, showed their concern about the possibility of widespread public unrest as they moved to re-cast themselves as new and reform-oriented. The government permitted Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy to register for bi-elections. Some exiles returned home. By mid-January 2012, 600 political prisoners had been released, many of them resuming their opposition activities. However, hundreds remain behind bars, although exact numbers are difficult to ascertain. The government’s stated commitment to permitting peaceful political opposition is encouraging, but much remains to be seen.

DEMOCRACY AND DISEMPOWERMENT

When protests flared in the Middle East and North Africa and other countries where freedom of expression and freedom of assembly were typically repressed, most democratic governments appeared confident that the civil unrest would remain “over there”.

In fact, protests occurred around the world and served to highlight the limitations of democratic governments in promoting and fulfilling human rights.

The clear lines that politicians draw to try to distinguish good governments from bad governments have always been oversimplified. The uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa exposed the self-serving and hypocritical foreign policies of states’ that claim to respect human rights. But in these same countries, domestic policies that led to the continuing economic crisis and a high tolerance for ever-growing inequalities exposed their failure to promote human rights at home as well. Xenophobia has swept across Europe and the USA as migrants are scapegoated. Roma, who have long suffered persecution and marginalization in Europe, and other victims of urban regeneration face forced evictions and violence.

The US government’s response to the economic crisis was to bail out financial institutions that were “too big to fail”. But they did so without imposing any conditions on how the bailout would work. People who were unemployed, unable to secure health insurance and facing foreclosure and possibly homelessness felt betrayed. As Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz wrote, “The banks got their bailout. Some of the money went to
bonuses. Little of it went to lending. In the end, bank managers looked out for themselves and did what they are accustomed to doing.”

What the economic crisis revealed was that the social contract between the government and the governed was broken. Governments were at best indifferent to the concerns of the people and at worst only interested in protecting those in power. Statistics demonstrating increasing inequalities of incomes and assets were evidence of governments’ failure to fulfil their obligation to ensure the progressive realization of economic and social rights.

As the economic crisis in many European countries deepened, people took to the streets in anti-austerity demonstrations. In Greece, video footage, pictures, press reports and witness testimonies pointed to the repeated use of excessive force by police in demonstrations in Athens in June, including the extensive use of chemicals, against largely peaceful protesters. In Spain, police used excessive force to stop demonstrations in which people were demanding political, economic and social policy changes.

The ongoing protests throughout Europe and North America showed that people had lost their faith in governments that time and again disregard accountability, justice and the promotion of equality.

BRAVING THE BACKLASH
While protesters in Europe and North America faced violations of their freedom of assembly and, in some cases, illegitimate use of force by the police using water cannons and tear gas, in other parts of the world the stakes were even higher. In Tunisia and Egypt, in Yemen and Syria, protesters faced the risk of death, enforced disappearance and torture to demand freedom. In Homs, protesters braved tanks, snipers, shelling, arrest and torture.

Modern technology imposed some restraints on police who were repeatedly reminded that people can use mobile phones to record incidents of police brutality and upload them to social networking sites in an instant. As it was, the police did their best to restrict media scrutiny, intimidate protesters, use tear gas, pepper spray and batons. In a particularly innovative move in the USA, the authorities dusted off an 18th century law against wearing face masks in New York in order to crack down on largely peaceful protesters.

Whether in Tahrir Square, Zucotti Park or Manezhnaya Square, a common strand linking these demonstrations was how quick governments were to prevent peaceful protest and restrict the right to freedom of expression and association.

CORPORATE POWER RISING
Few scenarios illustrate lack of leadership more than governments’ failure to regulate large business, particularly multinational corporations that often profit at the expense of local communities. From Shell in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, to Vedanta Resources in Orissa, India, governments are failing to ensure that corporate actors, at a minimum, respect human rights. In many countries, hundreds of thousands of people face forced evictions as mining companies move in to claim natural resources.

Digital and communications companies are coming under greater scrutiny as they face governments’ demands to comply with patently illegal laws that violate human rights
including the rights to freedom of expression, information and privacy. There is evidence that businesses ostensibly dedicated (and benefiting) from expression and sharing of opinion, including Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter, Vodaphone and Yahoo are collaborating in some of these violations.

Threats to freedom of expression on the internet being highlighted in the context of human rights revolutions is not new. Amnesty International has long documented the failures of governments, such as those of China, Cuba and Iran to respect freedom of expression and related rights on the internet. Recently introduced laws in the US Congress and in the European Union also threaten internet freedom.

The failure of governments to demand any level of accountability of these corporations and institutions highlights yet again how governments work to support those in power rather than to empower those who are disempowered.

LOOKING FOR LEADERSHIP

What emerged during a year of unrest, transition and conflict was the singular failure of leadership at the national and international level. Officials of repressive governments who dismiss the concept of the universality of human rights and argue that human rights are western values being imposed on them have had their arguments laid bare. Other governments which bought the line that people in some countries are “not ready for democracy and human rights” had their beliefs equally exposed.

So, how do governments reclaim their role as legitimate leaders?

First, the hypocrisy must end. No state can legitimately claim that the people it governs are not ready for human rights and a participatory system of government. And those states that claim to defend human rights must stop shoring up dictatorial leaders because they are allies. The cry for freedom, justice and dignity being heard around the world must be honoured. The first step in doing so is for all states to respect freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest.

Second, states must take their responsibilities as international actors seriously – particularly those charged with guaranteeing international peace and security. One example of such a commitment would be to adopt a strong Arms Trade Treaty.

In July 2012, UN member states meet to agree a final text for the Treaty. A strong Treaty would prevent the international transfer of all types of conventional arms, including small arms, light weapons, ammunition and key components, to countries in which there is a significant risk that these will be used to commit serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law. To achieve this, the Treaty would require governments to conduct rigorous assessments of the risk to human rights before issuing arms export licences. This would demonstrate that governments value human rights and international peace and security over political expediency and the profits of the arms trade. A strong Arms Trade Treaty is only so close to becoming a reality because activists, human rights defenders and individuals at the grassroots, national, regional and international level who recognize the incredible toll taken by the irresponsible trade in arms have demanded that governments address this human rights problem.
In addition, greater oversight, especially of financial institutions, needs to be put in place to prevent the type of economic crises that continues to drive many around the world deeper into poverty. Weak oversight and deregulation allowed banks and mortgage companies to gamble away people’s savings and homes.

Leaders must understand the imperative to build and maintain a system that protects the powerless and restrains the powerful – a system based on the rule of law that ensures an end to impunity and adherence to international standards of due process, fair trial and independence of the judiciary, a system where leaders remember they are here to serve the best interests of their citizens. Creating an environment that provides everyone with genuine access to participation in political life, where there is strong institutional support for the engagement of civil society, is a clear way to make this vision take root.

The Amnesty International movement is built on the understanding that freedom of expression and the ability to challenge governments and demand that they respect, protect and fulfil human rights is essential in order to build a world in which all people live free and equal in dignity and rights. Protesters have thrown down the gauntlet demanding that governments show leadership by promoting human rights, justice, equality and dignity. The world has shown that leaders who don’t meet these expectations will no longer be accepted.
Indigenous and environmental protesters on their way to La Paz, Bolivia, to protest against a government-planned highway that would cut through Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park, home to thousands. August 2011.
A man in Kurchi watches military aircraft fly overhead, Southern Kordofan, Sudan, August 2011. Following the outbreak of conflict in the region in June, the Sudanese government repeatedly carried out indiscriminate aerial bombardments, killing and wounding civilians.
“Maybe this could be the year when freedom of expression and association will be respected… Maybe this could be the year when Ethiopians will no more be imprisoned for their political convictions.”

Ethiopian journalist and former prisoner of conscience, Eskinder Nega, in a speech on press freedom on the eve of the new Ethiopian calendar year in September 2011. Days later he was arrested and charged with terrorism offences and treason.

The popular movements across North Africa resonated with people in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in countries with repressive governments. Trade unionists, students and opposition politicians were inspired to organize demonstrations. People took to the streets because of their political aspirations, the quest for more freedom, and a deep frustration with a life in poverty. They protested against their desperate social and economic situation and the rise in living costs.

Many of the underlying factors which led to the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East also exist in other parts of Africa. They include authoritarian rulers who have been in power for decades and rely on a security apparatus to clamp down on dissent. Poverty and corruption are widespread, there is a lack of basic freedoms, and large groups are often marginalized from mainstream society. The brutal suppression of demonstrations during 2011 illustrated how the region’s political leaders learned little from what happened to their peers in the north.

Poverty

Africa’s poverty rates have been falling and progress has been made in realizing the UN Millennium Development Goals over the past decade. But millions of people are still living in poverty, without access to essential services such as clean water, sanitation, health care and education.

Rapid urbanization means that many Africans live without adequate housing, often in slums, where they lack the most basic facilities and are at constant risk of forced eviction by the authorities. People who are forcibly evicted often lose their belongings when their
homes are destroyed. Many also lose their livelihood, which pushes them further into poverty. Thousands of people were affected when mass forced evictions took place in at least five informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. Hundreds of people were forcibly evicted from a settlement in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. Forced evictions also continued in N’Djamena, Chad, and in different parts of Angola.

Violence, including during anti-government demonstrations, was sometimes partially caused by high levels of unemployment and poverty. Anti-corruption initiatives were regularly squandered by a lack of political support. In Nigeria, for example, the President dismissed the Chairperson of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission six months before her tenure was due to end, without explanation.

**Political repression**

Inspired by events in North Africa, anti-government protesters took to the streets in Khartoum and other towns across Sudan, from the end of January onward. They were beaten by security forces, and dozens of activists and students were arbitrarily arrested and detained. Many were reportedly tortured in detention. In Uganda, opposition politicians called on people to imitate the Egyptian protests and take to the streets, but violence marred the demonstrations. In February, the Ugandan government banned all public protests. The police and army used excessive force against protesters, and opposition leader Kizza Besigye was harassed and arrested. In Zimbabwe, a group of about 45 activists were arrested in February, merely for discussing events in North Africa. Six of them were initially charged with treason. In April, the Swaziland authorities repressed similar protests with excessive force.

Security forces used live ammunition against anti-government protesters in Angola, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan, resulting in many casualties. The authorities usually failed to investigate the excessive use of force and nobody was held to account for the deaths caused.

Human rights defenders, journalists and political opponents in most African countries continued to be arbitrarily arrested and detained, beaten, threatened and intimidated. Some were killed by armed groups or government security forces. Investigations into the 2009 killing of human rights defender Ernest Manirumva in Burundi did not progress significantly. In June, five policemen were convicted for the 2010 killing of human rights activist Floribert Chebeya in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). However, concerns remained that some individuals allegedly involved in this crime had not been investigated.
Governments tried to control publicly available information in Burundi, the DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. They placed restrictions on reporting certain events, closed down or temporarily suspended radio stations, blocked specific websites or banned the publication of certain newspapers. Rwanda embarked on a process of reforms to enhance media freedom, but some media outlets that were closed by authorities in 2010 remained suspended. Two journalists were also sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

The national assemblies of Angola and South Africa debated legislation which could severely limit freedom of expression and access to information. On a more positive note, President Goodluck Jonathan finally signed the Freedom of Information Act into law in Nigeria.

Conflict

The political violence that erupted following Côte d’Ivoire’s November 2010 presidential elections escalated into armed conflict during the first half of 2011. Forces loyal to Alassane Ouattara were supported by French troops and the UN peacekeeping mission. They took control of the country at the end of April and arrested former President Laurent Gbagbo and dozens of his supporters. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced because of the conflict and many fled to neighbouring countries, particularly Liberia. Several thousand civilians were killed or injured in the economic capital, Abidjan, and in the western part of the country. Both parties to the conflict unlawfully killed hundreds of civilians in March and April in the western area of Duékoué and surrounding villages. People were targeted because of their ethnicity or their perceived political affiliation. The UN peacekeeping mission failed to adequately protect civilians in Duékoué. Forces on both sides also committed acts of sexual violence, including rape. In October, the International Criminal Court (ICC) authorized an investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both parties to the conflict. After an arrest warrant was issued, Laurent Gbagbo was transferred to the ICC in the Netherlands in November. To preserve its credibility, the ICC should ensure that crimes committed by forces loyal to President Ouattara are also investigated and individuals prosecuted. The ICC should also investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity committed prior to the November 2010 presidential elections, as the judiciary in Côte d’Ivoire has as yet been unable or unwilling to do so.

The South Sudanese people voted overwhelmingly in favour of independence during the January referendum on self-determination. With South Sudan’s independence date set for 9 July, tensions rose in...
the so-called transitional areas of Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. The envisaged separate referendum for Abyei did not take place as scheduled in January, and conflict erupted in May. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), supported by militia, took control of Abyei, causing tens of thousands of people from the Dinka Ngok community to flee to South Sudan. Houses in Abyei town were looted and destroyed. Here too the UN peacekeeping mission, deployed in Abyei, failed to take any meaningful action to prevent the attacks and protect the civilian population. By the end of the year, no resolution had been found for the status of Abyei.

Following disagreements over security arrangements and the outcome of the state elections, the situation in Southern Kordofan escalated into armed conflict between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) and the SAF. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced as a result of the insecurity and conflict. The SAF carried out indiscriminate aerial bombardments that resulted in numerous civilian casualties. The UN and various organizations including Amnesty International documented these indiscriminate attacks and unlawful killings. In one example, Angelo al-Sir, a farmer, described how his pregnant wife, two of their children and two other relatives were killed in an air strike on 19 June in Um Sirdeeba, a village east of Kadugli.

By September, the Southern Kordofan conflict spilled over into Blue Nile state, again causing tens of thousands of people to flee to South Sudan and Ethiopia. The Sudanese government essentially sealed off the Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states from the outside world by denying access to independent humanitarian organizations, human rights monitors and other observers. The AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council failed to take any concrete action to address the situation, including by not condemning the lack of humanitarian access or the ongoing human rights violations.

The conflict in Darfur, Sudan, also continued unabated, forcing more people to leave their homes. Those already living in camps for internally displaced people were targeted by the Sudanese authorities because they were perceived to be supporting armed opposition groups. Rape and other forms of sexual violence continued to be reported. Sudan still refused to co-operate with the ICC. The ICC Prosecutor requested an arrest warrant for the Minister of Defence, Abdelrahim Mohamed Hussein, for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur.

Continued fighting in Somalia against the Islamist armed group al-Shabab took on a regional dimension when Kenyan and Ethiopian
troops directly intervened in the conflict. Indiscriminate attacks by various parties to the conflict killed or injured thousands of civilians, mainly in Mogadishu. Hundreds of thousands of people remained displaced as a result of the conflict and insecurity. The drought in the sub-region compounded the already dire humanitarian situation, and a famine was declared in parts of Somalia. Humanitarian organizations faced immense difficulties in accessing people to provide them with emergency assistance.

No end was in sight either to the conflict in the eastern DRC. Rape and other forms of sexual violence remained endemic, and were committed both by government security forces and armed opposition groups. Other human rights abuses, such as unlawful killings, looting and abductions continued as well, primarily by armed groups. The DRC’s justice system remained unable to deal with the many human rights violations committed during the conflict. Child soldiers continued to be recruited and used in various conflicts, such as in the Central African Republic, the DRC and Somalia.

Some African governments remained reluctant to ensure accountability for crimes under international law. Senegal continued to refuse to either prosecute or extradite the former Chadian President, Hissène Habré. At the end of the year, the Burundian government discussed a revised proposal for setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the government seemed to have insufficient political will to create a Special Tribunal, as recommended by the UN in 2005.

**Justice and impunity**

Many human rights violations committed by security and law enforcement forces remained unaddressed. The authorities hardly ever initiated independent and impartial investigations in reported cases of arbitrary arrests and detention; torture or other ill-treatment; unlawful killings, including extrajudicial executions; and enforced disappearances. Only very rarely were individuals held to account for committing human rights violations. As a result, people have lost confidence in law enforcement agencies and the judiciary in many countries in the region. High costs are another obstacle to accessing the formal justice system, including for people subjected to human rights violations.

Impunity for human rights violations by law enforcement officers was pervasive in Burundi, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. For example, the commission of inquiry set up by the
Burundian authorities to investigate extrajudicial executions did not publish its findings. The Burundian authorities also failed to investigate allegations of torture committed by the National Intelligence Service in 2010. Another blatant example of institutionalized impunity was Sudan’s rejection – during the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review of Sudan in September – of recommendations to review its 2010 National Security Act and to reform the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). As a result, NISS agents continue to enjoy immunity from prosecution or disciplinary action for the human rights violations they have committed.

The number of people in pre-trial detention remained very high, as most countries’ justice systems could not guarantee a fair trial without undue delay. Many people arrested had no access to legal representation. Detention conditions remained appalling in many countries, with overcrowding, a lack of access to basic sanitation facilities, health care, water or food, and a lack of prison staff. Detention conditions often fell below minimum international standards and constituted inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment or punishment. In one particularly gruesome incident, nine men died of asphyxiation caused by overcrowding during their detention in a National Gendarmerie facility in Léré, Chad, in September.

The trend towards abolition of the death penalty continued. Benin’s parliament voted to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, thereby confirming its intention to abolish the death penalty. In Ghana, the Constitutional Review Commission recommended that the death penalty be abolished. Nigeria’s Attorney General and Minister of Justice informed an Amnesty International delegation in October that the government had introduced an official moratorium on executions. Sierra Leone’s government had made a similar announcement in September. In contrast with these positive developments, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan were among the last remaining countries in sub-Saharan Africa to still execute people – often after grossly unfair trials.

Marginalization
Refugees and migrants were particularly affected by human rights violations and abuses in many countries. Congolese nationals were again exposed to gender-based violence while being expelled from Angola. Mauritania arbitrarily arrested several thousand migrants before deporting them to neighbouring countries. Refugees and migrants were also subjected to human rights violations in Mozambique, including reported unlawful killings by law enforcement.
officials. In South Africa, refugees and migrants continued to experience violence and had their property destroyed. In December, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, recommended that host countries take steps to terminate the refugee status of most Rwandans on their territory. Refugees and human rights organizations expressed concern about the extent to which the UNHCR had adequately articulated the rationale behind this recommendation, and also that its implementation by individual states could put large numbers of people still in need of protection at risk of being forcibly returned to Rwanda.

Tens of thousands of South Sudanese people decided to leave Sudan for South Sudan because they risked losing their Sudanese citizenship rights after South Sudan’s declaration of independence. They faced numerous difficulties, including harassment before and during their journey and a dire humanitarian situation on arrival.

Violence and discrimination against women remained widespread in many countries, including as a result of cultural norms and traditions. Existing legislation institutionalizes discrimination against women in some countries. Discrimination also affected women’s ability to access health care services.

Girls and women continued to be subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence in various countries in conflict or with a large number of refugees or displaced people. These included eastern Chad, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, eastern DRC and Sudan (Darfur). Members of government security forces were often responsible, and in most cases no investigations were carried out.

**Discrimination**

Discrimination against people based on their perceived or real sexual orientation or gender identity worsened. Politicians not only failed to protect people’s right not to be discriminated against, but often used statements or actions to incite discrimination and persecution based on perceived sexual orientation.

In Cameroon, people believed to be in a same-sex relationship were persecuted. Scores were arrested and some, such as Jean-Claude Roger Mbede, were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The Cameroonian government also proposed to amend the penal code to increase prison sentences and fines for people found guilty of same-sex sexual relations. In Malawi, Mauritania and Zimbabwe, men were also arrested and prosecuted because of their perceived sexual orientation. The government in Malawi enacted legislation to criminalize sexual relationships between women, and President Bingu wa Mutharika described gay men as “worse than dogs” at a political rally. In Nigeria, the Senate passed a bill further criminalizing same-sex
relationships. In Ghana, the Western Region Minister called for all gay men and lesbians to be arrested.

Uganda’s anti-homosexuality bill was not discussed in parliament, but it was not formally withdrawn either. David Kato, a prominent human rights defender and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activist, was killed in January at his home. One man was arrested for the killing and sentenced to 30 years’ imprisonment in November. In South Africa, civil society pressure to address violence against lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people, in particular lesbian women, led to a Task Team being set up by the authorities to prevent violence based on perceived sexual orientation.

In Eritrea, people continued to be persecuted on religious grounds. Scores were arbitrarily arrested and believed to be ill-treated while in detention.

Security and human rights
Africa has become increasingly vulnerable to acts of terrorism from various Islamist armed groups. They include al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI), which operated in various countries in the Sahel; the religious sect Boko Haram, which stepped up its bombing activities in Nigeria throughout the year; and al-Shabab, which is active in Kenya and Somalia. These armed groups were responsible for numerous human rights abuses, including indiscriminate attacks, unlawful killings, abductions and torture.

In response, some governments increased their military co-operation, including in the Sahel. Neighbouring countries also intervened militarily. Nigeria set up a Special Military Task Force to counter Boko Haram in some states. Government security forces were often responsible for human rights violations during their response to violence by armed groups. In Mauritania, 14 prisoners sentenced for terrorism activities were subjected to enforced disappearances during a transfer to an unknown location. In Nigeria, security forces responded to escalating violence in some states by arbitrarily arresting and detaining hundreds of people, subjecting people to enforced disappearance and carrying out extrajudicial executions.

Time to embrace change
Improved respect for and protection of human rights will probably not develop as quickly and dramatically in sub-Saharan Africa as in North Africa. In some places the situation might even get worse. However, factors such as sustained economic growth, demands for better governance, an emerging middle class, stronger civil society and improved access to information and communication technology will
gradually contribute to a better human rights situation. The question is whether Africa’s political leadership will embrace these changes or see them as a threat to their hold on power. In 2011, most political leaders – in their reactions to protests and dissent – were part of the problem, not the solution.
"The struggle for justice doesn’t end with me. This struggle is for all the Troy Davises who came before me and all the ones who will come after me.”

Troy Davis, executed after spending 20 years on death row.

Martina Correia gazes towards the prison at the exact moment her brother, Troy Davis, was executed on 21 September in Georgia, USA, amid serious doubts about the reliability of his conviction. Two months later Martina Correia herself died, following a long illness.
On 11 August 2011, Judge Patrícia Acioli was shot 21 times outside her home in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil, by members of the Military Police. Her long track record of presiding over criminal cases implicating Brazilian police officers in human rights violations had made her a target of numerous death threats. In October, 11 police officers, including a commanding officer, were detained and charged with her killing. It was reported that, at the time of her death, Judge Acioli had been presiding over the investigation into allegations of extrajudicial executions and criminal activity by the policemen involved. Her death was a serious blow to the human rights movement in Brazil, but her tireless pursuit of justice remains an inspiration to countless others who, like Judge Acioli, refuse to let human rights violations go unchallenged.

The demand for human rights resounded throughout the region during 2011 in the national courts, the Inter-American system and on the streets. The calls for justice from individuals, human rights defenders, civil society organizations and Indigenous Peoples continued to gain strength, frequently bringing people into direct confrontation with powerful economic and political interests. At the heart of many of these conflicts were economic development policies that left many, particularly those living in poverty and marginalized communities, at increased risk of abuse and exploitation.

**The demand for justice and an end to impunity**

Many human rights cases made slow progress, obstructed by the absence of meaningful access to justice, a lack of independence in the judiciary, and a willingness among some sectors to resort to extreme measures to avoid accountability and to protect vested political, criminal and economic interests. Difficulty in pursuing
Respect for rights was often exacerbated by threats against and killings of human rights defenders, witnesses, lawyers, prosecutors and judges in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Venezuela. Journalists trying to expose abuses of power, human rights violations and corruption were also frequently targeted in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In some countries, however, despite obstacles and frequent setbacks, there were significant advances in the investigation and prosecution of past human rights violations and a number of former de facto military rulers and senior commanders were convicted and sentenced to prison terms.

In Argentina, Reynaldo Bignone, a former army general, and Luis Abelardo Patti, a politician and former police officer, were both sentenced in April to life imprisonment for murder, abduction and torture carried out in the town of Escobar during the 1970s. In October, former navy captain Alfredo Astiz and 15 others were sentenced to prison terms of between 18 years and life for their role in 86 crimes against humanity during the 1970s. Their victims had been abducted and held at a secret detention centre in a Buenos Aires naval school (the Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada, ESMA) where some died under torture while others were flung to their deaths from aeroplanes. Among those killed were French nuns Léonie Duquet and Alice Domon; human rights activists Azucena Villaflor, María Bianco and Esther Careaga, co-founders of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo; and writer and journalist Rodolfo Walsh.

In Bolivia, the Supreme Court convicted seven former high-ranking military and civilian officials in August for their part in the events known as “Black October”, which left 67 people dead and more than 400 injured during protests in El Alto, near La Paz, in 2003. This was the first time that a trial of military officials accused of human rights violations had reached a conclusion in a Bolivian civilian court. Five former military officers received prison sentences ranging from 10 to 15 years, while two former ministers were sentenced to three years’ imprisonment, later suspended.

In Brazil, President Rousseff signed into law the creation of a Truth Commission to investigate human rights violations committed between 1946 and 1988. And in Chile the number of cases of human rights violations under investigation by the courts rose to its highest level yet, after a court prosecutor submitted 726 new criminal complaints and more than 1,000 complaints filed over the years by relatives of people executed on political grounds during the military government of General Augusto Pinochet.
Former President Jean-Claude Duvalier returned to Haiti after 25 years in exile to find himself the subject of a criminal investigation on the basis of complaints of serious human rights violations brought by victims and their relatives. In Colombia, retired general Jesús Armando Arias Cabrales was sentenced in April to 35 years in prison for his role in the enforced disappearance of 11 people in November 1985 after military forces stormed the Palace of Justice where people were being held hostage by members of the M-19 guerrilla group. In September, Jorge Noguera, former head of the Colombian civilian intelligence service (the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS), was sentenced to 25 years in prison for the killing in 2004 of academic Alfredo Correa de Andreis and for his links to paramilitary groups.

Important though these cases were, they were the exception, and impunity for human rights violations remained the norm. For example, in Colombia another former DAS director, María del Pilar Hurtado, implicated in a scandal involving illegal wire-tapping and surveillance and threats targeting opponents of former President Alvaro Uribe, continued to evade justice. She had been granted asylum in Panama in 2010.

In Mexico, legal action against those responsible for grave human rights violations during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s remained stalled. However, the Supreme Court ruled that Inter-American Court judgements against Mexico, including the requirement that alleged human rights violations by military personnel be transferred to civilian jurisdiction, were binding.

In the sphere of international justice, progress was uneven. For example, in October, the Canadian government failed to arrest former US President George W. Bush when he travelled to British Columbia, despite clear evidence that he was responsible for crimes under international law, including torture. However, in December, France extradited former de facto head of state Manuel Noriega to Panama where he had been convicted in his absence of the murder of political opponents, among other crimes.

The Inter-American human rights system
The Inter-American system, and in particular the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, came under sustained attack from several states during 2011. For example, Brazil recalled its Ambassador to the OAS in reprisal for the Commission’s ruling that work on the Belo Monte dam project should be suspended until Indigenous communities affected had been adequately consulted. Worryingly, the OAS Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, openly supported Brazil’s position and publicly called...
on the Commission to review its decision in the Belo Monte case. Subsequently, the Inter-American Commission modified the precautionary measures issued in this case, no longer requiring Brazil to suspend the project pending consultation.

Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela also voiced criticisms of the Commission, accusing it of exceeding its mandate and interfering in their sovereign rights. Ecuador and Venezuela’s criticisms focused on the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression while Peru voiced serious criticism of the Commission’s decision to refer a case related to alleged extrajudicial executions committed during the rescue of 71 hostages in 1997 (the “Chavín de Huántar” operation) to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

During the second half of 2011, OAS member states continued the debate over possible reforms of the Inter-American human rights system. This debate concluded with the issuing of a report that the OAS Permanent Council was due to consider in early 2012. Although the recommendations contained in the report were described as an effort to strengthen the system, in reality some of the measures proposed could have the effect of undermining its independence and effectiveness, and have a particularly serious impact on the work of the Commission and its rapporteurs.

Public security and human rights
Governments continued to exploit legitimate concerns regarding public security and high crime rates to justify or to ignore human rights violations committed by their security forces when responding to criminal activities or armed groups.

The Mexican government closed its eyes to widespread reports of torture, enforced disappearances, unlawful killings and excessive use of force by the army and, increasingly, by navy personnel, as it pursued its campaign against the drug cartels. More than 12,000 people were killed in violence attributed to criminal organizations and some 50,000 soldiers and navy marines continued to be deployed on law enforcement duties by President Felipe Calderón. There was evidence that members of the police and security forces colluded with criminal organizations in the abduction and killing of suspected members of other criminal organizations, among other crimes. The government continued to assert that abuses were exceptional and perpetrators were held to account, but in only one case were members of the military brought to justice during 2011.

On a lesser scale, a number of other countries in the region also used military personnel to carry out law enforcement duties. These included the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras.
and Venezuela, where President Hugo Chávez ordered National Guard troops onto the streets to tackle widespread violent crime.

In the face of high levels of violent crime, law enforcement practices in Brazil continued to be characterized by discrimination, human rights abuses, corruption and military-style policing operations. While certain public security projects achieved limited success in reducing levels of violence, federal government public security reforms were undermined by severe budget cuts and a lack of political will. Socially excluded communities continued to be caught between violent criminal gangs and abusive policing that often resulted in residents being treated as criminal suspects. In Rio de Janeiro the power of the *milícias* (militias) continued to grow. These criminal gangs, made up of active and former law enforcement agents, increased their hold on many of the poorest communities of Rio de Janeiro through violence and extortion, sustained by illicit financial activity and the creation of political power bases. The attack on Judge Acioli underlined the reach and confidence of these criminal gangs.

In the Dominican Republic, serious human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions, torture and other cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment, unlawful killings and disappearances, were committed by the police implementing a so-called “hard line policy” in fighting crime. There was evidence that in a number of cases the police had adopted a shoot-to-kill policy, rather than trying to arrest suspects, many of whom were unarmed.

**Armed conflict**

The long-running internal armed conflict in Colombia continued to inflict untold misery on civilian communities across the country. The human rights consequences of the fighting were particularly acute for rural Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendent and peasant farmer communities, thousands of whom were forced to flee their homes. Guerrilla groups, as well as paramilitaries and the security forces sometimes acting in collusion, were all responsible for serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.

Some of the administration’s legislative measures, such as the Victims and Land Restitution Law, were important first steps in efforts to acknowledge the rights to reparation of some victims and to return some of the millions of hectares of land stolen during the course of the conflict. However, the Law excluded many victims and a surge in threats and killings targeting human rights defenders, especially those working on land restitution, raised doubts about the government’s ability to make good on its promise to return land to the rightful owners.
The Colombian administration’s commitment to human rights and the fight against impunity was called into question by efforts to broaden military jurisdiction, which could allow members of the security forces to evade justice for human rights violations. President Juan Manuel Santos and the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces also criticized the conviction of several senior military officers for human rights violations.

**Counter-terror and security**

At the end of 2011, nearly two years after US President Barack Obama’s missed deadline to close the Guantánamo detention facility, more than 150 men were still held there.

Hopes that the US administration would follow through on its decision, announced in 2009, to bring five detainees accused of involvement in the attacks of 11 September 2001 to trial in ordinary federal courts were dashed when the Attorney General announced in April that the five would now be tried by military commission. The administration made clear its intention to seek death sentences against these five. In another military commission case, the death penalty came a step closer in September when the charges against Saudi Arabian national ‘Abd al Rahim al-Nashiri were referred on for trial as capital offences.

Impunity continued for human rights violations committed under the previous administration as part of the CIA’s programme of secret detention. In June, the Attorney General announced that, with the exception of two cases involving deaths in custody, no further investigations into the detentions were warranted. This despite the fact that torture and enforced disappearance were an integral part of the secret programme and that victims included the detainees currently facing unfair trial by military commission who, if convicted, could be executed.

**Indigenous Peoples**

Human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples remained a serious concern despite some positive advances in the region.

In many cases, Indigenous Peoples were denied their right to meaningful consultation and free, prior and informed consent over large-scale development projects, including extractive industry projects, affecting them. Peru passed a landmark law in 2011 making it mandatory to hold consultations with Indigenous Peoples before development projects can go ahead on their ancestral lands. However, this remained the exception. Despite the fact that all states in the region had endorsed the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples, the rights it sets out were still far from being respected.

The failure to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples had a negative impact not only on livelihoods, but also resulted in communities being threatened, harassed, forcibly evicted or displaced, attacked or killed as the drive to exploit resources intensified in the areas where they live. In Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico, Indigenous Peoples were forced off their lands, often violently. Excessive use of force against those demonstrating for Indigenous Peoples’ rights and against development projects was reported in Peru and Bolivia. Spurious charges against Indigenous leaders were a concern in Ecuador and Mexico.

There were further signs that governments were not taking Indigenous Peoples’ rights seriously or showing the political will to roll back decades of entrenched discrimination. In April, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights urged Brazil to suspend the construction of the Belo Monte dam until Indigenous communities had been fully and effectively consulted – including by having access to a social and environmental impact assessment of the project in appropriate languages – and until measures had been put in place to protect the lives of communities in voluntary isolation. Brazil argued fiercely against these precautionary measures, which were subsequently weakened by the Commission.

In Bolivia, after several weeks of protests during which scores of people were injured when the security forces used tear gas and truncheons to break up a makeshift camp, the President decided to cancel the building of a road through the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park. Indigenous protesters argued that the road had been planned in breach of constitutional guarantees on prior consultation and of environmental preservation laws.

In August, a Canadian federal audit concluded that 39 per cent of water systems in First Nations communities had major deficiencies, with 73 per cent of drinking water systems and 65 per cent of waste water systems constituting medium or high risks to health.

**The rights of women and girls**

States in the region failed to put the protection of women and girls from rape, threats and killings at the forefront of their political agendas. Implementation of legislation to combat gender-based violence remained a serious concern and the lack of resources available to investigate and prosecute these crimes raised questions about official willingness to address the issue. The failure to bring to justice those responsible for these crimes further entrenched impunity for gender-
based violence in many countries and helped foster a climate where violence against women and girls was tolerated.

Violations of women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive rights remained rife, with appalling consequences for their lives and health. Chile, El Salvador and Nicaragua continued to ban abortion in all circumstances, including for girls and women pregnant as a result of rape or who experience life-threatening complications in their pregnancies. Those seeking or providing an abortion risked lengthy imprisonment.

In other countries, access to safe abortion services was granted in law, but denied in practice by protracted judicial procedures that made access to safe abortion almost impossible, especially for those who could not afford to pay for private abortion services. Access to contraception and information on sexual and reproductive issues remained a concern, particularly for the most marginalized women and girls in the region.

**Migrants: visible victims, invisible rights**

Hundreds of thousands of regular and irregular migrants in a number of countries were denied the protection of the law.

In Mexico, hundreds of bodies, some identified as kidnapped migrants, were discovered in clandestine graves. The families of Central American disappeared migrants, carried out nationwide marches to press for action to locate their relatives and highlight the fate of many migrants. Central American migrants travelling through Mexico in their tens of thousands were kidnapped, tortured, raped and killed by criminal gangs, often with the complicity of public officials.

In the case of irregular migrants, fear of reprisals or deportation meant they were rarely able to report the serious abuses they experienced.

Migrants’ rights defenders came under unprecedented attack in Mexico, especially those working at the network of shelters providing humanitarian assistance to migrants.

In the USA, along its south-western border with Mexico, regular and irregular migrants suffered discrimination and profiling by federal, state, and local law enforcement officials. They faced discrimination when attempting to access justice and protection and encountered barriers to education and health care. Such barriers included policies to single out migrants for extra scrutiny, and the threat of being reported to the immigration authorities. Proposals for new anti-immigrant laws forced some students to drop out of school for fear their parents might be arrested. Anti-immigrant legislation in Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina and Utah faced legal challenges in federal courts.
In the Dominican Republic, regular and irregular Haitian migrants were victims of human rights violations, including mass and violent illegal deportations in which Dominicans of Haitian descent continued to be denied their right to Dominican nationality. Beatings and the separation of children from their parents were reported during deportations. Several states, including the Bahamas, failed to heed the UN’s calls to stop deportations to Haiti on humanitarian grounds, given the continuing humanitarian crisis in Haiti triggered by the earthquake and cholera outbreak of 2010.

**Death penalty**

Forty-three prisoners were executed in the USA during the year, all by lethal injection. This brought to 1,277 the total number of executions carried out since the US Supreme Court lifted a moratorium on the death penalty in 1976. On a more positive note, however, in March, Illinois became the 16th abolitionist state in the USA and in November, the Governor of Oregon imposed a moratorium on executions in the state and called for a rethink on the death penalty.

Among those put to death in 2011 was Troy Davis. He was executed in Georgia in September, despite serious doubts about the reliability of his conviction. Martina Correia, his sister and a determined and fearless campaigner against the death penalty right up to her own death in December 2011, remains an inspiration to the many speaking out for human dignity and justice throughout the region and beyond: “The death penalty is an abomination. A denial of human dignity. It’s not just based on colour and race but on ability to fight the system. I try to be a voice for the voiceless. I don’t think I’m a special person, I just believe that my community doesn’t only mean the people who live on my street – it means my global community. And when someone is killed in China or Uganda or Nigeria or Georgia or Texas, it kills a little of us.”
Su Su Nway, a labour rights activist, arrives at Yangon airport, Myanmar, 16 October 2011. She was originally sentenced to 12 years and six months’ imprisonment but was released after the government granted an amnesty to around 240 political prisoners on 12 October 2011.
“It’s time, people of China! It’s time. 
China belongs to everyone. 
Of your own will
It’s time to choose what China shall be.”
Zhu Yufu, Chinese dissident

As winds of political change blew in from the Middle East and North Africa, several governments in the Asia-Pacific region responded by increasing their efforts to retain power by repressing demands for human rights and dignity. At the same time, the success of uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt inspired human rights defenders, activists, and journalists in Asia to raise their own voices, using a combination of new technologies and old-fashioned activism to challenge violations of their rights.

Zhu Yufu, the author of the poem cited above, was detained by Chinese authorities in March. The prosecutor cited this poem as key evidence in support of the charge of “inciting subversion of state power”. Zhu Yufu, who had already spent nearly nine of the last 13 years in prison for demanding greater political freedom, was just one of dozens of critics, activists, and dissidents detained and harassed by the Chinese authorities after February in what has been one of the worst political crackdowns since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. In addition to Zhu Yufu, the long list of those detained, placed under illegal house arrest or subjected to enforced disappearance included Liu Xia, wife of Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo, lawyer Gao Zhisheng and Ai Weiwei, the globally renowned artist. In several cases, Chinese authorities tortured detainees to extract “confessions” and promises to avoid using social media or speaking to journalists or others about their mistreatment.

The harshness of the crackdown was an indicator of just how worried the Chinese government was about the anonymous “Jasmine” online messages that began circulating in February, calling for Chinese citizens who were fed up with corruption, poor governance and political repression to gather peacefully and simply walk around
designated areas in selected cities. As innocuous as these calls were, the Chinese government responded by banning internet searches for the words “jasmine” and “Egypt” at various points in the year. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of demonstrations occurred throughout the country as Chinese protesters sought to protect their human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

The dynamism of Chinese citizens invoking their rights contrasted with the situation in neighbouring Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), where there were no indications of an improvement in the country’s horrific human rights situation after Kim Jong-un, in his late twenties, succeeded his father as absolute ruler of the country on 17 December. If anything, there were signs that the authorities had detained officials suspected of potentially challenging or questioning a smooth transition, and there were concerns that those detained would be sent to join the hundreds of thousands already suffering arbitrary detention, forced labour, public execution and torture and other ill-treatment in the country’s numerous political prison camps.

Repression of dissent

Few governments in the region were as brutal as the North Korean regime in repressing the voices of their own people, but violations of the right to freely express and receive opinions continued throughout the region. Several governments deliberately crushed dissenting views. In North Korea, those deviating from official ideology could end up spending the rest their lives in a bleak and remote political prison camp. Both Viet Nam and Myanmar have criminalized free expression of dissenting views, and have intelligence agencies that are dedicated to intimidating and silencing critics. Other countries also muzzled critics, although they relied on less overtly violent means. Continuing to hold itself as an exception to international standards on the protection of freedom of speech, Singapore briefly jailed 76-year-old British author Alan Shadrake on 1 June, having charged him with contempt of court after he criticized the judiciary for imposing the death penalty.

In India, which boasts a proud history of free speech and a vibrant media, the government sought to impose new restrictions on social media including instant messaging services. Internet media also remained under pressure in Malaysia, although it was slightly less fettered than the country’s heavily censored print and broadcast media.

In Thailand, the newly elected government of Yingluck Shinawatra (sister of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra) did not put a stop...
to the aggressive enforcement of the highly problematic lèse majesté law, which prohibits any criticism of the royal family. Many of those who were targeted had posted material on the internet which prosecutors had found objectionable, or, in the case of a 61-year-old grandfather, Ampon Tangnoppakul, had allegedly sent text messages deemed offensive, earning a 20-year prison sentence.

Authorities in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) increasingly invoked the National Security Law to harass those perceived as opposing the government’s policy on North Korea. At times, this resulted in absurd applications of the Law, as in the case of Park Jeonggeun, who faced detention and criminal prosecution for posting satirical snippets of North Korean propaganda.

Other critics demanding human rights and dignity in the region provoked more severe responses and, at times, paid the ultimate price for raising their voices. Pakistani journalists managed to maintain a boisterous and at times fractious media environment in the country despite a violent backlash from the government as well as from political parties and insurgent groups such as the Pakistani Taleban. At least nine journalists were killed during the year, including Saleem Shahzad, an online journalist who had openly criticized the country’s powerful military and intelligence agencies. Other journalists told Amnesty International that they had been seriously threatened by the country’s powerful and shadowy intelligence agencies, security forces, political parties or militant groups.

Journalists were not alone in being attacked for their opinions in Pakistan. Two high-profile politicians were assassinated for challenging the use of the highly problematic blasphemy laws: Salman Taseer, the outspoken Governor of Punjab, and Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities (and sole Christian cabinet member).

**Minority groups**

Pakistan, like many other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, witnessed ongoing and serious discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities. Members of minority groups were often marginalized and in many instances were the victims of direct government harassment. In numerous cases, governments failed to uphold their responsibility to protect the rights of members of minority groups. This entrenched discrimination, aggravated poverty, slowed down overall development, and in many countries, stoked violence.

In Pakistan’s resource-rich Balochistan province, security forces as well as some insurgent groups were implicated in violations, including enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions. The government did not follow through on all its promises.
to address the long-standing grievances of the Baloch community relating to distribution of income from major extractive and infrastructure projects. The province also witnessed several brutal attacks on Pakistan’s Shi’a community, especially Shi’a Hazaras, many of them of Afghan origin living in Balochistan’s capital, Quetta. Militant religious groups openly called for violence against the Shi’a and were allowed to operate and carry out acts of violence, such as the execution-style killing of 26 Shi’a pilgrims on 20 September. Pakistani militant groups claimed responsibility for attacks on the Shi’a even in Afghanistan, where twin bomb blasts in December killed some 70 Shi’as participating in the Ashura religious processions in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif.

The Ahmadiyya community, a religious group mainly based in Asia that consider themselves to be adherents of Islam, faced systematic discrimination in Pakistan and Indonesia. In Pakistan, where Ahmadis are legally barred from declaring themselves Muslims, the Ahmadiyya community experienced ongoing harassment from government officials, and without sufficient protection or support, were targeted by militant religious groups. In Indonesia, the police were criticized for failing to stop a 1,500-person mob from attacking the Ahmadiyya community in the sub-district of Cikeusik in February, killing three and injuring many more. The central government allowed local regulations restricting Ahmadiyya activities to remain in force. Ahmadis in other Muslim-majority countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Bangladesh and Malaysia, also suffered from discrimination for their religious beliefs, with their children barred from some schools and their right to worship freely under severe constraints.

Sunní Muslims were victims of discrimination in China: the Uighur population, predominantly Muslim and ethnically distinct, continued to face repression and discrimination in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The Chinese government invoked the nebulous threat of terrorism and insurgency to repress civil and political rights and interfere with the religious practices of the Uighurs, while the influx of Han Chinese migrants and discrimination in their favour has rendered Uighurs second-class citizens in terms of cultural, economic and social achievement.

Other ethnic minorities in China also fared poorly. At least a dozen Tibetan nuns and monks or former monks set themselves on fire (six of them are believed to have died) in protest against the restrictions imposed on religious and cultural practices – restrictions that have heightened Tibetans’ sense of alienation and deepened their grievances. In Inner Mongolia, too, ethnic tensions were high.
Widespread protests erupted across the region after a Han Chinese coal truck driver allegedly murdered an ethnic Mongolian herder.

**Armed conflicts and insurgencies**

Ethnic and religious discrimination and the resulting political and economic grievances were behind many of the multiple armed conflicts and long-running insurgencies that afflicted hundreds of thousands of people in the region.

The decades-old conflicts between the government of Myanmar and various ethnic armed groups flared up again significantly. Government forces fought against Karen, Shan and Kachin insurgents, displacing tens of thousands of civilians and committing human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law that amounted to crimes against humanity or war crimes.

The Taleban and other insurgent groups in Afghanistan engaged in widespread and systematic attacks on civilians, causing 77 per cent of civilian casualties in the conflict, according to the UN. Amnesty International renewed its call for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the situation, even as international forces assisting the Afghan government began to transfer responsibility for security to Afghan government forces. Many Afghan civil society groups, and in particular women’s groups, voiced concerns about being excluded from negotiations with insurgent groups, despite UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for women to be meaningfully and adequately represented during peace talks.

Lower intensity conflicts continued on Mindanao island in the Philippines, as well as in southern Thailand – both areas where Muslim minority populations were historically disenfranchised and had to contend with poor economic development. There was room for hope in the Philippines, as the parties seemed to pursue peace despite a brief outbreak of violence. But in southern Thailand the situation defied easy answers as insurgents continued to target civilians with the intention of intimidating the local population and displacing Buddhists and others perceived as loyal to the central government. Thailand’s central government did not meet commitments to provide accountability for violations committed by security forces, nor to provide a strategic and sustainable response to demands for greater political and economic development in the area.

Relatively low economic development, particularly for tribal Adivasi communities, and poor governance, fuelled insurgencies in several of...
India’s central and eastern states. Clashes between Maoist insurgents and security forces killed some 250 people. The insurgents resorted to hostage taking and indiscriminate attacks, while government forces routinely violated the rights of the local populations they were ostensibly protecting. Recognizing the problematic nature of the government’s strategy, India’s Supreme Court ordered the disbandment of Chhattisgarh’s state-sponsored paramilitary groups allegedly responsible for serious human rights violations. The Indian Supreme Court also allowed prisoner of conscience Dr Binayak Sen to be released on bail while he appeals against his life sentence. In 2010, a Chhattisgarh district court sentenced him to life after convicting him on charges of sedition and collaborating with armed Maoists.

Indian forces in Jammu and Kashmir again came under criticism for violating human rights. Amnesty International released a report in March that focused on the misuse of administrative detentions under the Public Safety Act (PSA), prompting the state government to promise the PSA’s reform. In September, the state human rights commission identified over 2,700 unmarked graves and identified 574 bodies as those of disappeared locals, belying the security forces’ claim that they were militants. The human rights commission’s request that the state use modern forensic testing to identify the other remains went unheeded.

Impunity for past violations haunted many countries in the region, particularly those grappling with the legacy of conflicts. The failure to provide justice complicated reconciliation efforts and often established a pattern of injustice and lack of accountability for security forces.

Accountability and justice
Impunity for past violations haunted many countries in the region, particularly those grappling with the legacy of conflicts. The failure to provide justice complicated reconciliation efforts and often established a pattern of injustice and lack of accountability for security forces.

Sri Lanka’s decades-long record of faulty special commissions to address major human rights violations continued with the work of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). The LLRC completed its mandate with a report that included some useful suggestions for improving the country’s human rights situation, but failed to properly investigate the role of government forces in the attacks on thousands of civilians during the final stages of the conflict against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The LLRC’s conclusions in this regard were the outcome of a deeply flawed process, and stood in contrast to the findings of the UN Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka, which concluded that there were credible allegations that war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed by both sides. The Panel of Experts recommended establishing an independent
investigation into the allegations of violations by all sides to the conflict, as well as a review of UN actions during the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The failure to provide justice helped foster a climate of impunity that saw new cases of enforced disappearances in the north and east of the island, as well as threats and attacks on journalists, critics and activists. Although the government repealed the State of Emergency, it retained the repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act and even added new regulations that allowed for suspects to be detained without charge or trial.

Cambodia’s accountability process for crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge period was also compromised by government interference, as one case was closed without a full investigation and another stalled. And in Afghanistan, individuals facing credible allegations of responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity continued to hold senior government posts.

While those accused of human rights violations evaded accountability, many governments used flogging to punish alleged wrongdoers – a violation of the international prohibition of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Singapore and Malaysia continued to impose caning for a variety of offences, including immigration violations. The Indonesian province of Aceh increasingly used caning as a punishment for various offences, including drinking alcohol, gambling, and being alone with someone of the opposite sex who is not a marriage partner or relative. And in the Maldives, the government retained the punishment of caning under pressure from its political opposition.

Migrants and refugees
Insecurity, natural disasters, poverty, and lack of suitable opportunities drove hundreds of thousands of people to seek better lives elsewhere, within the region as well as outside. While many governments in the region rely on migrant labour as a matter of basic economic necessity, many governments still fell short of protecting the rights of people who were seeking work or shelter.

At least 300,000 Nepalis migrated abroad to avoid poverty and the legacy of a long conflict. Many of them were deceived about the conditions of their employment and worked in conditions that amounted to forced labour. Although the Nepalese government put in place some laws and redress mechanisms to protect its migrant workers, Amnesty International’s research documented that these measures were not properly implemented due to low public awareness and poor monitoring and prosecution of wrongdoers.
Malaysia served as a major receiving country for regional migrants, as well as a staging ground for asylum-seekers on their way to Australia. Undocumented migrants in Malaysia were often detained and imprisoned or caned. Poor detention conditions led to riots by detained migrants at the Lenggeng facility near Kuala Lumpur in April. Australia’s High Court invalidated a bilateral agreement between Australia and Malaysia to “swap” 800 asylum-seekers who arrived by boat in Australia with 4,000 refugees (predominantly from Myanmar) who were in Malaysia awaiting resettlement, citing inadequate legal guarantees for refugees in Malaysia.

Steps forward

Despite serious obstacles, many human rights defenders and activists in the Asia-Pacific region were able to navigate their way towards greater respect for their rights, with success in one country serving as inspiration and encouragement in others.

In India, the Adivasi communities of Orissa gained a victory in July in their struggle to defend their way of life when the Orissa High Court found that Vedanta Aluminium’s bid to expand its refinery violated the communities’ rights to water, health and a healthy environment, and that the expansion would perpetrate further abuses against Adivasi communities.

Malaysia’s Prime Minister announced in September that he would seek to repeal the Internal Security Act, which among other things allows for indefinite detention without charge or trial, and replace it with new security laws. The move came at least in partial reaction to the Bersih 2.0 (“Clean”) movement, which saw thousands of peaceful protesters marching in Kuala Lumpur in July. The police beat protesters, fired tear-gas canisters directly into the crowds and arrested more than 1,600 people.

In March, Malaysia announced that it had signed the Rome Statute of the ICC and would seek to ratify the treaty. The Philippines ratified the Rome Statute in November.

Perhaps the most significant potential advance in terms of the region’s human rights situation was the decision by the authorities in Myanmar to free more than 300 political prisoners during the year.

Perhaps the most significant potential advance in terms of the region’s human rights situation was the decision by the authorities in Myanmar to free more than 300 political prisoners during the year and to allow Aung San Suu Kyi to contest parliamentary elections. The authorities continued to harass and detain some dissidents and opposition activists, raising concerns that their main intention was to loosen the sanctions imposed on the country rather than to bring about genuine change. But as events in Myanmar and elsewhere have shown, it is through such
narrow openings that political activists and human rights defenders can make their voices heard and decide what their future will be.
Policemen ill-treating a political activist during a protest in Baku, Azerbaijan, 12 March 2011. A ban on demonstrations effectively criminalized protests in March and April and led to the imprisonment of many of those who organized and took part in them.
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

“I am very happy to be released. I am extremely grateful to Amnesty International, who have campaigned since the beginning. In my opinion you saved me. Thank you to all those who tweeted.”

Journalist and prisoner of conscience Eynulla Fatullayev in Baku, Azerbaijan

Early one spring morning in a small village in Serbia, one of Europe’s biggest manhunts came to an end. General Ratko Mladić, wanted among other things for the murder of 8,000 men and boys in Srebrenica, was finally set to face justice. Two months later Croatian Serb Goran Hadžić, the last remaining suspect wanted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, was also detained in Serbia and subsequently transferred to The Hague.

These were landmark steps for the victims of the horrific crimes of the 1990s wars in former Yugoslavia. The long-overdue arrests held out hope for the survivors that they would finally receive the truth, justice and redress. Many, many more across the region, however, were still waiting for their own chance to see justice done, not delayed.

Freedom of expression

In a marked contrast to the hope and change unleashed across the Arab world, autocratic regimes in a number of the successor states to the Soviet Union strengthened their grip on power. They crushed protest, arrested opposition leaders and silenced dissenting voices. For many, the hope that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union 20 years ago must have seemed a distant memory.

In Belarus, protests following the alleged vote-rigging in 2010 were banned or dispersed, hundreds of protesters were arrested and fined and even more draconian restrictions on the freedom of assembly were introduced. Critical human rights NGOs were also targeted. In Azerbaijan, anti-government demonstrations were effectively outlawed, and attempts by a small number of government critics prompted a fresh wave of repression and intimidation. The demonstrations planned for March and April, to protest against
corruption and call for greater civil and political freedoms, were unreasonably banned then violently dispersed despite their peaceful nature. As in Belarus, critical NGOs and reporters also felt the backlash, with five human rights organizations closed down and several journalists reporting instances of intimidation and harassment in the immediate aftermath of the protests.

In Central Asia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan continued to severely restrict the rights to freedom of expression and association. Genuine opposition political parties continued to be denied registration, and social activists were rarely able to operate openly. Critical journalists and human rights defenders were routinely monitored and risked beatings, detention and unfair trials. In Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan there were unfair trials and cases of harassment for government critics and those who exposed abuses by public officials.

The picture in Russia was mixed. As elsewhere in the region, human rights defenders and journalists were harassed, intimidated and beaten for exposing abuses. Anti-government demonstrations were frequently banned and their organizers and participants subjected to short periods of detention or fined. Typically for the region, most mainstream media and TV outlets remained under the strong influence of national and local authorities. Despite this, civic activism continued to grow, with a variety of causes garnering widespread popular support – including the environment and combating abuses by public officials. The internet remained relatively uncontrolled by the authorities and grew in importance as a rival source of information and forum for the exchange of opinion.

Against this backdrop, the largest demonstrations seen in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union took place in December, sparked by widespread allegations, and numerous recorded instances, of electoral fraud in the parliamentary elections that returned Prime Minister Vladimir Putin’s United Russia party to power with a significantly reduced share of the vote. Initial spontaneous demonstrations across Russia in the days immediately following the elections were routinely dispersed, with hundreds being sentenced to short periods of detention or fined. Demonstrations planned in Moscow in subsequent weeks became too big to ban – and passed off peacefully.

In Turkey, critical journalists, Kurdish political activists, and others risked unfair prosecution when speaking out on the situation of Kurds in Turkey, or criticizing the armed forces. Threats of violence against prominent outspoken individuals continued and in November new regulations came into force raising further concerns regarding the arbitrary restriction of websites.
People on the move

Against the backdrop of political turmoil in North Africa and the Middle East, thousands of refugees and migrants attempted the dangerous sea crossing to Europe in search of safety and a secure future, often in overcrowded and un-seaworthy vessels. According to conservative estimates, at least 1,500 people, including pregnant women and children drowned while attempting this journey. Rather than taking measures to prevent such deaths at sea, including by increasing search and rescue operations, the EU’s response was to boost the ability of its external border agency, Frontex, to deter arrivals in Europe via the Mediterranean. There were reports that NATO failed to rescue people in distress at sea, despite the fact that the prevention of civilian casualties was being advanced as the primary justification for military intervention in Libya.

Those who survived the crossing often found Europe less than welcoming. Instead of a humanitarian response to a humanitarian crisis, the signature response of European states remained an approach focusing on policing borders and controlling migration flows.

Thousands of those who made it onto the Italian island of Lampedusa endured appalling reception conditions, the result of a failure on the part of the Italian authorities to respond to the growing number of arrivals.

New arrivals on the island were often left stranded, with many of them having to sleep rough with limited or no access to sanitary and washing facilities. Nor was arriving on European shores a guarantee of protection: in April, following an agreement between the Italian government and the Tunisian authorities, Italy began summary and collective expulsions of Tunisians back to Tunisia.

Many European countries, including France and the UK, refused to resettle any refugees displaced by the armed conflict in Libya, despite having been parties to that conflict under the aegis of NATO.

Across the region, states continued to violate human rights through the interception, detention and expulsion of foreign nationals, including those eligible for international protection. Detention as a tool of deterrence and control was a widespread, rather than a last, legitimate, resort.

Asylum systems frequently failed those seeking protection, including because of the resort to expedited asylum determination procedures in countries such as Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK that offered inadequate safeguards against the risk of individuals being sent back to places where they faced human rights abuses. People were returned from Turkey and Ukraine without even being able to access the asylum systems there.
Following a landmark ruling in January by the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *M.S.S. v Belgium and Greece*, European states suspended the return of asylum-seekers to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation due to the country’s lack of a functioning asylum system. However, some states continued to send people back to countries such as Iraq and Eritrea, contrary to the advice of UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and to forcibly return Roma to Kosovo despite the real risk of persecution and discrimination there.

Across the region, hundreds of thousands of people remained displaced by the conflicts that accompanied the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, often unable to return owing to their legal status – or lack of it – and discrimination in access to rights including property tenure.

While negotiating new EU asylum legislation, EU member states failed to address deficiencies in their asylum systems and in arrangements for transferring asylum-seekers back to the first EU country which they had entered.

### Discrimination

Although discrimination continued to affect the lives of millions of people across the region, governments failed to prioritize policies to combat it, citing other urgent needs. They quoted economic factors, in spite of many pointers that those already marginalized faced an increased risk of having the inequalities they already experienced further entrenched. Or they simply sought to walk away from their obligations, like the Dutch government, which publicly stated in July that it was the primary responsibility of citizens to free themselves from discrimination.

Instead of counteracting stereotypes and prejudices that fuel intolerance and hatred, some governments and public officials actually strengthened them. The equality body in Romania twice warned the President about anti-Roma statements on TV.

Gaps in both domestic and European anti-discrimination legislation persisted. In some cases the opportunity to bridge them was lost by reluctant public authorities or governmental coalitions concerned that offering enhanced protection might stir up political opposition. The inclusion of sexual orientation as a prohibited ground in a new anti-discrimination bill in Moldova was criticized, leading to a stalemate in its adoption. A new anti-discrimination bill in Spain failed to be adopted before the parliamentary elections in November. At the European level, the Council of the European Union pursued its discussion on the proposal for new EU-wide anti-discrimination legislation, proposed in 2008, although participants showed more
interest in watering down the proposals or shelving it. In addition, existing legislation, such as the Race Directive or the Charter of Fundamental Rights, was not enforced by the European Commission, despite continuing breaches by member states.

Domestic and regional anti-discrimination standards were sometimes publicly criticized and had their legitimacy questioned. The European Court of Human Rights had played a key role in applying the discrimination prohibition enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and strengthening the prohibition to discriminate on specific grounds such as gender identity and sexual orientation. Past judgements of the Court, such as those finding segregation of Romani children in schools discriminatory, were not implemented in several countries such as the Czech Republic and Croatia.

Unanimous ratification of key regional human rights instruments, which would have enhanced protection, did not take place. For instance, no new country signed or ratified Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits discrimination. On a more positive note, in May the Council of Europe adopted a new Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and all forms of domestic violence, which was subsequently signed by 18 countries in the region.

While failing to strengthen domestic or European mechanisms to tackle discrimination, some governments were also keen to uphold existing or promote new discriminatory tools. Legislation, policies and practices discriminating against Roma in the enjoyment of their right to housing remained on many statute books, and Roma communities continued to be forcibly evicted in several countries across the region including France, Italy and Serbia. Legislative proposals discriminating against individuals on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation were introduced in the Russian Federation and Lithuania.

The absence of comprehensive legal protection and a robust championing of rights by those in authority again led to adverse consequences in individual lives. Hostility and discrimination, often driven by radical-right populist parties, against ethnic and religious minorities, as well as people on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation, continued to be a matter of concern throughout the region. Lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people, and Roma, migrants and Muslims, among others, were targeted in hate-motivated attacks. Hate crimes continued to be inadequately tackled because of gaps in legislation, poor reporting systems, inadequate investigations, or flaws in criminal justice systems and lack of trust towards the police. Entrenched prejudices and stereotypes also resulted in racially motivated misconduct by law enforcement officials.

Discussions on general prohibitions of full face veils were pursued in many countries across the region.
Discussions on general prohibitions of full face veils were pursued in many countries across the region. Legislation came into force at the national level in Belgium and France. The accompanying debates, often based on assumptions rather than reliable data, further stigmatized Muslims. Stereotypical views of symbols perceived to be Muslim, such as the headscarf, were advocated, rather than counteracted, by public officials. The wearing of specific forms of religious and cultural symbols and dress continued to lead to discrimination against Muslims, and in particular Muslim women, in employment and education.

**Counter-terror and security**

European governments continued to stonewall in the face of concerted efforts to secure accountability for their alleged complicity in the CIA’s rendition and secret detention programmes. Some governments released new information regarding their involvement in these operations, or were accused yet again of such complicity upon the discovery of new evidence by NGOs or the media. Others terminated or only gave lip service to anaemic investigations, proposed inquiries that failed to meet even minimal human rights standards, or simply denied any involvement despite mounting evidence to the contrary. In March, the European Parliament approved a follow-up to its 2007 report on European complicity in these CIA-led operations, in order to ensure compliance with its earlier resolutions regarding the obligation to investigate allegations of fundamental human rights abuses.

Invoking technicalities and state secrecy, Lithuania abruptly closed its investigation in January into two secret detention facilities established on Lithuanian territory by the CIA. In August, the Polish authorities extended their investigation into the presence of a secret CIA site there, but continued to thwart access to information sought by the two named victims’ lawyers and failed to reveal any information about the investigation’s progress. Revelations...
by the media in December that the location of a secret CIA site in Bucharest had been identified evoked firm denials from the Romanian authorities. They continued to reject outright claims of any involvement in the CIA operations, despite compelling evidence that Romania was deeply and willingly incorporated into these programmes.

The Finnish authorities released flight data in October and November indicating that rendition aircraft had landed on their territory and fielded calls for an independent inquiry into alleged complicity, but by the end of the year had made no decision to investigate. An investigation into alleged Danish complicity, announced in November, was limited to Greenland and would involve only a “paper review” of information previously compiled in the course of a parliamentary inquiry.

In the face of obstructions to investigations at the national level, some rendition victims submitted applications to the European Court of Human Rights, hoping for some measure of accountability there. Cases against Lithuania, Macedonia, and Poland were pending before the Court.

Counter-terrorism policies and practices across the region continued to undermine human rights protections. The use of unreliable diplomatic assurances to deport people considered a risk to national security proliferated across the region, including in Belgium, Germany, Italy and the UK. In November, the UN criticized Germany for collaborating with intelligence agencies that routinely employed forms of coercion in interrogations. Control orders and other forms of social control amounting to a deprivation of liberty were used in a number of countries, most notably the UK, as proxies for full criminal trials and the safeguards normally attendant on them.

In Turkey a vast number of cases were brought under flawed anti-terrorism laws which routinely contravened fair trial standards. Many of those prosecuted were political activists, among them students, journalists, writers, lawyers and academics. They were routinely interrogated about activities which were protected by the right to freedom of expression.

The security situation in Russia’s North Caucasus remained volatile and uneven. Armed groups continued to target law enforcement and other officials, with civilians caught in the crossfire and, on occasion, deliberately attacked. Security operations across the region were often accompanied by serious human rights violations. There were reports of witnesses being intimidated and journalists, human rights activists and lawyers being harassed and killed.

The armed Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna announced the end of its armed struggle. In Turkey bombings by both the army and armed groups claimed the lives of civilians.
Impunity in post-conflict situations
In spite of the arrests of the two final suspects indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, progress was slow in tackling impunity for crimes committed during the wars of the 1990s. There was a lack of capacity and commitment, and some retrograde steps. In Croatia, some efforts were undertaken by the President and the judicial authorities to deal with the war-time past, but there was little action by the government. Instead, key political figures engaged in attacks on international justice, and the parliament passed a law which breached Croatia’s obligation to co-operate with Serbia in criminal matters. Regional co-operation was also hampered, in the failure to dismantle legal barriers to extradition of war crimes suspects between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro.

Ten years after the 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia, prosecutions for war crimes cases returned from the Tribunal were annulled after parliament adopted a new interpretation of the Amnesty Law, effectively ensuring immunity from prosecution in domestic courts.

In Kyrgyzstan, despite facilitating two independent commissions of inquiry, the authorities failed to fairly and effectively investigate the violence of June 2010 and its aftermath.

Torture and other ill-treatment
Victims of torture and other ill-treatment were likewise too often failed by justice systems that did not hold those responsible to account. Obstacles to accountability included lack of prompt access to a lawyer, failure by prosecutors to vigorously pursue investigations, fear of reprisals, low penalties imposed on convicted police officers, and the absence of properly independent systems for monitoring complaints and investigating serious police misconduct.

Pockets of entrenched impunity persisted. In Uzbekistan, despite assertions by the authorities that the practice of torture had significantly decreased, and the introduction of new legislation to improve the treatment of detainees, dozens of reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners emerged throughout the year. In Turkey the ground-breaking decision issued in 2010, which, for the first time in legal history, convicted state officials to long prison terms for causing death through torture, was overturned on appeal. Incidents of torture remained widely reported in Ukraine and in Russia, despite superficial police reforms in the latter.

Elsewhere, there were allegations of excessive use of force and ill-treatment as police sought to disperse protests against anti-austerity measures, such as in Greece and Spain.
The death penalty
Belarus remained the region’s last executioner, putting to death two men within a flawed criminal justice system which continued to shroud the process in secrecy. The executions were carried out despite a formal request by the UN Human Rights Committee for a stay so it could consider the two men’s cases.

Conclusion
The arrests of Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić sent out a powerful message not only to those affected, but across the wider region. It was a message of hope in the face of long years of waiting, but also a message of warning to all those who thought that influential friends, powerful neighbours or opaque vested interests would – or could – protect them from the reach of justice. It was a testament to what could be achieved when individuals, civil society, governments and the international community were committed to upholding universal human rights.

However, too many people across the region still fell through the gap between the rhetoric of human rights and the reality of their implementation. Robust support for human rights was too often seen as incompatible with supporting state security or energy supply. There were challenges to the independence and authority of the European Court of Human Rights; the EU too often showed itself a toothless tiger in the face of violations committed by its member states. And individual states still failed in their primary obligation to uphold all human rights for all.
Yemeni rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawakkol Karman shouts slogans as a policeman watches during an anti-government demonstration in Sana’a, Yemen, 15 February 2011.
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

“We are not scared of being killed, injured or tortured. Fear does not exist any more. People want to live in dignity. So we will not stop.”

Ahmed Harara, who worked as a dentist, was injured in one eye by gunshot pellets during protests in Egypt on 28 January 2011, then a second time in the other eye on 19 November 2011, leaving him blind.

For the peoples and states of the Middle East and North Africa, 2011 was a truly momentous year. It was a year of unprecedented popular uprisings and tumult, a year in which the pent-up pressures, demands and protests of a rising generation swept aside a succession of veteran rulers who, almost until they fell, had appeared virtually unassailable. Others, at the year’s end, were still clinging to power but only through the most ruthless means, their futures hanging in the balance. The region as a whole was then still reeling amid the continuing tremors and aftershocks of the political and social earthquake that exploded in the first months of the year. Although much remained uncertain, the events of 2011 appeared likely to be every bit as significant for the peoples of the region as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet empire had been for the peoples of Europe and Central Asia.

All across the Middle East and North Africa, 2011 was marked by mass demands for change – for greater liberty to speak and to act, free from the suffocating fear of state repression; for government transparency and accountability and an end to pervasive high-level corruption; for more jobs and fairer employment opportunities and the means to seek a better standard of living; for justice and human rights, including the right to live one’s life and bring up one’s family in dignity and security. It was in support of such demands that hundreds of thousands of people, with women conspicuous in the vanguard, thronged onto the streets of Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi, Sana’a and many other cities and towns across the region to demand change. They continued to do so despite the carnage wrought among them by government security forces. They did so with determination, resolution and naked courage, and in doing so freed
themselves from the fear that their governments had for so long sought to imbue in order to keep them quiescent and in their place. For a time at least, the notion of people’s power gripped the region and shook it to its core.

Initially, the protests mostly voiced popular frustration against the failure of national leaders to address people’s needs and aspirations. Those leaders responded all too characteristically by sending out their riot police and security agents to crush the protests by force; they succeeded only in pouring fuel on the flames and further igniting public outrage and defiance. As protesters were shot down in cold blood, rounded up in mass arrests, tortured and abused, so the popular mood hardened. Unintimidated by the bloodshed, more and more people rallied to the streets to demand the replacement or overthrow of national leaders who had become both discredited and despised as they sought to consolidate family dynasties to maintain their grip on power. The rapid fall of Tunisia’s President Zine El ‘Abidine Ben ‘Ali and then Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak resounded all across the region, sending a message of hope to advocates of change and reform in other states. For a time, it seemed that a new form of domino effect was taking place that would sweep out other repressive and authoritarian rulers from power. Within months, Colonel Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi’s 42 years of abusive rule in Libya had been brought to an abrupt and bloody end, and in both Yemen and Syria long-standing regimes were fighting a rearguard action – literally – for their survival in the face of continuing mass demands for their demise. In Bahrain, the government used excessive force and repression to quell the protests yet ended the year committing to political and human rights reform. Elsewhere, in states such as Algeria, Jordan and Morocco, those in power were urgently promising the people reform and a greater say in government. In oil- and gas-rich Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, rulers used their financial reserves to try to address social grievances and try to keep the people sweet.

The uprisings
2011 dawned with Tunisia in ferment. For a time, President Ben ‘Ali sought to quash the protests in the same way that he had crushed earlier protests in the Gafsa region in 2008, through the application of brute force. In a few short weeks, some 300 Tunisians met violent deaths but, this time, without the resolve of the protesters being diminished. On 14 January, Ben ‘Ali’s nerve gave way. With other members of his clan, he boarded a plane and flew away to seek safe haven in Saudi Arabia. It was an electric moment, as both
governments and people across the region recognized that what had until then seemed almost unthinkable – the enforced flight of an autocratic ruler of more than 20 years – had just been achieved. For the other repressive governments of the region, Ben ‘Ali’s abrupt demise sounded the alarm bells; for the mass of people watching events unfold on Al Jazeera and other satellite TV stations, the Tunisian uprising inspired new hope and a sense that they too could obtain for themselves what Tunisia’s people had achieved.

Within two weeks, what had occurred in Tunisia was being mirrored on an even greater scale in Egypt. Cairo’s Tahrir Square had become the fulcrum and a key battleground in which Egyptians set forth their demands for change. Using the internet, social networking sites and mobile phones to help organize and co-ordinate their activities, within 18 days the protesters wrought the “25 January Revolution” and provoked the downfall of President Mubarak after 30 unbroken years in power. This they achieved in the face of extreme repression by the security forces and thugs hired by the government. At least 840 people were killed and more than 6,000 injured, with thousands more arrested, beaten or tortured. On 11 February, Hosni Mubarak announced his resignation and was replaced by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). He retreated to his villa in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, from where he was summoned to a Cairo court in August to stand trial for corruption and ordering the killing of protesters.

Mubarak’s fall, which occurred in the full glare of the worldwide media, had the effect of spurring calls for mass protests in a rash of other cities and towns across the region. In Bahrain, starting in February, protesters belonging mostly to the country’s Shi’a Muslim majority mounted peaceful demonstrations and set up a protest camp at the capital Manama’s Pearl Roundabout to demand a greater say in the running of the country and an end to their alleged marginalization by the ruling Al Khalifa family. The protesters were cleared away with excessive force days later and then with even greater brutality when they resumed their protests in March. In Iran, the leaders of mass protests crushed by the government in 2009 called for new demonstrations, and were shut up under house arrest in response.

In Algeria, the government called out the security forces in large numbers to deter demonstrations but also sought to reduce tension by lifting the 19-year-long state of emergency. Oman’s Sultan Qaboos bin Said promised to create thousands of new jobs and improved benefits for the unemployed, and ordered the release of detained
protesters. In Saudi Arabia, the government was reported to have paid out more than US$100 billion to citizens while warning that all public demonstrations were banned. It mobilized the security forces to deploy against anyone attending a planned “Day of Rage” in Riyadh.

In Yemen, protests had begun in January, sparked by proposed constitutional changes that would enable President Ali Abdullah Saleh to remain in office for life and then hand power to his son. The protests continued throughout the year, spurred by the events in Egypt and elsewhere, while President Saleh’s forces fired indiscriminately into crowds of demonstrators and he manoeuvred to try and maintain his long monopoly of power. By the end of the year, the Yemeni President’s position had become seriously eroded. Nevertheless, he still clung to power as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) offered him immunity from prosecution despite the grim toll of unlawful killings and other gross human rights violations committed by his forces. That he and others responsible should be afforded impunity was an affront to justice and an outrageous betrayal of the victims of his regime’s crimes.

In Libya, geographically lying between Tunisia and Egypt, the events in those countries brought new hope to a population that, after 42 years under Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi, was denied freedom of speech, independent political parties, trades unions or civil society organizations. Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi had maintained power for so long by playing one section of the population against another, favouring those who he considered loyal and clamping down ruthlessly on those who expressed dissent. Formerly an international pariah for his alleged sponsorship of terrorism, in recent years he had enjoyed a blossoming rapprochement with Western democracies as Libya’s oil extraction industry developed and Libya assumed a new importance as a means of transit for African refugees and migrants seeking to gain entry to Europe. Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi appeared confident and in firm control as first Ben ‘Ali and then Mubarak fell, but in February anti-government demonstrations erupted into a popular revolt in Libya too. This quickly developed into an international armed conflict in which NATO became involved and culminated on 20 October in al-Gaddafi’s capture and violent death as he sought to flee from his besieged stronghold in the city of Sirte. A National Transitional Council then took office but by the end of the year it had yet to establish its authority and Libya was awash with arms and armed militias which carried out reprisals against suspected al-Gaddafi loyalists and presented a continuing threat to public security.
In Syria, where the regime headed by the al-Assad family has been in power since 1970, the first stirrings of protest in February were low key and hesitant. However, when security forces detained and reportedly abused children who had chalked up anti-government slogans in the southern town of Dera’a, they set off mass protests that rapidly spread from city to city. Caught off guard, the government closed the country to the world’s media and to independent observers. It launched a crackdown of vicious intensity against unarmed protesters, using snipers on rooftops, firing into crowds and deploying army tanks in towns and villages, while all the time claiming that the killings were the work of shadowy anti-government armed gangs. By the end of the year, the UN reported, some 5,000 people, mostly civilians, had been killed while thousands more had been wounded or arrested or both. In some pockets of the country, an incipient civil war appeared to be developing between the regime’s forces and soldiers who had defected to join the protests.

Syria’s government tried to conceal both the extent of the protests and the violence of its response but was largely thwarted due to the courage and determination of local activists and witnesses who recorded the carnage on mobile phone cameras and uploaded hundreds of videos onto the internet. Some showed the bodies of individuals who had been tortured to death in detention and, in some cases, mutilated; among them were children.

**The international response**

The US and other Western governments that had long been principal allies of the autocratic leaders of Tunisia and Egypt initially failed to grasp the significance of the protests and were slow to react. Soon, however, they were hurrying to reformulate policy, now finally acknowledging the abusive nature of the regimes at risk. When Libya descended into armed conflict, they intervened decisively against Colonel al-Gaddafi, with the support of the key Gulf states, using a UN Security Council mandate to protect civilians that paved the way for a NATO air campaign which swung the balance against the Libyan leader.

In Bahrain, where the US navy’s Fifth Fleet has its base, and particularly in Syria and Yemen, protesters were also in desperate need of protection from the murderous policies of their governments. The international community, however, was notably less inclined to offer them support. While the Security Council had referred Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi to the International Criminal Court, it took no such action against Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad despite compelling evidence that his forces were committing crimes against humanity.
The Russian Federation, China and the governments of the emerging powerhouses of Brazil, India and South Africa all used their leverage at the Security Council to forestall effective action on Syria even as the UN’s own human rights chief spoke out against the crimes being committed by the al-Assad regime. Saudi Arabia also denounced the Syrian government’s crimes while denying Saudi Arabians the right to demonstrate and after sending troops into Bahrain only hours before the authorities there launched a bloody crackdown in March. Overall, it was a depressingly familiar story, with governments of all political hues continuing to operate selectively and, whatever their rhetoric, to subordinate human rights to their own perceived and partisan interests.

Conflict and intolerance of dissent

The uprisings that dominated the headlines throughout 2011 overshadowed other deep-seated problems that retained disastrous potential for human rights in the Middle East and North Africa, and beyond.

Israel maintained its blockade of Gaza, prolonging the humanitarian crisis there, and continued aggressively to expand settlements in the Palestinian West Bank territory it has occupied since 1967. The two leading Palestinian political organizations, Fatah and Hamas, despite a reconciliation agreement signed in May remained divided and targeted each other’s supporters, while Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups mounted tit-for-tat attacks in Gaza. It was a sorry and all too familiar tale that continued to wreak a heavy cost on so many people’s lives.

Iran’s government became increasingly isolated internationally and tolerated no dissent at home; human rights defenders, women’s and minority rights activists were among those persecuted, and the death penalty was used on an extensive scale, ostensibly to punish criminals but also to intimidate the populace. Globally, only China carried out more executions.

Elsewhere in the region, it was unclear how the withdrawal of all US military forces from Iraq would impact security there after eight years of conflict. The issue of self-determination for the people of Western Sahara still remained as a running sore, poisoning government relations in the Maghreb.

Other patterns of human rights violations remained and were both central in driving the popular uprisings and protests and also deepened by governments’ responses. Arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, unfair trials, and unlawful killings by state forces remained common
and widespread across the region. Almost without exception, those in power allowed their forces to kill and torture with impunity. In Egypt, the SCAF bowed to popular demands and disbanded the State Security Investigations service, which was notorious for torture under Hosni Mubarak. Torture, however, did not cease; the army simply took it over, even subjecting some women protesters to forced “virginity testing”, while also arresting and sending thousands of civilians for trial before unfair military courts. Yet thousands of Egyptians remained stubborn in the face of the new authorities’ repression and continued to demand political, social and human rights changes.

Discrimination
Discrimination on grounds of gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin and other factors, such as sexual orientation, remained. To a large extent, the sense of injustice this engendered was reflected in the wave of protests, as when stateless Bidun gathered together in Kuwait to demand that they be recognized as citizens. At the same time, the turmoil also deepened divisions. In Libya, both Libyans and foreign nationals were targeted by militias because of their skin colour. There was growing fear within the Syria’s complex of different faiths and communities that the country might descend into a civil war of such bitterness and hatred as the one that tore Lebanon apart from 1975 to 1990 – a war whose legacy of enforced disappearances and distrust still remains conspicuously unaddressed. In Egypt, discrimination against Copts remained rife. In Iran, religious and ethnic minorities continued to face discrimination in law and, in the case of the Baha’i minority, persecution.

Migrants, many of them originating from sub-Saharan Africa, were among the principal victims of the Libya conflict. Thousands were forcibly displaced by the fighting. Many escaped to Egypt or Tunisia but others were trapped for weeks or months and subject to racist attacks in Libya, often accused of being African “mercenaries” recruited by Colonel al-Gaddafi. Some who reached Egypt and Tunisia, many of them Eritreans and Somalis, were unable to return to their home countries for fear of persecution and at the end of 2011 were consigned to desolate desert camps to await resettlement in European or other countries where they would be safe. Still others lost their lives trying to cross the sea to Italy.

All across the region, migrant workers from poor and developing countries were abused and exploited even though, as in several Gulf states, they were the lifeblood of the economy. They were inadequately protected, if offered any protection at all, under local labour laws. Women domestic workers suffered worst of all – they were victims all
too often of multiple discrimination, as women, as migrants, and as foreign nationals whose own governments frequently took little or no interest in their plight.

**Economic concerns – housing and livelihoods**

At the end of 2011 it was still too early to assess how Egypt’s “25 January Revolution” had impacted, let alone improved, the lot of the millions of poor and marginalized residents of the country’s teeming informal settlements. Many lived in areas officially designated as “unsafe” due to unstable rock formations or other hazards, without access to basic services – clean water, effective sanitation, electricity – and were liable to be forcibly evicted from their homes without adequate notice or any consultation. During the year, further forced evictions were carried out in Manshiyet Nasser, the sprawling slum-like informal settlement on the outskirts of Cairo in which over 100 residents were killed by a rock fall in 2008, under the SCAF’s authority, perpetuating the policy pursued under Hosni Mubarak and rendering more families homeless.

The Israeli authorities also continued to force people from their homes – both Palestinians resident in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Arab Israelis resident in officially “unrecognized” villages in the Negev and elsewhere – as they continued their policy of demolishing homes and other buildings erected without official permits that they themselves withheld. By contrast, thousands of Jewish Israelis living in settlements unlawfully established on occupied Palestinian lands received every encouragement to further expand, develop and consolidate the settlements even though these settlements are prohibited under international law. Meanwhile, Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip continued to suffocate the local economy and prolong what is a deliberate humanitarian crisis whose heaviest impact is on the most vulnerable – children, the elderly, those needing specialist medical care not available in Gaza. The blockade constituted nothing less than collective punishment of Gaza’s 1.6 million inhabitants, and breached international law.

When 24-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight on 17 December 2010 in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, few could have predicted the regional firestorm of protest and change that his tragic and fatal act would ignite. A year later, the outburst of euphoria had all but evaporated. The early gains of the popular uprisings remained in the balance and the struggles for change in Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and elsewhere continued to levy a heavy cost in people’s lives and gross abuses of human rights. Yet at the end of
2011 there was a palpable feeling that the old discredited order was in the process of being consigned to history through the valiant and determined efforts of the people. For the peoples of the region, it appeared that the long march to freedom, justice and human rights for all had undoubtedly begun.
Women and children wait to receive medical attention at the Ahmad Shah Baba Hospital in Arzan Qimat, Afghanistan. Attacks on aid workers and doctors, especially in areas most affected by the conflict, deprived millions of health care during 2011. February 2011.
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Strategic Partnerships Project is part of the Growth Unit in Amnesty International. The project aims to grow human rights activism and impact in countries with no Amnesty International entities by establishing partnerships with local NGOs. It also aims to increase the visibility of Amnesty International and the strategic partner and create platforms for Amnesty International issues in the country. Amnesty International’s Strategic Partnerships in 2011 were in Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Latvia, Liberia and Romania.

For more information on Strategic Partnerships, please contact:
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INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

There are also International Members in several countries and territories around the world. More information can be found online at: www.amnesty.org/en/join
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OFFICES

International Secretariat (IS)
Amnesty International,
Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street,
London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom
email: amnestyis@amnesty.org
www.amnesty.org

Amnesty International Language Resource Centre (AILRC) Head office
Calle Valderribas, 13, 28007 Madrid, Spain
email: AILRC@amnesty.org
Spanish: www.amnesty.org/es
Arabic: www.amnesty.org/ar

Amnesty International Language Resource Centre – French (AILRC-FR)
Paris office
47 rue de Paradis – Bât C, 75010 Paris, France
www.amnesty.org/fr

IS New York – UN Representative Office
Amnesty International,
777 UN Plaza, 6th Floor, New York,
NY 10017, USA
email: aiuny@amnesty.org

IS Geneva – UN Representative Office
Amnesty International,
22 rue du Cendrier, 4ème étage,
CH-1201 Geneva,
Switzerland
email: uaigv@amnesty.org

Amnesty International European Institutions Office
Rue de Trèves 35, B-1040 Brussels,
Belgium
email: amnestyIntl@amnesty.eu
www.amnesty.eu

IS Beirut – Middle East and North Africa Regional Office
Amnesty International,
PO Box 13-5696, Chouran Beirut 1102 - 2060,
Lebanon
email: mena@amnesty.org
www.amnestymena.org

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Amnesty International,
SICAP Sacré Coeur Pyrotechnie Extension, Villa No. 22,
BP 47582, Dakar, Senegal
email: isdakaroffice@amnesty.org
www.africa-hre.org

IS Hong Kong – Asia Pacific Regional Office
Amnesty International,
16/F Siu On Centre, 188 Lockhart Rd, Wanchai,
Hong Kong
email: admin-ap@amnesty.org

IS Kampala – Africa Regional Office
Amnesty International,
Plot 20A Kawalya Kaggwa Close, PO Box 23966,
Kampala, Uganda
email: ai-aro@amnesty.org

IS Moscow – Russia Resource Centre
Amnesty International,
PO Box 212, Moscow 119019,
Russian Federation
email: msk@amnesty.org
www.amnesty.org.ru

IS Paris – Research Office
Amnesty International,
76 boulevard de la Villette,
75940 Paris, Cédex 19,
France
email: pro@amnesty.org
“They looked at his identity card and shot him dead”: Six months of post-electoral violence in Côte d’Ivoire

The violence that followed Côte d’Ivoire’s disputed presidential election in November 2010 has caused the most serious humanitarian and human rights crisis in the country in recent years.

Hundreds of people were unlawfully killed, often because of their ethnicity or presumed political affiliation. Sexual violence, including rape, was reported. Thousands of people remain displaced after fleeing the wave of human rights violations and abuses which, as this report shows, were and continued to be committed by both sides after the arrest of former President Laurent Gbagbo.

Index: AFR 31/002/2011
Format: c80pp, A4, colour insert and cover
Price: £12.50
Languages available: English and French
Product order code: P3620
At a crossroads: Sierra Leone’s free health care policy

Pregnant women and girls in Sierra Leone face continuing challenges in gaining access to maternal health care services. Despite important reforms initiated over the last two years, including a free health care policy in pregnancy and childbirth, the health care system remains dysfunctional.

This report examines how gaps in accountability undermine the reforms’ success, in particular free access to essential drugs in pregnancy and childbirth. Amnesty International calls on the government of Sierra Leone to establish and strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms so that health care is accessible to women and girls and effective remedies are available if their human rights are violated.

Index: AFR 51/001/2011
Format: c30pp, A4, colour cover
Price: £4.00
Languages available: English
Product order code: P3316

“You cannot kill the truth”: The case against Jean-Claude Duvalier

Jean-Claude Duvalier returned to Haiti on 16 January 2011 after spending the last 25 years in France, evading prosecution for human rights-related crimes committed against the Haitian people during his 15 years in power (1971-1986).

Amnesty International’s unique archive material and testimonies from the period demonstrate that the systematic or widespread violations that were committed against Haitians amount to crimes against humanity.

The report argues that the Haitian state has an obligation under international law to investigate these crimes, identify the individuals responsible and prosecute them in an ordinary court of law, respecting all fair trial guarantees.

Index: AMR 36/007/2011
Format: c30pp A4, B&W report with colour cover
Price: £4.00
Languages available: English and French
Product order code: P3639

“This is what we demand. Justice!”: Impunity for sexual violence against women in Colombia’s armed conflict

Sexual violence is endemic to Colombia’s long-running armed conflict. Members of all the warring parties have sexually abused and exploited women and girls. They have done this to make women sexual slaves, to sow terror within communities, to wreak revenge on adversaries, and to silence women leaders.

This report focuses on the deeply entrenched impunity that has for so long shielded from justice human rights abusers of all kinds in Colombia. It examines what, if any, progress has been made by the authorities, particularly since 2008, in addressing sexual violence and impunity.

Index: AMR 23/018/2011
Format: c84pp, A4, colour cover
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Languages available: English, French and Spanish
Product order code: P3220
Eviction and resistance in Cambodia: Five women tell their stories

Over the past two decades, Cambodia has emerged from an armed conflict, economic collapse and isolation. These changes have brought both opportunities and challenges for the women of Cambodia. Among those challenges is the risk of forced eviction.

This report tells the stories of five women whose lives have been blighted by a tragedy afflicting thousands across the country. Mai, Sophal and Heap have suffered the trauma of forced eviction, while Hong and Vanny are resisting moves by powerful business interests that are threatening their homes and livelihoods without any regard for their rights.

Index: ASA 23/006/2011
Format: c68pp, full colour
Price: £14.00
Languages available: English and Khmer
Product order code: P3600

When justice fails: Thousands executed in Asia after unfair trials

More people are executed in the Asia-Pacific region than in the rest of the world combined. Add to this the possibility that they were convicted after an unfair trial, and the gross injustice of this punishment becomes all too clear. This report, indispensable for lawyers, opinion leaders and government officials, argues the case against the death penalty, using eight cases from different Asian countries.

The report highlights the potential for miscarriages of justice after unfair trials. It describes the situation across Asia and can be used to challenge public opinion about the death penalty in Asia and beyond.

Index: ASA 01/023/2011
Format: c40pp, A4, colour cover
Price: £6.00
Languages available: English
Product order code: P3761

Beaten up for speaking out: Attacks on human rights defenders in the Russian Federation

Attacks on human rights defenders and journalists by state and non-state actors violate Russia’s human rights obligations. The failure to investigate these attacks has had a chilling effect on the Russian human rights community.

This report focuses on a number of different groups that are at particular risk of attack. It investigates possible reasons for such attacks, provides updates on individual cases and includes recommendations to the Russian authorities.

Index: EUR 46/038/2011
Format: c30pp, A4, colour insert and cover
Price: £6.50
Languages available: English, French and Russian
Product order code: P3416
“No evidence of a crime”: Paying the price for police impunity in Ukraine

Human rights abuses are practised systematically by the police in Ukraine, despite increasing efforts to combat the problem and growing public outrage. Institutional failings and high levels of corruption in the Ministry of Internal Affairs mean that people who come into contact with the police are at risk of a wide range of abuses, from verbal attacks to torture.

Investigations into these events are often delayed, ineffective and biased, which only encourages the police in a culture of impunity. The government must commit to comprehensively reforming the system for overseeing the police.

Index: EUR 50/009/2011
Format: c55pp, A4, colour cover
Price: £6.00
Languages available: English, Russian and Ukrainian
Product order code: P3583

Misratah – under siege and under fire

This report, published in May 2011, documents evidence obtained by researchers on the ground of the abuses suffered by the 300,000 residents of Misratah, Libya’s third largest city, during the siege there that began in March, and of the growing humanitarian crisis.

The report highlights reckless and indiscriminate attacks by Colonel al-Gaddafi’s forces; the use of cluster bombs; the deliberate use of civilians as “human shields”; and the plight of foreign nationals trapped by the fighting.

Index: MDE 19/019/2011
Format: c42pp, A4, colour cover
Price: £6.00
Languages available: Arabic and English
Product order code: P3606

Egypt rises: Killings, detentions and torture in the ‘25 January Revolution’

During 18 extraordinary days in early 2011, millions of Egyptians rose up against police brutality, poverty and the relentless repression of their basic freedoms. Most of the protests were peaceful, yet the authorities’ response was not. At least 840 people were killed and around 6,500 were injured. Thousands were detained and many allegedly tortured by the security forces or the army.

This report, issued in May 2011, describes why and how the “25 January revolution” unfolded. It charts the patterns of the security forces’ repression of protesters from 25 January until 7 March, when the country’s interim cabinet was sworn in.

Index: MDE 12/027/2011
Format: 130pp, A4, colour insert and cover
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Languages available: English and Arabic
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WHETHER IN A HIGH-PROFILE CONFLICT OR A FORGOTTEN CORNER OF THE GLOBE, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS FOR JUSTICE, FREEDOM AND DIGNITY FOR ALL AND SEEKS TO GALVANIZE PUBLIC SUPPORT TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

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Millions of people have taken to the streets in a mass outpouring of hope for freedom and justice. Even the most brutal repression seems unable to silence the increasingly urgent demands for an end to tyranny, as people show they are no longer willing to endure systems of governance that are not built on accountability, justice and the promotion of equality.

Published with the *Amnesty International Report 2012*, which documents the state of human rights in 155 countries and territories in 2011, this pamphlet provides in-depth analysis of the human rights challenges facing world leaders today.

In his essay "Leading from the streets", Salil Shetty explores how, despite growing demands for better governance, leaders at the national and international level are still failing to create strong societies built on respect for human rights. To reclaim their role as legitimate leaders, governments must understand the imperative to develop and maintain a system that protects the powerless and restrains the powerful.

This essay sits alongside five regional overviews that highlight the key events and trends that dominated the human rights agenda in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and Central Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa during 2011.

As Amnesty International moves into its sixth decade, we bear witness not only to the plight of those living in the shadow of human rights violations, but also to those who continue to be inspired to action by the principle of human dignity.

Full report: [amnesty.org](http://amnesty.org)