2011 saw a worldwide pattern of protest. Despite restrictions on freedom of expression in at least 91 countries, people the world over took to the streets, the airwaves and the internet to demand democracy, freedom, justice.

Many governments responded with violence. People were tortured and otherwise ill-treated in at least 101 countries, in many cases for taking part in anti-government demonstrations.

The international community has armed oppressive states, rather than establishing justice and security.

500,000 people die every year as a result of armed violence. Millions more are injured, brutally repressed, raped or forced to flee from their homes because of armed conflict, armed violence and human rights violations using conventional arms.

When we began campaigning against the death penalty in 1977, only 16 countries had abolished capital punishment in law for all crimes. Today 141 countries are abolitionist in law or practice.

Change is possible.
Across the region, long-standing discrimination against women, minorities and migrants remained prevalent. Executions, which occurred chiefly in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, increased.

Executions, which occurred chiefly in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, increased. Torture and other ill-treatment was reported in a number of countries, including China and North Korea. Migrant workers faced exploitation by recruiters who exposed them to human trafficking and forced labour. Journalists, human rights defenders and political opponents carried out their work under threat of harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention, violence and even murder.

There was some progress in tackling impunity for past human rights violations, yet some security forces and military in the region continued to use torture and to carry out extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances.

Gender-based violence and violations of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls remained serious concerns.

In Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, thousands of political prisoners were released and freedom of expression was expanded. However, abuses seen under the previous regimes continued, including torture, excessive use of force against demonstrators and restrictions on free speech.

Popular uprisings brought down long-standing regimes. Protesters and dissidents were met with violence and repression. Little attempt was made to bring perpetrators to justice.

Anti-government protesters took to the streets across Africa. Security forces responded with violence, including shooting at demonstrators with live ammunition. In most cases, those responsible for the violence were not held to account.

Indigenous Peoples across the region struggled to have their rights recognized, including land rights. Corporate interests frequently took precedence over Indigenous land rights.

Migrants passing through Mexico continued to be threatened, raped and killed.

Throughout the former Soviet Union, human rights defenders and journalists were frequently harassed, intimidated and beaten. In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, government critics faced unfair trials and harassment.

Minority groups including migrants, Roma people and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people faced widespread discrimination.

At least 1,500 refugees and migrants, including pregnant women and children, drowned trying to enter Europe by sea. The EU turned back boats, rather than preventing deaths. Italy deported many Tunisian arrivals, and countries including France and the UK refused to resettle Libyan migrants.

Freedom of expression was restricted as states silenced poets, journalists, bloggers and critics. Internet use was curtailed and new restrictions were sought on social media in India. Thousands of dissidents were held in North Korean prison camps. Internet use was curtailed; Thailand imposed lengthy sentences for critics of the royal family.

Religious and ethnic minorities frequently faced discrimination. In Pakistan, two politicians were assassinated for challenging the use of blasphemy laws. The Ahmadiyya community were discriminated against in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and elsewhere.

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THE DEADLY GLOBAL ARMS TRADE

IN JULY 2012, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WILL CALL FOR A STRONG ARMS TRADE TREATY TO PREVENT WEAPONS BEING TRANSFERRED TO COUNTRIES WHERE THEY ARE LIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, WAR CRIMES OR POVERTY.

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HERE’S WHY:

- AT LEAST 60% OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DOCUMENTED BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HAVE INVOLVED SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS.
- AT LEAST 55 ARMED GROUPS AND GOVERNMENT FORCES USE CHILDREN AS SOLDIERS OR AUXILIARY TROOPS, ACCORDING TO THE UN.
- ONLY 35 COUNTRIES PUBLISH NATIONAL REPORTS ON TRANSFERS OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS.

THE DEATH PENALTY

IN 2011 WE MADE PROGRESS ON ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY – BUT THERE IS STILL MORE WORK TO DO:

- 21 OF THE WORLD’S 198 COUNTRIES CARRIED OUT Executions – DOWN BY MORE THAN A THIRD FROM A DECADE AGO.
- CHINA EXECUTED THOUSANDS OF ITS CITIZENS – IT DID NOT MAKE PUBLIC THE TOTAL NUMBER.
- AT LEAST 18,750 PEOPLE WERE UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH AT THE END OF 2011.
- PUBLIC EXECUTIONS WERE STILL BEING CARRIED OUT IN IRAN, NORTH KOREA, SAUDI ARABIA AND SOMALIA.

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights. Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.