

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CASES DOCUMENT

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Write for Rights. 2013's Cases. Summary and some key contextual information

Ethiopia – Eskinder Nega. Ethiopian journalist Eskinder Nega is serving an 18-year prison sentence for “terrorism”. He was detained and charged in 2011 after giving speeches and writing articles criticizing the government and supporting free speech. He is a prisoner of conscience and Amnesty International asks for his immediate release.

Key contextual facts:

- Repression of dissent has continuously increased since the disputed 2005 elections. The excessively broad Anti-Terrorism Proclamation - under which Eskinder was tried - was introduced in 2009. It has predominantly been used against journalists, political opposition members and peaceful protestors.
- The crackdown on freedom of expression/dissent became still worse in early 2011, when the government appeared to fear that the Middle East and North Africa style uprisings might spread to Ethiopia.
- According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Ethiopia has the second highest number of journalists in jail in Africa - after Eritrea - and is the 8th biggest jailer of journalists in the world.
- There are almost no independent media left in Ethiopia. A number of other journalists have been imprisoned, are on trial or in pre-trial detention. Journalists significantly self censor under risk of harassment, arrest and prosecution.
- Restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of association manifest in different ways, including major restrictions on the work of human rights organisations and the arrests of peaceful protestors.

Some previous public materials:

Public Statement: [Ethiopia: End stifling of peaceful protests.](#)

Report: Ethiopia: [Dismantling dissent: Intensified crackdown on free speech in Ethiopia.](#)

Nigeria – Badia East Community. In February 2013, at least 266 structures in Badia East Community, Lagos State, were demolished by the authorities, affecting 2,237 households. The affected residents haven't received any compensation or alternative housing since then. Amnesty International is calling on the Governor of Lagos State to stop all forced evictions and ensure that those forcibly evicted receive compensation and alternative housing.

Key contextual facts:

- Forced evictions are not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. It is estimated that in the last five years, over 1.2 million people have been forcibly evicted from their homes in different parts of the country. There's a wide pattern of forced evictions across the African continent, mainly in larger cities.
- Such evictions generally target marginalized people, many of whom have lived for years without access to clean water, sanitation, adequate health care or education.

- Forced evictions often go hand-in-hand with other violations of human rights - particularly the use of excessive force to carry out the evictions. Human rights defenders and journalists investigating cases of forced evictions also face harassment.
- The main victims of excessive use of force are women, children and the elderly, as evictions normally occur during the day, when most men are away at work. Women are also exposed to violence after evictions, when men are in a desperate search for housing. Such violence includes rape, sexual assault, and armed robbery.
- Poverty is rife in Nigeria, despite it being Africa's largest oil producer.

Some previous public materials:

News Story: *Nigeria: Lagos state government must stop wave of devastating forced evictions.*

Report: *Nigeria: If you love your life, move out! Forced eviction in Badia East, Lagos State, Nigeria.*

Honduras – COFADEH. The Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) is one of the country's main human rights organizations. It seeks justice for current and past human rights abuses. Its members have suffered intimidation, threats and attacks. Amnesty International calls on the Honduran authorities to endorse their work and protect them.

Key contextual facts:

- Over the last years, Honduras has experienced, escalating levels of violence, insecurity and impunity. The country held general elections last 24 November. Amnesty International called on presidential candidates before the elections to tackle the human rights crisis in the country and to protect those who defends human rights.
- One of the main concerns in Honduras is the consistent trend of killings, physical attacks and threats against human rights defenders – including: Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant and peasant leaders, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) activists, lawyers and journalists. All these attacks are carried out with almost total impunity.
- According to United Nations figures, the Honduran homicide rate was 92 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011, the highest in the world. A full 82 per cent of the homicides committed in the country in 2010 involved the use of a firearm. Only 20 per cent of homicides in the country are investigated.
- In many cases, the police and army are actually contributing to the violence instead of combating it, something which is exacerbated by an almost total lack of accountability for the abuses.
- According to the National Institute of Statistics, for 2010, more than 60 per cent of the population was living in poverty and more than 40 per cent in extreme poverty.

Some previous public materials:

Press release: *Honduras: Elections should mark a turning point for human rights.*

Letter to presidential candidates to 24 November elections.

Mexico – Miriam López. In February 2011, moments after dropping off her children at school, Miriam Isaura López Vargas was detained by two men and driven to a military barracks in the city of Tijuana. For the following week, she was raped and tortured repeatedly in order to get her confession to a crime that she had not committed. Amnesty International asks the Mexican authorities to carry out a full investigation and bring those responsible to justice.

Key contextual facts:

- Human rights violations have increased substantially in Mexico since 2006 when the authorities decided to deploy thousands of police and military officers to combat violent drug cartels. Torture, disappearances and unlawful killings have all gone up.
- Since 2012, President Enrique Peña Nieto has promised to respect human rights, but so far this is an empty promise as his government has failed to put in place any substantive measures to tackle human rights violations and impunity.
- Across Mexico criminal suspects often face detention and trial on the basis of evidence obtained under torture and ill-treatment. This often leaves innocent people behind bars and criminals on the streets. Prosecutors routinely fail to investigate allegations of torture and bring those responsible to account.
- Between 2006 and 2012, the number of torture and ill-treatment complaints at the National Commission of Human Rights increased by 500 per cent.
- In the period 2009-2012, Amnesty International recorded reports of torture in all areas of the country.

Some previous public materials:

Press Release: *Mexico: Government's fine words on human rights defy reality.*

Report: *Mexico: Known abusers, but victims ignored: Torture and ill-treatment in Mexico.*

Cambodia. Yorm Bopha. Yorm Bopha, a passionate campaigner for the rights of her Boeung Kak Lake community in Phnom Penh where thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes, was unjustly imprisoned in September 2012. While she was released on bail on 22 November, Amnesty International will continue campaign for her full acquittal.

Key contextual facts:

- Housing rights activists and human rights defenders such as Yorm Bopha are often convicted in Cambodia on fabricated or spurious charges after unfair trials. As a result many Cambodians - especially those living in poverty - do not trust the courts, which lack independence.
- Tens of thousands of people have been forcibly evicted across Cambodia, in both rural and urban areas while Indigenous people face expulsion from their traditional land. Most of these forced evictions are linked to development construction projects of land companies owned by well-connected business people.
- Forced eviction often leads to loss of possessions and livelihood, the break up of communities, and a deterioration of a family's mental and physical wellbeing. Access to education and health services can be disrupted.
- Many victims of forced eviction receive inadequate compensation and are resettled in remote areas. Husbands may need to spend long periods of time away from home seeking work, leaving their wives to cope alone.
- Women are at the forefront of the fight against forced evictions. Many have taken the lead in their communities' struggle for justice, putting themselves at risk to defend their communities.

Some previous public materials:

Press Release: *Cambodia: Injustice prevails despite activist's release on bail.*

Report: *Cambodia: Eviction and resistance in Cambodia: Five women tell their stories*

Myanmar – Dr. Tun Aung. A community leader, Dr. Tun Aung was sentenced to 17 years in prison after an unfair trial. He was arrested following violent riots in Rakhine state in June 2012. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and asks for his immediate and unconditional release.

Key contextual facts:

- In July 2013, President Thein Sein articulated a promise to clear Myanmar's jails of prisoners of conscience by the end of 2013, however peaceful activists and human rights defenders continue to face arbitrary arrest, detention and harassment in Myanmar. Prisoners of conscience and other detainees in Myanmar are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.
- Following large-scale and widespread violence between the Buddhist and mostly Rohingya Muslim communities in Rakhine state in 2012, predominantly anti-Muslim attacks erupted in several towns in 2013. The anti-Muslim violence has resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of individuals. More than 140,000 individuals – mostly from the Rohingya Muslim minority – remain displaced across Rakhine state. Most live in official internally displaced person (IDP) camps and unofficial temporary shelters.
- The Rohingya have faced discrimination in Myanmar for generations. They are not recognized as an official ethnic group and continue to be denied equal access to citizenship rights. Their rights to study, work, travel, marry, practise their religion, and receive health services are restricted to varying degrees.
- Several Muslim leaders accused of orchestrating community protests against a government-led population registration exercise conducted in Rakhine state in April 2013 have been arrested in recent months. This includes prominent Rohingya Lawyer Kyaw Hla Aung who is on trial and faces the possibility of a lengthy prison sentence.

Some previous public materials:

Press release: [Myanmar: Release of prisoners of conscience positive but many still locked up](#)

Urgent Action: [Myanmar activist facing long prison sentence: Kyaw Hla Aung.](#)

Belarus – Ihar Tsikhanyuk. Shortly after an attempt to register the Human Rights Centre Lambda, Ihar Tsikhanyuk, one of the founders, an openly gay man and gay rights activist, was taken to a police station where he was punched, verbally abused and threatened with further violence. Amnesty International asks the Belarusian authorities to investigate the ill-treatment and threats against Ihar Tsikhanyuk and bring those responsible to justice.

Key contextual facts:

- The authorities in Belarus regularly deny the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression, preventing people from speaking out in public, holding demonstrations or setting up civil organizations.
- Human rights defenders, trade unions, environmental campaigners and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals – often see the exercise of their human rights denied.
- People trying to register independent organizations of any kind have to grapple with restrictive legislation which authorities apply in ways that further restrict freedom of association. Activists who function without registration face the threat of prosecution for acting in the name of an unregistered organization.
- No new political parties have been registered in Belarus since 2000 because of stringent registration requirements. Members of independent trade unions also face discrimination in the workplace.
- The Law on Mass Actions violates the fundamental right of people in Belarus to demonstrate. Even a one-man march or protest is considered a violation of the Law. Peaceful protesters are frequently fined or sentenced to short periods of detention for minor offences such as swearing in public.

Some previous media materials:

Report: [Belarus: What Is Not Permitted Is Prohibited: Silencing Civil Society in Belarus.](#)

Russia – Three Bolotnaya Detainees. Vladimir Gheorgievich Akimenkov, Artiom Viktorovich Saviolov and Mikhail Aleksandrovich Kosenko were detained during a protest in Bolotnaya Square in Moscow in May 2012, along with hundreds of others. Released shortly afterwards, they, as well as dozens of the others, were rearrested and have been in detention ever since. Amnesty International asks for immediate release of all peaceful protestors standing trial in "Bolotnaya case" and fair trials for all.

Key context facts:

- The systematic undermining and violation of the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association have been the hallmark of Vladimir Putin's human rights record during his third mandate as Russian president.
- The wave of protests sparked by the much-contested Duma elections in December 2011 and Presidential elections of March 2012 prompted a raft of restrictions. The use of excessive force by police and arbitrary arrests have continued to mar protests.
- New laws have been introduced and many more amended as part of a broad clampdown on dissent, criticism and protest: The recent re-criminalization of defamation and the "blasphemy law" – a response to the Pussy Riot case – imposes further restrictions on the freedom of expression.
- The Foreign Agents Law has led to a wave of inspections of several hundred organisations across the country including Amnesty International's office in Moscow.
- The law banning "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" further increases discrimination and harassment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex people and explicitly infringes on their right to freedom of expression and assembly.

Some previous media materials:

Press Release: *Russia: Abhorrent use of punitive psychiatry to silence dissent.*

Report: *Russian Federation: Freedom under threat: The clampdown against freedoms of expression, assembly and association in Russia.*

Turkey – Hakan Yaman. On 3 June 2013, Hakan Yaman was walking home in Istanbul when he passed by a public demonstration against police violence in the context of the Gezi Park protests. He was caught up in a brutal attack by police officers, losing one eye and 80 per cent of the sight in the other. Amnesty International calls for an effective investigation to identify and bring those responsible for the attack to justice.

Key contextual facts:

- Turkish authorities committed human rights violations on a massive scale in the government's attempts to crush the Gezi Park protests this summer including the excessive use of force
- The use of live ammunition, tear gas, water cannon, plastic bullets and beatings of protestors left more than 8,000 people injured at the scene of demonstrations. The deaths of at least three protestors have been linked to the excessive use of force by police.
- The vast majority of police abuses are likely to go unpunished, while many of those who organised or participated in the protests have been vilified, abused and now face prosecution on unfair or inflated charges.
- Those who assisted protestors or reported on the protests – such as doctors, lawyers, journalists and even businesses - have faced threats and harassment.

- Many of those accused of organising of the protests are being investigated under anti-terrorism legislation.

Some previous public materials:

Press Release: [Turkey accused of gross human rights violations in Gezi Park protests.](#)

Report: [Turkey: Gezi Park protests: Brutal denial of the right to peaceful assembly in Turkey.](#)

Bahrain – 13 Opposition Activists. These thirteen men have been behind bars since 2011 for their activism and expressing their opinions. Across the political and religious spectrum, they dared to challenge the authorities. Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience and asks for their immediate and unconditional release.

Key contextual facts:

- Almost three years after the popular uprising in Bahrain, and beneath the fanfare of reform, prisoners of conscience remain behind bars and the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are still being suppressed. In recent months, not only have prisoners of conscience remained behind bars, but more people have been jailed simply for daring to express their views, whether via Twitter or on peaceful marches.
- On the second anniversary of the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), the government has not implemented the report's key recommendations.
- There's been no independent, effective and transparent investigation into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive use of force.
- On 28 July 2013 Bahrain's parliament recommended the King toughen punishments laid out in the 2006 anti-terrorism law. Within a few days, he issued several decrees curtailing the right to freedom of expression further, including banning all protests, sit-ins and public gatherings in the capital, Manama, indefinitely.
- At the UN Human Rights Council on 9 September 2013, 47 countries signed a joint statement expressing serious concern about the ongoing human rights violations in the country.

Previous public materials:

Press Release: [Bahrain: End crackdown on peaceful demonstrations.](#)

Report: Bahrain: ["Freedom has a price": Two years after Bahrain's uprising.](#)

Israel/OPT – Nabi Saleh. Nabi Saleh villagers face frequent violent repression from the Israeli army. Since December 2009 two peaceful protesters in Nabi Saleh have been killed following weekly demonstrations against Israel's continued military occupation and the expansion of illegal settlement. Amnesty International urges the Israeli authorities to stop the use of excessive force against demonstrators and to bring to justice officials responsible for the killings.

Key contextual facts:

- Over 500 Israeli checkpoints and barriers in the West Bank, as well as the separation fence/wall, restrict Palestinians' movement. Israel imposes a military blockade of the Gaza Strip which has now entered its seventh year. A myriad of restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on the movement of Palestinians amount to collective punishment, which is a violation of international law.
- Israel continues to build illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, in contravention of international law. At the same time, Israeli authorities fail to protect Palestinians and their property from settlers' violence and continue to demolish Palestinian homes and carry out forced evictions. This year, until September, Israeli authorities demolished at least 515 structures, including homes, displacing at least 872 civilians.

- The Israeli military authorities govern the occupied West Bank, including the areas under Palestinian Authority administration but excluding East Jerusalem, using a regime of military orders. It prohibits all gatherings of 10 or more persons “for a political purpose or of a matter that could be interpreted as political” unless they have received authorization in advance.
- Israeli army continues to use excessive and/or unnecessary force against Palestinian demonstrators in the West Bank, having killed dozens and injured thousands of protestors against Israel’s military occupation and the associated policies since 2009. While since April 2011 the army is required to investigate all killings of unarmed civilians in the West Bank, these investigations do not meet international standards.
- Since 2009, Israel has banned Palestinians - including landowners - in Nabi Saleh from access to their spring and surrounding land. Meanwhile settlers enjoy free access and are allowed to continue building in its vicinity.

Previous public materials:

News story: [Israel: Stop judicial ‘bullying’ of Palestinian activists.](#)

[Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in Amnesty International’s Annual Report.](#)

Tunisia – Jabeur Mejri. He was jailed in March 2012 for seven and a half years after posts he made about the Prophet Muhammad on his Facebook page were deemed “insulting to Islam and Muslims”. Jabeur Mejri is the first prisoner of conscience in Tunisia since the December 2010-January 2011 uprising that toppled former President Ben Ali and Amnesty International is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Key contextual facts:

- The new Tunisian authorities promised to uphold freedom of expression and improve legislation. In practice, however, they have resorted to old, repressive tactics, despite the adoption of new decrees on press freedom.
- Old laws remain in place, allowing for the prosecution of bloggers, artists, journalists, critics of the authorities and individuals expressing ideas deemed as not conforming to social and cultural norms.
- Different pieces of legislation criminalize the publication, distribution or sale of information that is said to disrupt “public order” and “public morals”, to constitute “indecent behaviour” or “defamation”, or to attack “sacred values”.
- According to the Telecommunications Code anyone accused of disturbing or insulting others through public communication networks can be jailed for up to two years.
- Tunisian journalists and media workers have also accused the government of trying to take control of the media following controversial appointments of people to head state media organizations.

Previous public materials:

Press Release: [Freedom of expression on trial in Tunisia.](#)

Report: [Tunisia: Last opportunity for Tunisian lawmakers to enshrine human rights for all in Tunisia’s new Constitution.](#)