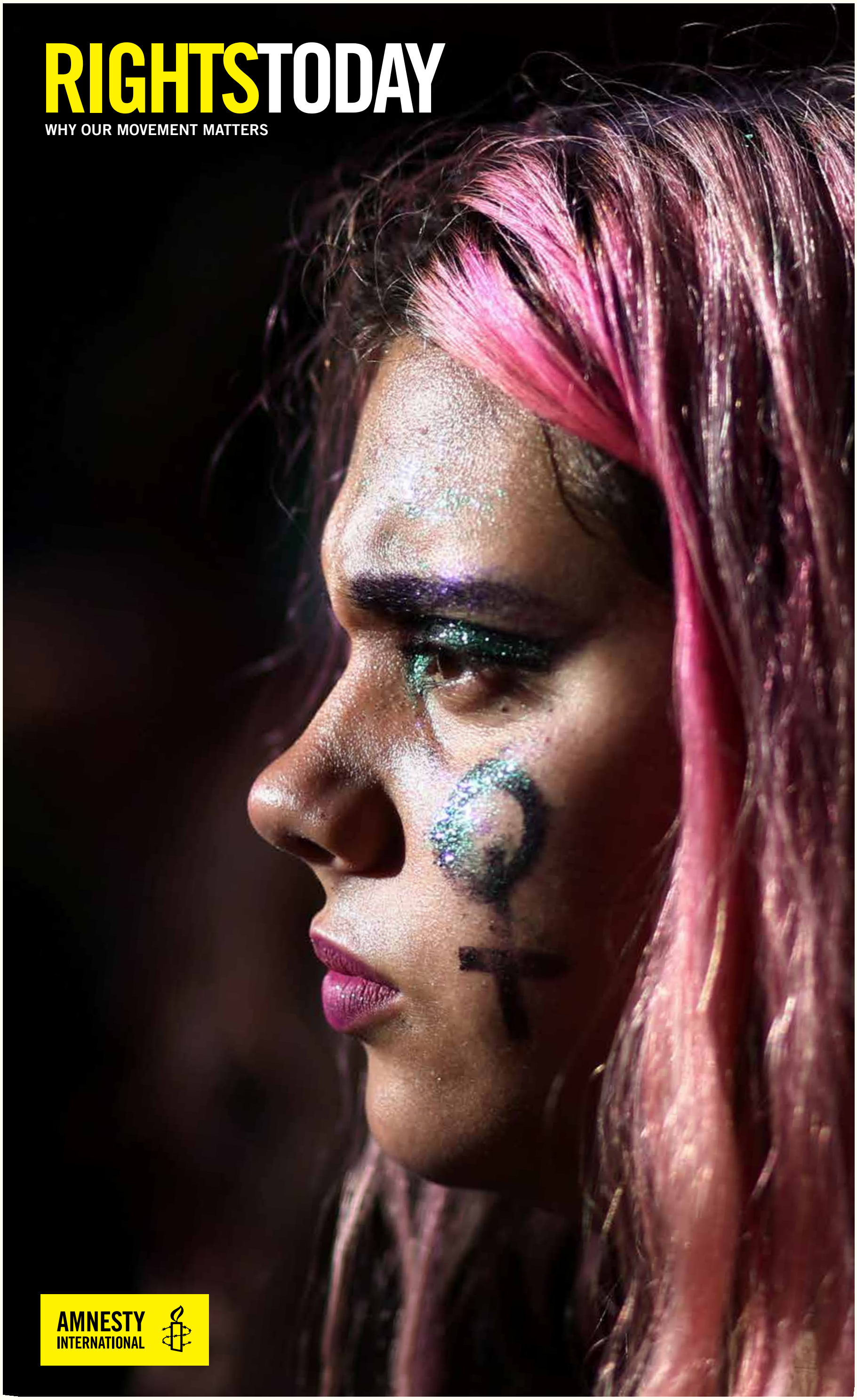
# RIGHTSTODAY

## WHY OUR MOVEMENT MATTERS



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

**Contents**

2 Preface
3 Kumi Naidoo – a year defined by women's resistance
6 #ToxicTwitter and the silencing of women online
8 Women bear the brunt of inequality
10 Refugees need meaningful change
14 A year in arms supplies to the Saudi/UAE coalition
16 Focus on Africa
18 Focus on the Middle East and North Africa
22 Focus on Europe and Central Asia
28 Focus on Southeast Asia and the Pacific
32 Focus on East Asia
34 Focus on South Asia
38 Focus on the Americas
42 Five women leading the struggle for human rights
46 The "not enough" impact report
50 Birthright – a personal perspective on the 70th anniversary of the UDHR

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all. 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.

© Amnesty International 2018
Except where otherwise noted, content in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons (attribution, non-commercial, no derivatives, international 4.0) licence.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode
For more information please visit the permissions page on our website: www.amnesty.org
Where material is attributed to a copyright owner other than Amnesty International this material is not subject to the Creative Commons licence.
First published in 2018
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

Index: POL 10/9090/2018
Original language: English

**Cover photo: International Women's Day in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 8 March 2018. © Reuters/Marcos Brindicci.**

**As 2018 draws to a close, we reflect on the 70 years that have passed since the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and ask ourselves: "How far have we come?"**

The Universal Declaration pronounces rights that each and every one of us possesses, by the very fact that we are human. Every year since 1948, progress has been made towards every person enjoying all those rights. More and more people are living lives free from want, fear and discrimination. And yet there are always places where humanity takes a step backwards too. Much more work remains to be done before we fully realize the Universal Declaration's vision of a world where all are free and equal. Conflict, prejudice, unequal sharing of resources and poor governance are just some of the reasons why many of us have yet to enjoy all our rights.

In this summary of the state of the world's human rights, we turn our attention to a handful of key issues and themes that have been prominent in 2018. We examine some of the defining moments for each region, look at key movements that have called for change, and consider in particular how the rights of women have fared during the year. We also acknowledge the many human rights defenders working around the world today, and pay tribute to those who have lost their lives or freedom in the course of their work. Even in the darkest moments, their courage gives us the strength to continue our fight for human rights. ■

# A year defined by women's resistance

**KUMI NAIDOO,** SECRETARY GENERAL

Today, the world honours the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This extraordinary document, adopted on 10 December 1948, brought the international community together in an unprecedented show of unity, setting out for the first time a bill of rights that would apply to all people, and in doing so struck at the heart of injustice across the globe.

**Abortion rights activists gather as lawmakers are expected to vote on a bill legalizing abortion, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 8 August 2018. © Reuters/Marcos Brindicci.**

**Yet seven decades on, we have seen a weak global economy give rise to bombastic figureheads who use macho posturing, misogyny, xenophobia and homophobia to give the appearance that they are "tough guy" leaders. This mirrors the rise of fascism in the 1930s, following an earlier economic depression, and its culmination in the horrors of the Holocaust; one response to this was the Universal Declaration and its proclamation that all people "are born free and equal in dignity and rights".**

**In 2018, we witnessed many of these "tough guy" leaders trying to undermine the very principle of equality – the bedrock of human rights law.** They sought to demonize and persecute already marginalized and vulnerable communities. But nowhere has the struggle for equality this year been louder or more visible than in the fight for women's rights.

## THE POWER OF WOMEN'S VOICES

Women around the world have been at the forefront of the battle for human rights in 2018. In India and South Africa, thousands took to the streets to protest against endemic sexual violence. In Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively, women activists risked arrest to resist the driving ban and forced *hijab* (veiling). In Argentina, Ireland and Poland, demonstrators rallied in vast numbers to demand an end to oppressive abortion laws. Millions of people in the USA, Europe and parts of Asia joined #MeToo-led women's marches to demand an end to misogyny and abuse. In northeastern Nigeria, thousands of displaced women mobilized for justice for the abuses they have suffered at the hands of Boko Haram fighters and the Nigerian security forces.

The burgeoning power of women's voices cannot be overstated. Spurred on by powerful cries for women's rights to finally be respected, citizens of Ireland voted by a landslide to overturn the abortion ban. In Saudi Arabia, women were finally granted the right to drive. In Iceland and Sweden, new laws were passed recognizing sex without consent as rape. In the USA, accusations of sexual misconduct sent shockwaves through the Hollywood patriarchy, challenging decades of impunity.

## THE DIRE REALITY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Yet we cannot celebrate the stratospheric rise of women's activism without recognizing why women need to fight so hard. The stark reality is that, in 2018, many governments openly support policies and laws that subjugate and suppress women.

Globally, 40% of women of childbearing age live in countries where abortion remains highly restricted, and some 225 million do not have access to modern contraception. Despite widespread activism, El Salvador refused to decriminalize abortion in any circumstances, and the Argentinian senate narrowly voted against a bill that would have legalized abortion on demand in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. At the same time, Polish and Guatemalan policy-makers continue to advocate for stricter abortion laws, while in the USA, funding cuts to family planning clinics have put the health of millions of women at risk.

Gender-based violence disproportionately affects women, transgender people and gender non-conforming people; yet it remains a human rights crisis that politicians continue to ignore. In July, Bulgaria chose not to ratify the Istanbul Convention, a European treaty for preventing and combating domestic violence and violence against women, after its Constitutional Court declared it "unconstitutional". In August, Luxembourg became the 33rd state to ratify the Convention; yet, even with a relatively large number of European states signing up to abide by it, the statistics still paint a grim picture.

One in 10 girls worldwide is reportedly sexually assaulted by the age of 20, while only a third of EU countries recognize that sex without consent is rape. Elsewhere, in interviews with Amnesty International, women from conflict-affected areas of Nigeria, Iraq, South Sudan and Myanmar described the horrors of sexual violence they have faced, often by their country's own security forces.

Throughout the world, women who experience intersecting layers of discrimination – including based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, race or socio-economic status – face unique and additional human rights violations. In Somalia, women with disabilities are often subjected to forced marriages and domestic violence. In Canada, Indigenous women are six times more likely to be murdered than other women. We in the women's and human rights movements need to do more to recognize how these intersecting

Kumi Nadoo

forms of discrimination affect people's lives and to ensure the voices of the most marginalized are heard.

In response to women's resistance and activism, anti-rights groups across Latin America and Europe have adopted a new tactic of repression: labelling feminists and LGBTI activists as so-called "proponents of gender ideology" who, according to them, pose an existential threat to "marriage and family values". Such groups often try to silence women and LGBTI people who speak up for human rights, including through campaigns of online abuse. Thus, people of all genders campaigning against gender inequality are also fighting the additional battle to defend their rights to speak out at all.

Research carried out by Amnesty International this year, one of the first studies of its kind on human rights and violence against women online, confirms what many women know to be true: that social media platforms have proved both a blessing and a curse. Companies and governments have comprehensively failed to protect users from a deluge of online abuse, prompting many women in particular to self-censor or even leave these platforms altogether.

Conversely, social media has given more prominence in some parts of the world to women's calls for equality in the workplace, a battle that has been raging for decades, centuries even, but which gained renewed attention during the year in calls to narrow the gender pay gap, currently standing at 23% globally. Women worldwide are not only paid less, on average, than men, but are more likely to do unpaid work and to work in informal, insecure and unskilled jobs. Much of this is due to social norms that consider women and their work to be of lower status.

Without workplace equality, women will continue to bear the brunt of the world's shaky economic recovery. In the UK, women have reportedly shouldered 86% of the burden of austerity measures put in place since 2010 due to their reliance on social security benefits.

For most of history, women have been trapped in a cycle of discrimination driven by gender hierarchies and norms. The political participation of women is essential to tackle laws that entrench social and economic inequality. Although record numbers of women ran for public office in 2018, progress remains painfully slow. Currently, only 17% of all heads of state or government, and 23% of the world's parliamentarians, are women.

## 2019: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

The 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration is an opportunity to reflect on what was a momentous achievement for all the women and men involved in its creation. It took the active lobbying of a woman – Hansa Mehta – to successfully change the wording of Article 1 of the Declaration from "All men are born free and equal", to "All human beings are born free and equal." And Hansa Mehta was right to be concerned that women would be excluded from human rights protections. Now, 70 years on, we are still fighting for women's rights to be recognized as human rights. One of the most urgent steps governments must take to address this is to genuinely commit to the international bill of rights for women – the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – and ensure, through national implementation, that women have freedom from discrimination and violence.

CEDAW is the second most ratified human rights treaty, with 189 states parties. Yet governments must stop merely paying lip-service to women's rights. If the undeniable surge of women's activism this year proves anything, it is that people will not accept this. And neither will we. In 2019, Amnesty International will be increasing our lobbying efforts to ensure that governments drop their reservations to CEDAW with immediate effect and take the bold steps necessary to fully realize women's rights. Now, more than ever, we must stand with women's movements, amplify women's voices in all their diversity and fight for the recognition of all our rights. I hope you will join us. ■

**LGBT supporters run from tear gas fired by police after attempting to march to Taksim Square on 25 June 2017 in Istanbul, Turkey. The 2017 LGBT Pride March was banned by authorities for the third year. Organizers defied the order and people attempted to march to Taksim Square but were met by a heavy police presence. The crowd was dispersed by tear gas and several people were arrested. © Chris McGrath/ Getty Images.**

# #TOXICTWITTER AND THE SILENCING OF WOMEN ONLINE

**Social media allows people around the world to express themselves by debating, networking and sharing information. Yet, in 2018, women have been increasingly vocal about a particular threat to their right to freedom of expression on social media platforms: the proliferation of violence and abuse online.**

## SELF-CENSORSHIP

Many women who spoke to Amnesty International as part of our research on this issue said that violence and abuse flourish on the social media platform Twitter, often with little accountability. The violence and abuse many women experience on Twitter has a detrimental effect on their right to express themselves equally, freely and without fear. Instead of strengthening women's voices, these experiences lead women to self-censor what they post and limit their interactions online. In some cases, it drives women away from Twitter completely.

At a watershed moment when women around the world are using their collective power to speak out and amplify their voices through social media platforms, Twitter is failing to adequately respect human rights and effectively tackle violence and abuse on its platform. This means that, instead of women using their voices to create change in the world, many are being pushed backwards towards a culture of silence.

Violence and abuse against women on Twitter takes various forms, including direct or indirect threats of physical or sexual violence; abuse targeting one or more aspects of a woman's identity, such as racism or transphobia; targeted harassment; privacy violations such as doxing (uploading private identifying information publicly to cause alarm or distress); and the sharing of sexual or intimate images of a woman without her consent. The aim of this violence and abuse is to create a hostile online environment for women with the goal of shaming, intimidating, degrading, belittling and ultimately silencing them.

This year, Amnesty International acted to address this dangerous trend which threatens the ability of women to participate freely in the public realm. Amnesty's International's report *#ToxicTwitter: Violence and abuse against women online*, found that women are targeted with violence and abuse on Twitter for a variety of reasons.

Sometimes it is for speaking out about certain – often feminist – issues. Sometimes it is because they are public figures. Although people of all genders can experience violence and abuse online, the abuse experienced by women is often sexist or misogynistic in nature, and online threats of violence against women are often sexualized and include specific references to women's bodies. Women who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination offline often find that violence and abuse online also targets their different identities. Non-binary people can also face targeted and misogynistic abuse online for not conforming to gender norms.

Twitter's policies on hateful conduct and abuse are designed to provide guidance and clarity on which behaviours the company deems acceptable on the platform. However, although Twitter's "hateful conduct policy" covers many forms of abuse that affect women's rights, it means little for women on Twitter if such policies are not consistently enforced in practice. Many women told Amnesty International that when they report abuse on Twitter it is often met with inaction and silence from the company. One of the most pernicious impacts of the combination of inaction and inconsistency in responding to reports of abuse is the detrimental effect this has on women reporting such experiences in the future. Women who are the targets of abuse bear the burden of reporting it. This not only takes time, but also takes an emotional toll on women. When women have – or hear of other people having – negative experiences reporting abuse to Twitter, they are less likely to undertake the effort of reporting it.

Twitter should be assessing, on an ongoing and proactive basis, how its policies and practices affect users' rights to freedom of expression and opinion as well as other rights, and taking steps to mitigate or prevent any possible negative impact. It is also critical that Twitter is transparent about its policies and practices and the steps it is taking to identify and address human rights abuses.

Despite some improvements, Twitter is failing to adequately meet its responsibility to respect human rights in the context of violence and abuse against women on its platform. The steps it has taken are not sufficient to tackle the scale and nature of the problem. Women have the right to live free from discrimination and violence. They also have the right to freely express themselves, both online and offline. Twitter's policies and practices clearly fail to respect these rights.

Ensuring that everyone can freely participate online and without fear of violence and abuse is vital to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to freedom of expression. The silencing and censoring impact of violence and abuse against women on Twitter can have far-reaching and harmful repercussions on how women, particularly younger women and those from marginalized communities, fully exercise their right to participate in public life and freely express themselves online for years to come.

In 2019, Twitter, as a company, must act on its responsibility to respect all human rights – including the rights to non-discrimination and freedom of expression and opinion. It must demonstrate that it hears the voices of women, and take concrete steps to avoid causing or contributing to abuses of those rights. This includes acting to identify, prevent, address and account for human rights abuses that are linked to its operations.

Violence and abuse against women on this scale can be ended. Twitter, first and foremost, must enforce its own policies on hateful conduct and abuse.

Although the company states that it "doesn't tolerate behaviour that harasses, intimidates or uses fear to silence another person's voice", this is exactly what is happening to many women who use its platform.

Twitter should publicly share comprehensive and meaningful information about the nature and levels of violence and abuse against women, as well as other groups, on the platform, and how the company responds to it.

It must improve its reporting mechanisms to ensure consistent application of its own rules and a better response to complaints of violence and abuse.

Finally, Twitter should provide more clarity about how it interprets and identifies violence and abuse on the platform and how it handles reports of such abuse. It should undertake far more proactive measures in educating users and raising awareness about security and privacy features on the platform that will help women enjoy a safer and less toxic Twitter experience.

Continued inaction by Twitter in 2019 would effectively be silencing women. Twitter must therefore undertake, with urgency, these concrete steps to tackle the problem once and for all. ■

**Above: Protesters stage a demonstration as part of a nationwide strike by women against gender inequality to coincide with International Women's Day in Bilbao, Spain. 8 March 2018. © Reuters/Vincent West.**
**Above left: A demonstrator chants with a megaphone during a one-day strike to defend women's rights on International Women's Day in Madrid, Spain, on 8 March 2018. © Pablo Cuadra/Getty Images.**
**Below left: Women students at Delhi University and members of the group Pinjratod, or Break the cages, protest in favour of equal rules for men and women in Indian universities, especially curfew timing and other rules for women in university hostels. Arts Faculty, North Campus, Delhi, India, 8 October 2018. © Sanchit Khanna/Hindustan Times/Getty.**

**23%**
**OF WOMEN**
**POLLED IN EIGHT COUNTRIES HAVE EXPERIENCED ONLINE ABUSE OR HARASSMENT**

# WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF INEQUALITY

**Last January, the World Economic Forum made the call for 2018 to be "the year for women to thrive". It urged governments to raise women's participation in the labour force to that of men.**

**But two months earlier, in November 2017, the organization had said that it will take 217 years to close the economic gender gap.**

Prior to this, in 2015, following concerted campaigning by women's groups and development and human rights organizations, governments had made a political commitment, under the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to achieve gender equality by 2030.

There is a stark mismatch between the commitment to achieve gender equality within 12 years - including through women's equal rights to economic resources - and the prognosis that it will in fact take more than two centuries.

## BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

The barriers to women achieving their economic and social rights are well documented. The UN says that women own only 12.8% of the world's agricultural land. Lack of security of tenure is a major obstacle to women's rights to food, work and housing in rural and urban areas. Discriminatory inheritance, and personal and property laws frequently impede women's ability to rent, own or register land or property. Amnesty International's 2018 report on Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) demonstrated how the traditional system of land allocation, *kukhonta*, by chiefs who traditionally allocate land to men, often disadvantages women. One woman, forcibly evicted from her home after the authorities demolished it, told us "It's very difficult as a woman to *kukhonta*. You need a male. Otherwise you won't be able to get land, or be heard."

For more than a decade, Amnesty International has called on governments to guarantee a minimum degree of security of tenure to everyone. This must include protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats. Governments continue, however, to carry out land acquisitions for large commercial projects or redevelopment of urban areas in ways which flagrantly breach international law and result in forced evictions.

The impacts are deeply gendered because of women's differential access to land and property rights, and drive women into, or further into, poverty. For example, Indigenous Sengwer women described to Amnesty International how forced evictions from Kenya's Embobut forest destroyed their financial autonomy because they lost access to the forest, land and livestock upon which they depend for their livelihoods and cultural identity. A Sengwer woman, who received no compensation, said, "I am hosted [living in someone else's home], I have no land, no bedding, I hardly have food. I do casual labour in people's farms. I live in destitution."

## GROSSLY INADEQUATE PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO AND AT WORK

According to the World Bank, Brazil, Egypt, France, India, Russia and 99 other countries still have laws which prevent women from working in specific jobs. More than 2.7 billion women are therefore legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men. The Fielding School of Public Health, a think tank, found that only 87

**Left: A worker delivering vegetables rests on a rickshaw at Divisoria Market in Manila, Philippines, 12 July 2018. © Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images. Above: Participants march during the Labour Day Parade organized by the Central Organization of Trade Unions Kenya (COTU-K) at Uhuru Park in Nairobi on 1 May 2018. © Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images. Right: Water vendor Esther Njuguna in Nairobi, Kenya, 2 March 2018. A mother of four, she has delivered water to customers for the past 18 months, a business decision she made after determining that no-one could deliver water when she needed it. © Biko Macoins/AFP/Getty Images.**

countries guarantee equal pay between men and women for work of equal value.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 740 million women work in the informal economy where there is a lack of legal protection and limited or no access to social security systems.

Domestic workers are often in a particularly vulnerable situation. Amnesty International's campaigns in Lebanon, Qatar, Hong Kong SAR and Indonesia have highlighted domestic workers' vulnerability to severe labour and other human rights abuses because of gaps in labour laws and/or poor enforcement. Women who work in informal economies and in many export processing zones face legal and practical barriers to joining trade unions and exercising their rights to collective bargaining.

Women comprise the majority of workers in certain segments of global supply chains, like clothing and horticulture, according to the ILO, but tend to be disproportionately concentrated in low-wage or low-status jobs. Amnesty International's ongoing campaigns around palm oil and cobalt in global supply chains have highlighted the failure of some of the world's wealthiest companies to undertake adequate human rights due diligence.

Changing employment patterns, such as increased offshoring and outsourcing in global supply chains and in the gig economy, especially when combined with insecurity of work and low pay, raise significant challenges to closing the gender wage gap.

Governments need to urgently adapt labour rights frameworks and modes of enforcement to address gaps in the protection of women's rights to, and at, work. Companies need to identify, prevent and address risks to labour and other human rights throughout their global operations and supply chains. Governments must make a substantial paradigm shift in the way they assign legal responsibility within corporate groups, and ensure that all victims have access to remedies.

## WOMEN'S UNPAID AND CARE WORK

Women continue to bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid and care work. According to data analysed by the UN from 83 countries, women carry out more than twice as much unpaid care and domestic work as men. This restricts their ability to access education and gainful employment opportunities, and adversely affects their incomes. According to the ILO, as the educational and work experience gaps between women and men narrow, the gender pay gap remains wider than expected.

Gender inequalities in work and the burden of unpaid and care work also result in gaps in social protection cover for women. Furthermore, women make up nearly 65% of people over retirement age who do not have a regular pension. Almost 750 million women also do not benefit from a statutory right to maternity leave. It is essential that governments recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, including through better provision of public services and social care programmes.

These inequalities are compounded by regressive austerity measures and budget cuts to key public services in many countries. For example, in Spain, delays in implementing legislation to regulate long-term care has had a huge impact on informal carers, most of whom are women. Similarly, Chad's austerity measures have had a serious impact on the public health sector and undermined access to basic health care for women and girls. This has a severe effect on economically vulnerable women and girls who live in rural areas. One 29-year-old pregnant woman who lives 12km from her nearest health centre told Amnesty International, "I did not come before because I did not have the money for the health tests, nor money to buy iron tablets or purchase the booklet..."

## GOVERNMENTS MUST ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY

It is positive that more than 100 governments have taken action to track budget allocations for gender equality. However, governments need to do far more to assess, develop, and implement appropriate fiscal and monetary policies to ensure gender equality. This includes implementing progressive taxation policies and addressing tax evasion and illicit financial flows in order to make more resources available to realize women's economic, social and cultural rights.

To achieve gender equality, governments can and must address gaps in legal frameworks in the enforcement of laws and in public spending. Women cannot wait another 200 years. ■

# REFUGEES NEED MEANINGFUL CHANGE

**The UN Global Compact on Refugees, initiated by the General Assembly, failed to deliver meaningful change for 25 million refugees.** In July, after 18 months of consultations, the final text of the Compact, which aimed to improve the international community's response to mass forcible displacement, was notably unambitious: a shameful blueprint for responsibility shirking.

Above right: A drone photo shows an aerial view of al-Karama camp which hosts thousands of war victims who fled their homeland due to ongoing civil war. 20 December 2017, near Qah village in the northwestern city of Idlib, Syria. © Burak Karacaoglu/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images.
Right: A migrant sits on board a rescue boat run by the NGO Proactiva Open Arms in the central Mediterranean Sea, 2 August 2018. © Reuters/Juan Medina.
Below: Two migrant boys walk through a makeshift area next to the Moria camp for refugees and migrants on the island of Lesbos, Greece, 17 September 2018. © Reuters/Giorgos Moutafis.

UNHCR REPORTED A

**54%**

DROP IN RESETTLEMENT PLACEMENTS FOR REFUGEES.

**The Compact will not change the situation for Rohingya refugees newly arrived in Bangladesh, or a generation of Somali youth born in refugee camps in Kenya, or refugees stuck in illegal and devastating limbo on the island of Nauru for the past five years.** For sub-Saharan Africa, now hosting 31% of the global refugee population, it will provide no relief.

## REFUGEES' VOICES GO UNHEARD

**Few of the world's refugees will have heard of the Global Compact.** Neither will they have been consulted on its process or content or involved in the negotiations. The Compact set out to be a comprehensive, all-encompassing collection of best practice but any momentum towards concrete commitments, mandatory requirements or bold action was crushed in the early rounds of discussion. Human rights and refugee law obligations were largely absent from the "zero" draft. Even fundamentals like the principle of *non-refoulement* and the right to seek asylum were omitted. Climate change as a cause of forced displacement was also dropped and there was little space for refugee voices to be institutionalized in any mechanisms. What remained was a strong bias towards states' interests rather than refugees' rights.

## STATES MAKE SEVERE CUTS TO RESETTLEMENT QUOTAS

Far more outrageous, however, were certain initiatives that states took outside the Compact negotiations. State actions this year have already shown that even the feeble ambitions recommended in the Compact are not likely to be abided by. Ahead of the text's finalization, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, reported a 54% drop in resettlement placements: 75,188 compared to 163,206 in the previous year due to a decline in resettlement quotas provided for by states. This is significantly less than the 1.2 million places UNHCR say are needed.

The US government cut its refugee admissions quota to 45,000, their lowest since the domestic Refugee Act was enacted in 1980, and apparently plan to decrease it to 30,000 in 2019. Amnesty International, meanwhile, documented the catastrophic and irreparable harm caused to thousands of asylum-seekers by the Trump administration's border and immigration policies. Policies included separating and detaining children and families, violating both US and international law.

## FORCIBLE RETURNS

In Europe, several states forcibly returned increasing numbers of Afghans who had not obtained refugee status or other forms of international protection, despite Afghanistan's deteriorating security situation, and amidst UN reports of record high civilian deaths. Amnesty International documented the risk that serious human rights violations and generalized violence pose to refugees returned to Afghanistan. Nevertheless, during 2018 Finland forcibly deported 75 people; Germany returned 366; the Netherlands returned around 28; and Norway returned 15. This was in addition to the almost 10,000 Afghans deported from Europe between 2015 and 2016.

## RESPONSIBILITY SHIRKING

European governments also failed to reform asylum rules, or agree on a common system of shared responsibility and co-operation for protecting and assisting refugees within Europe. As a result, frontline states continued to shoulder a disproportionate responsibility for processing asylum applications. Despite the considerable drop in numbers arriving in Europe, the EU and individual member states continued to advance externalization practices aimed at keeping people on the move well away from European borders, shifting the responsibility onto governments in Africa and elsewhere.

Refugees and migrants trapped in Libya bore the brunt of European policies, policies which supported the Libyan authorities in preventing departures and intercepting people risking their lives to reach safety and a better life in Europe. During the summer, over 1,700 people were reported dead or missing at sea in the central Mediterranean. Thousands were intercepted and pulled back to Libya to face arbitrary detention, violence, abuse and exploitation.

The EU/Turkey deal, a benchmark for responsibility shirking, led to thousands of refugees and migrants being confined in overcrowded and squalid EU-sponsored camps on the Greek islands. Women and girls were particularly in danger, facing harassment, sexual violence and other abuses.

In Israel, the government started 2018 with the publication of its Procedure for Deportation to Third Countries, under which single Sudanese and Eritrean men who had not applied for asylum by the end of 2017, or whose application was denied, would be served with deportation notices to either their country of origin, or to two unnamed "third countries", widely understood to be Uganda and Rwanda. Those refusing to leave would be detained until they agreed to do so; otherwise they would be transferred forcibly. Court proceedings halted implementation, but did not stop Israel's attempts to pass its responsibility for these refugees and asylum-seekers to Uganda, which already hosts 1.3 million refugees, the largest refugee population in Africa, and one of the top five worldwide. The procedure violates Israel's legal obligation of *non-refoulement*.

## CITIZEN ACTIVISM SEEKING SOLUTIONS

While governments abdicate their responsibilities, citizen activism and advocacy has raised its profile. But governments around the world are using an increasing variety of methods to hamper the work of people and organizations assisting migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. Administrative, criminal and other laws are some of the measures employed to deter, constrain, prosecute and punish those providing such assistance. From the seizure of NGO search and rescue ships in the Mediterranean to the detention of a journalist investigating the Australian government's abuses of refugees on Nauru, activism for refugee and migrant rights has become a precarious and potentially criminal affair.

However, the Global Compact's final draft mentions complementary pathways for refugees to reach safe third countries, recommending that states "establish private or community sponsorship programmes that are additional to regular resettlement, including community-based programmes", something Amnesty International has long advocated for.

Some countries made a start this year. In July, Canada, the UK, Spain, Argentina, Ireland and New Zealand announced their endorsement of the concept of community-based refugee sponsorship which places individuals and communities at the heart of organizing the arrival, welcome and integration of refugee families in third countries. Meanwhile, New Zealand announced a commitment to increase refugee quotas from 1,000 to 1,500 places.

In an increasingly hostile world, solidarity and direct action by communities and individuals may be the way to strengthen everyone's right to seek asylum and live in dignity. Governments should celebrate and follow the example of their citizens rather than threaten and target them. Now negotiations have ended, let's hope more governments see the Global Compact as a starting point for positive change, rather than an end to it. ■

Above: Refugees and migrants demonstrate in Jerusalem against the Israeli Prime Minister's cancellation of an agreement with the UN aimed at avoiding forced deportations, 4 April 2018. © Menahem Kahana/AFP/Getty Images.
Right: A woman walks with her children amid the rubble of destroyed homes in Banki, Nigeria, 26 April 2017. © Jane Hahn/Washington Post/Getty Images.
Below: Central American refugees and migrants await registration at a makeshift centre of Mexico's National Institute of Migration, in Matias Romero, Mexico, 4 April 2018. © Reuters/Henry Romero.

AS OF EARLY SEPTEMBER 2018, APPROXIMATELY

# 300 CHILDREN

IN THE USA HAD STILL NOT BEEN REUNITED WITH THEIR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS, FROM WHOM THEY WERE FORCIBLY SEPARATED.

Rohingya refugees wade across the Naf River from Myanmar into Bangladesh in Whaikhyang on 9 October 2017. © Fred Dufour/AFP/Getty Images.

# A YEAR IN ARMS SUPPLIES TO THE SAUDI/UAE COALITION

This year was another gruelling one in the conflict in Yemen, a country where millions of people are at risk of famine and **nearly 17,000 civilians have been killed or injured** since the war began.

**In 2018, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) coalition air forces crisscrossed Yemen, bombing residential areas, civilian infrastructure, and even hitting a school bus full of children.**

In reckless ground attacks, Yemen's Huthi armed group indiscriminately shelled urban centres and villages. And states, most significantly the USA and the UK, but also France and Italy, among others, continued to send billions of dollars of sophisticated military equipment in support of coalition forces.

## PUBLIC PROTEST AND POLICY SHIFT

But as the toll on the civilian population rose, 2018 saw a distinct shift in policy and practice amongst those arming the coalition. Under intense pressure from Amnesty International and other civil society organizations, journalists and parliamentarians, some states began cutting off arms supplies.

The shift began at the end of 2017 when Amnesty International Greece led protests against the proposed transfer of 300,000 tank shells from Greece to Saudi Arabia and the substantial risk that they could be used in Yemen. Breaking with precedent, a parliamentary committee cancelled the deal. In January 2018, Norway suspended supplies of lethal equipment to the UAE, citing concerns over the situation in Yemen. When images emerged of a Finnish-made Patria armoured vehicle being deployed by UAE forces in Yemen, all eight candidates in Finland's February presidential elections pledged to suspend sales.

Most dramatically, in April, Germany, a major arms manufacturer and exporter, appeared to change tack. The country's incoming coalition announced that it would suspend future licences for arms transfers to countries directly engaged in the Yemen conflict. Joining what appeared to be a growing trend, in September the Spanish government announced it would cancel the sale of 400 laser-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia, following an international outcry over an air strike on a Yemeni school bus in the city of Sa'da, northern Yemen, which killed 40 children.

## STATES RECANT ON PROMISES

But as the year wore on some of these states appeared to recant. Ignoring the election promises and more footage of Patria armoured vehicles in action in Yemen, Finland authorized licences for vehicle spare parts to the UAE. Despite earlier coalition promises, Germany continued to approve sales of military equipment to Saudi Arabia.

More contradictory still is the situation in Spain. Eight days after announcing the cancellation of the bomb sales, the Spanish government backed down under intense pressure both domestically and from Saudi Arabia. The bombs were shipped in late September, and the following month, in a parliamentary debate, the government refused to bend to pressure from Amnesty International and other civil society groups and commit to revoking past licences and suspending future sales.

While many western states are beginning to question their support for the coalition, the USA and the UK – the two largest suppliers – have stood firm, not only supplying the equipment that is being used to bomb civilians and destroy civilian infrastructure, but providing vital technical and logistical assistance to the Royal Saudi Air Force.

## SUPPLIER STATES AND ARMS COMPANIES UNDER FIRE

But as the civilian casualties mount and the catastrophic humanitarian situation worsens, the pressure on arms-supplying governments intensifies. In the UK, opposition parties have repeatedly called for an end to the arming of Saudi Arabia, and public opinion is overwhelmingly against the current policy. While a

**The crater made by a missile from a Saudi-led coalition air strike which left six members of the same family wounded in Sana'a, Yemen, 28 April 2018. © Mohammed Hamoud/Getty Images.**

judicial review challenging the UK government's decision to continue authorizing arms supplies to Saudi Arabia was rejected last year, two Court of Appeal judges granted permission to appeal in May 2018. In the USA, opposition in Congress is growing, threatening the transfer of 120,000 precision-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In a separate action, in September, there were renewed attempts to invoke the 1973 War Powers Act to end US involvement in the Yemen conflict on the grounds that Congress never authorized it.

The extrajudicial execution of Jamal Khashoggi, a journalist, in the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, has raised further concerns in the US Congress and the UK parliament about the continuing arms supplies to the Kingdom. Chancellor Angela Merkel said that German arms exports would be put on hold and Switzerland vowed to suspend exports of spare parts and air defence munitions. The EU parliament responded to the incident by reiterating its call on EU member states to impose an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia.

As supplier states faced pressure, arms companies also came under fire. Amnesty International and other organizations have documented remnants of munitions, manufactured by leading US arms companies such as Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, recovered from the rubble in the aftermath of controversial air strikes. The UK's BAE Systems continues to supply and service Saudi Arabia's formidable fleet of combat aircraft. Household names such as Boeing, General Electric and Rolls-Royce supply aircraft engines and munitions.

In April a coalition of NGOs in Italy and Germany filed a criminal complaint against managers of RWM Italia S.p.A., (a subsidiary of the German arms giant Rheinmetall AG), and senior officials of Italy's export authorities to the public prosecutor in Rome. The complaint concerns the export of a bomb - manufactured by RWM in Sardinia and exported by Italy - which killed six civilians in Yemen when it was used in an air strike on Deir al-Hajari, a village in the northwest, in October 2016.

## SHAMEFUL BUSINESS-AS-USUAL ATTITUDE

The events in Yemen pose a stark challenge to all those involved. The conduct of supplier states and companies in the face of likely war crimes is being subjected to ever closer scrutiny and vociferous protest. Amid some principled decisions on the part of mainly smaller states to stop supplying the coalition, the USA and the UK in particular, but also Spain, France and Italy, among others, have adopted a shameful business-as-usual attitude, undermining international law on arms transfers that they helped to create and committed to respect. Large corporations – like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and BAE Systems – are their willing partners in irresponsibility on an industrial scale.

Campaigners across the world must keep applying pressure on governments and companies. States must abide by their legal obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty and stop supplying all arms, munitions, military technology and assistance for use in the Yemen conflict. They must also use their leverage as key players in the region to pressure the coalition to abide by their international obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law. Otherwise they risk complicity in violations and war crimes, committed in a conflict that has not only killed and maimed tens of thousands of civilians but displaced millions more and left the country on the brink of a catastrophic famine. ■

# THE "THIRD STRUGGLE" FOR FREEDOM IN AFRICA

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN in 1948, much of Africa was still in its first struggle for liberation from colonial rule. Only three African countries were present at the UN for the vote: Egypt, Ethiopia and South Africa. Apartheid South Africa abstained.

**Below: Activists take part in a protest demanding the police conduct more investigations into the murders and kidnappings of women in Kampala, Uganda, 5 June, 2018. © Sumy Sadurni/AFP/Getty Images.**
**Bottom: Tendai Biti of Zimbabwe's main opposition Movement for Democratic Change is surrounded by police officers as he walks past a prison vehicle. He was given bail at Harare Magistrates Court on 9 August 2018 after facing charges of public violence as well as the illegal declaration of election results. © Jekesai Njikizana/AFP/Getty Images.**

**After independence came the struggle to guarantee human rights in law and practice, often against a backdrop of one-party states, brutal repression and persecution of dissenters.**

Today, the struggle is far from won, but the intervening decades have seen extraordinary progress.

Human rights defenders' tireless campaigning, often at great personal risk, has led to the Universal Declaration's founding principles - including freedom from fear and want - being enshrined in regional human rights treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as in the national laws of most, if not all, African countries.

But the struggle continues: a fierce "third" struggle to make national laws and regional human rights obligations and commitments worth more than just the paper they are written on. While sub-Saharan African states have become adept at speaking the language of human rights, too many continued in 2018 to brutally repress dissent and restrict the space in which individuals and organizations can defend human rights.

## STATE-SPONSORED INTIMIDATION AND HARASSMENT

In the south, critics of the Zambian government have been harassed and charged on spurious grounds. The most prominent example involves the ongoing trial of six activists, including rapper Fumba Chama (also known as Pilato), who were arrested in September for protesting against exorbitant levels of government spending.

Mozambique imposed prohibitively high accreditation fees on journalists and media houses in July, in an attempt to clamp down on independent reporting. In March, Ericino de Salema, a journalist, was kidnapped and beaten, contributing to a growing climate of fear. The continuing persecution faced by environmental rights activists in Madagascar is illustrated by the suspended sentences against Raleva and Christopher Manenjika which were confirmed on appeal in May and June respectively.

In Niger, Moussa Tchangari, Ali Idrissa, Nouhou Arzika and Lirwana Abdourahmane, prominent activists, were detained in March for organizing protests against a new finance law. Lirwana Abdourahmane remains in jail. The Sierra Leonean authorities continue to restrict peaceful demonstrations, while the killings of protesters by police go unpunished. In Togo, authorities arrested pro-democracy activists

including Atikpo Bob in January. Naïm Touré, an online activist in Burkina Faso, was sentenced to two months in prison in July for a Facebook post. In Mauritania, journalists and anti-slavery activists were arrested ahead of the September parliamentary elections. They include Biram Dah Abeid, who remains in detention.

Elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, this pattern of state-sponsored intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders persists. For example there were renewed attacks on freedom of expression in Uganda via a tax on social media use, introduced in July, and several MPs were arrested after participating in a protest march.

In Sudan, opposition figures and human rights defenders were arbitrarily arrested, including 140 activists detained in January and February following sporadic protests over rising food and medicine costs.

In South Sudan, civil society activists continued to be arbitrarily detained, including Bashir Ahmed Mohamed Babiker, a human rights defender, arrested in August.

Eritrea continued its policy of zero tolerance for any form of dissent or free media. In September, Berhane Abrehe, former Finance Minister, became yet one more of the thousands of prisoners of conscience and other detainees after he published a book calling for a peaceful transition to democracy.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there was a widespread crackdown on peaceful protests, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries and the sentencing to 12 months' imprisonment in September of four pro-democracy activists, all members of the Filimbi citizens' movement.

In Cameroon, Franklin Mowha, a civil society leader, was subjected to a possible enforced disappearance while on a fact-finding mission in the south-west to document internal displacement and the denial of justice. His case illustrates the government's brutal crackdown and its suppression of information connected with ongoing clashes between the military and armed separatist groups in the Anglophone regions.

The backlash against human rights, and regressive measures to restrict the space in which individuals can defend rights is also evident at the continental bodies level. The independence and autonomy of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights - Africa's main regional human rights treaty body - suffered a severe setback in August when it revoked the observer status granted to the Coalition of African Lesbians, a civil society organization registered in South Africa. The move came after immense political pressure from the African Union's Executive Council.

## NOT ALL BAD NEWS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Despite the widespread challenges, however, there is some good news for African human rights defenders.

In a few countries, leadership change has provided the impetus for significant improvements. In Ethiopia, thousands of people were released from detention in the first half of 2018, among them Eskinder Nega, the renowned journalist and prisoner of conscience, imprisoned since 2011 on trumped-up terrorism charges. The new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, introduced further reforms, including lifting the ban on several opposition parties, initiating the reform of repressive laws and removing arbitrary restrictions on websites and online media groups. However, there were major setbacks. Prisons filled up again when, in September, police arrested more than 3,000 young people and arbitrarily detained over 1,000 in Addis Ababa, including peaceful protesters, claiming it was containing "rising criminality".

Amidst unprecedented steps towards tackling endemic corruption in Angola after President João Lourenço succeeded the long-serving Eduardo dos Santos in 2017, human rights defenders saw encouraging signs that they would be protected. These included the court acquittals of Rafael Marques de Morais and Mariano Brás, prominent journalists, in July. However, there have been no steps towards investigating past human rights abuses by security forces.

Other notable victories for human rights defenders included the release in April of Tadjadine Mahamat Babouri, known as Mahadine, arrested in September 2016 and tortured in prison for posting online criticism of the Chadian government's alleged mismanagement of public funds. Meanwhile, international pressure led to the release of Ramón Esono Ebalé, an Equatorial Guinean cartoonist and activist, after six months in Malabo prison.

In Sudan, Matar Younis, a teacher, was released in July after spending over three months in prison for criticizing the government's inhumane practices in Darfur. In Rwanda, Victoire Ingabire, a jailed opposition leader, was pardoned by the President in September. Both countries, however, continue to detain real or perceived opponents.

## ORDINARY PEOPLE: EXTRAORDINARY BRAVERY

The best news of all, however, is the ongoing extraordinary bravery displayed by ordinary people across Africa, including countless courageous women human rights defenders, who exemplify resilience in the face of repression. Women like Wanjeri Nderu, who spearheads a campaign against extrajudicial killings in Kenya; Nonhle Mbuthuma, the land rights activist in South Africa who continues to advocate on behalf of her community despite being mistreated by police during a protest in September; and Nigeria's Aisha Yesufu and Obiageli 'Oby' Ezekwesili, co-founders of the #BringBackOurGirls movement who were arrested in January during a sit-in in the capital, Abuja.

There is no doubt that these are difficult times for human rights defenders in sub-Saharan Africa and, indeed, around the world. Although their work remains dangerous, it is also demonstrably effective. This year proved that Africa's governments do respond to public pressure. Even in an increasingly hostile atmosphere, the courage, dedication and selflessness of the continent's human rights defenders are keeping human rights at the front and centre of the regional agenda. In the year that the Universal Declaration turns 70, it is imperative that we acknowledge their victories, resilience and bravery. ■

**IN SEPTEMBER, POLICE ARRESTED MORE THAN**

**3,000**

**YOUNG PEOPLE AND ARBITRARILY DETAINED OVER**

**1,000**

**IN ADDIS ABABA.**

# CHALLENGING REPRESSION AND BRUTALITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

**Human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa faced an array of threats from governments and armed groups in 2018, but they have also been at the centre of stories of hard-won change. Women human rights defenders have been prominent on the front lines of resistance, challenging entrenched gender discrimination and other patterns of human rights violations.**

Nawal Benaissa, a prominent activist, was forced to move from the northern city of Al Hoceima to a different Moroccan city after harassment from the authorities. © Abdellah Azizi/Amnesty International.

**In 2019 the work of human rights defenders will continue to be vital to stemming crackdowns by governments across the region and pressing for accountability for abuses.**

## WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF CHALLENGING REPRESSION

On 24 June, Saudi Arabia finally lifted its ban on women driving, just one of a range of discriminatory policies against women in the Kingdom. Long overdue, the step was a testament to the bravery of women human rights defenders who, for decades, drew international media attention to the ban.

It was bitterly ironic then that the authorities subjected some of those who campaigned for the change to arbitrary detention and smear campaigns. Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan and Aziza al-Yousef are among a group of activists held without charge since their arrest in May, a month before the ban was lifted, and sinisterly accused of being "traitors".

Their plight reflects that of human rights defenders more generally in the country, nearly all of whom have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms, placed under travel bans or forced to leave the country.

Women's rights activists in Iran have also been courageously protesting against an entrenched manifestation of a broader set of discriminatory practices against women. Dozens removed their headscarves in public to challenge forced *hijab* (veiling) and disrupt Iranian society's apparent acquiescence in this abusive and degrading practice.

The authorities' violent crackdown forms part of a wider wave of repression against human rights defenders. Dozens of women have been beaten and arbitrarily detained and, in some cases, prosecuted and imprisoned for their peaceful campaigning. One of them, Roya Saghiri, began serving a 23-month prison sentence in August for "disturbing public order".

Their lawyers and supporters have also been harassed. For example, Nasrin Sotoudeh, an award-winning human rights lawyer, was arrested in June and charged with serious national security offences.

In Egypt, human rights defenders also felt the full force of a government intent on crushing challenges to its legitimacy. While moments of victory, like the releases of woman human rights defender Mahienour el-Massry in January and human rights lawyer Haytham Mohamdeen in October, punctured the climate of repression, too many others remain behind bars on ludicrous terrorism or security-related charges.

Amal Fathy was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in September for posting a video on Facebook condemning sexual harassment and the government's failure to address it. Ezzat Ghoniem, co-founder and director of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, and Azzoz Mahgoub, a human rights lawyer in the same organization, remain in incommunicado detention despite a court order to release them on 4 September.

Thirty human rights defenders and staff of civil society organizations are under travel bans; 10 of them have had their assets frozen.

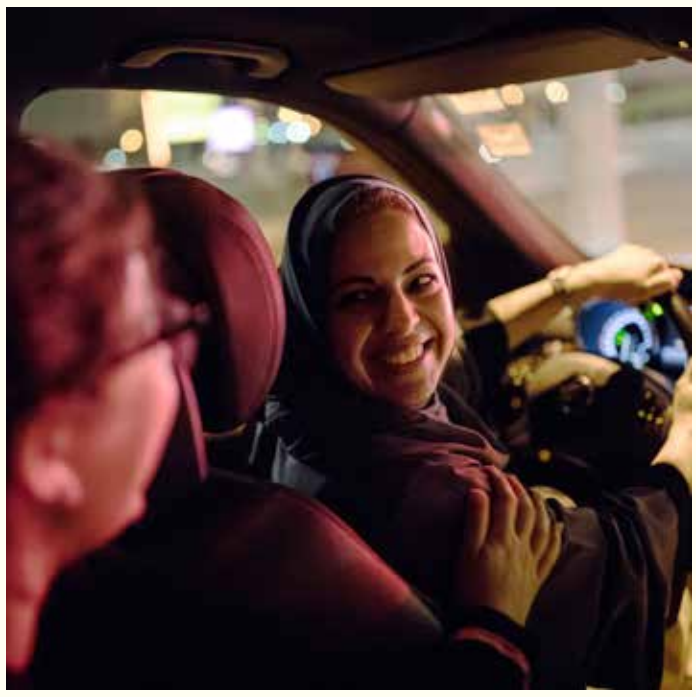
## ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE PROTESTERS

Human rights defenders in the region have acted as a vital check on government excesses, exposing abuses by the security forces in the Maghreb, challenging half a century of Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory and speaking truth to power in the Gulf.

Nawal Benaissa, one of the leading voices of Hirak, a popular movement, spoke out for social justice and better health care in the Rif region of Morocco. Like hundreds of other peaceful protesters, she has been arrested and held in custody. In February, she received a 10-month suspended sentence and a fine for "inciting to commit an offence".

In an attempt to silence criticism of the security forces' handling of the Hirak protests, the authorities also went after those defending the protesters. In February, Abdessadak El Bouchattaoui, a human rights lawyer, was sentenced to 20 months in prison and fined for his online posts.

The Israeli authorities have long displayed brutality against those protesting its military occupation of Palestinian territory and its blockade of the Gaza Strip, a pattern manifested in its lethal response to the Great March of Return, in which the army



Above: Dania Alagili drives her car after midnight on 24 June 2018 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the day the ban on women driving was lifted. © Iman Al-Dabbagh/Washington Post/Getty. Right: A woman demonstrator reacts to tear gas fired by Israeli troops during clashes at a protest at the Israel-Gaza border where Palestinians demand the right to return to their homeland, east of Gaza City. 20 April 2018. © Reuters/Mohammed Salem.

killed over 150 Palestinian protesters. In some cases, the authorities used military courts to persecute Palestinian human rights defenders. Munther Amira was sentenced to six months in prison in March on charges relating to his peaceful participation in protests.

In May, the government decided to expel Omar Shakir, Human Rights Watch's Country Director, for allegedly supporting boycotts of Israel. He challenged the decision and is awaiting a ruling.

Palestinian human rights defenders have also been actively challenging the Ramallah-based Palestinian government's sanctions on the Gaza Strip, which is administered by Hamas. They were among dozens of protesters violently dispersed by Palestinian security forces on 14 June. Amnesty International staff member Laith Abu Zeyad was among more than 50 demonstrators arrested and beaten in custody.

## PROSECUTED FOR SPEAKING OUT

In May a state security court in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sentenced Ahmed Mansoor, an award-winning human rights defender, to 10 years in prison on charges including "insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols".

In Bahrain, Nabeel Rajab's five-year prison sentence was upheld on appeal in June. He had been convicted of offences related to his peaceful online comments about torture allegations in Jaw prison and the killing of civilians in the conflict in Yemen by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition.

## SHEDDING LIGHT ON ABUSES IN ARMED CONFLICT

In Yemen human rights defenders have shed light on horrendous abuses and successfully advocated for the UN Human Rights Council to renew the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts in Yemen, despite opposition from the Saudi Arabian and Yemeni governments.

Consequently, they have been subjected to enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and death threats.

In Hodeidah, Kamal al-Shawish, a human rights defender, was released in September after being held incommunicado by Huthi forces for over a month in an unknown location. In Ta'iz, Yemeni government authorities and militias targeted those deemed opposition voices. Akram al-Shawafi, founder of the Watch Team, a human rights monitoring group, was forced to relocate five times during the year because of intimidation and online threats he received after he documented local authorities' poor treatment of civilians in the city.

In Libya, women human rights defenders have been at the forefront of those speaking out against corruption by officials, and abuses by the Libyan National Army and militias. They were subjected to gender-based violence, and smear campaigns on social media.

In January, Mariam al-Tayeb, who criticized militias responsible for extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and torture, was abducted and beaten by a militia from the Bab Tajoura district of the capital, Tripoli.

In Syria, the persecution of human rights defenders in both government and rebel-controlled areas remained endemic. In spite of this and the fact that their colleagues Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil, Wa'el Hamada and Nazem Hamadi (known as the Douma Four) are still missing five years after their abduction, the Violations Documentation Center in Syria is one of several organizations which continue to document human rights violations across the country.

In the Syrian diaspora, 2018 saw the rise to prominence of Families for Freedom, a women-led movement working to find or obtain the release of all who have been arbitrarily detained, subjected to enforced disappearance or abducted by the Syrian government and other parties to the conflict.

Their resilience and courage in the face of the human rights catastrophe that has befallen their country are an inspiration to activists around the globe. ■

THERE ARE CURRENTLY

**71**

COUNTRIES THAT CRIMINALIZE SAME-SEX RELATIONS.

An LGBT rights activist carries a flag in rainbow colours at a march on 1 July 2018 in Istanbul, after Turkish authorities banned the annual Gay Pride Parade for a fourth year in a row. © Bülent Kiliç/AFP/Getty Images.

# HUMAN RIGHTS OFFER HOPE FOR A EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA UNDER THREAT

**From the craggy Urals to the windswept Atlantic coastline, Europe is more than a geographical landmass. It is an idea, created over millennia: nourished by myriad cultures and traditions; refreshed by shifting populations; held together by shared values and a common history. With some notable exceptions, it has enjoyed unparalleled peace and prosperity in recent decades. But now Europe and Central Asia is facing an unrelenting attack on human rights from within.**

## THE POLITICS OF BLAME AND FEAR

**The rise of intolerance, hatred and discrimination, within the context of a shrinking space for civil society, is causing an ever-widening rift in the region's social fabric.** The politics of fear is driving people apart as leaders peddle a toxic rhetoric, blaming groups of people for social or economic problems.

Human rights defenders, activists, the media and political opposition are harassed by authorities. They face unfounded criminal prosecutions; some are targeted by violent groups who act with impunity.

In much of Europe, the so-called refugee crisis – and the abject response to it – has been a key touchstone: a mirror reflecting some stark truths.

Asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants are turned away or left in squalor while acts of solidarity are progressively criminalized. Children are left to fend for themselves. Fragmented policies arising from an "each country for themselves" approach have left frontline states like Greece bearing the responsibility for tens of thousands of refugees and migrants. Dodgy deals to outsource responsibilities and reinforce "fortress Europe" are breaching international law.

And the so-called crisis, combined with austerity policies, have been seized upon by a rising cabal of opportunistic politicians. Calling themselves "anti-establishment", they wield the politics of demonization to hound, scapegoat and dehumanize the most marginalized.

Hungary has become a standard-bearer of intolerance. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his ruling party Fidesz have intensified the attack on human rights, proudly flaunting his violations of international and EU law. The administration advanced a full-frontal assault on migrants and refugees, restricted the right to peaceful protest, criminalized homelessness and introduced draconian legislation that criminalizes lawful migration-related activities, threatening civil society's existence.

In Poland, legislation restricting the right to protest as well as hundreds of unjust prosecutions of peaceful protesters, and expanded surveillance powers enjoyed by law enforcement agencies, are shrinking the space for dissent. The authorities have systematically attacked and undermined judicial independence and overturned mechanisms and guarantees for protecting human rights, subjecting the judiciary to political interference. Judges who criticized the government for these measures, or sought clarification about their compatibility with EU law from the Court of Justice of the European Union, have faced harassment and disciplinary proceedings.

## CLIMATE OF FEAR STIFLES DISSENT

Meanwhile, a climate of fear has descended upon some countries in the region. Since the 2016 failed coup in Turkey, tens of thousands of people including journalists, human rights defenders and activists have been arbitrarily detained for their real or perceived criticism of the authorities without evidence of any conduct that could reasonably constitute criminal offences. NGOs and newspapers have been shut down and more than 130,000 public sector workers arbitrarily dismissed under state of emergency decrees. Taner Kılıç, Honorary Chair of Amnesty International Turkey, spent over 14 months in prison. Released in August, he faces baseless criminal charges just because of his human rights work.

Across Europe, emboldened groups advocate hate and discrimination, levering themselves into mainstream politics. Meanwhile, established political parties are absorbing their ideas and parroting their hateful rhetoric. Fuelled by certain politicians and a divisive media, advocacy of hatred and intolerance is increasingly normalized.

## EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

As key players withdraw from and even undermine international human rights mechanisms, the EU and its member states are challenged to step up their engagement with human rights in relation to their foreign policy. As it stands, though, the EU's credibility is threatened by its own human rights failures at home.

There have been some positive steps, like the European Commission and European Parliament triggering Article 7 to bring proceedings regarding Hungary and Poland. These proceedings came in response to measures introduced by both states which undermine human rights. The EU has also made advances to support and protect individual human rights defenders in some countries, but progress needs to be expanded throughout the region. In relation to migration, Europe's

Far left: A protester is surrounded by police during a protest against plans to further restrict abortion laws in Warsaw, Poland, 23 March 2018. © Agencja Gazeta/Dawid Zuchowicz/Reuters.
Left: A demonstrator confronts a police unit during a protest in front of the Parliament building in Budapest, Hungary, 8 May 2018. © Istvan Huszti /AFP/Getty Images.
Above: Turkish police detain protesters as they attempted to defy a ban and march on Taksim Square to celebrate May Day in Istanbul, Turkey, 1 May 2018. © Reuters/Murad Sezer.

institutions have taken no decisive action and have even taken steps which have worsened the situation.

## CALLOUS IMMIGRATION POLICIES

The EU-Turkey deal, for example, has left thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in squalid and unsafe conditions on Greek islands. In the central Mediterranean, European governments are complicit in the suffering caused by their callous immigration policies which outsource border control to Libya. By supporting the Libyan authorities in stopping sea crossings, impeding rescues, and taking people back to horrific detention centres in Libya, the EU has undermined search and rescue efforts and put people at real risk of torture.

## JUSTICE UNDERMINED

Meanwhile, the European Court of Human Rights' independence and authority is increasingly threatened. Some states have refused to implement the Court's binding judgments, often for political gain, and have thus enabled serious systemic and structural problems at the national level which, in turn, perpetuate human rights violations.

## SILENCING DISSENTING VOICES

In countries such as Kazakhstan, Russia and Tajikistan, online freedom of expression is progressively threatened while, across the region, peaceful protests are met with a range of restrictive measures and excessive force by police.

In Russia, where street protest is on the rise, heavy-handed policing has resulted in mass arrests. Even children are detained for attending peaceful demonstrations and journalists are being targeted for covering them. An unprecedented number of people have been prosecuted for posting or even re-posting critical material online.

Governments continue to enact counter-terrorism and "anti-extremism" measures, and abuse criminal justice systems to target government critics and dissenters.

In Russia and elsewhere, human rights defenders are prosecuted on fabricated criminal charges. In January, Oyub Titiev, head of the Grozny, Chechnya office of the human rights organization Memorial, was arrested on trumped-up drug-related charges. He faces years in prison. Others face violence from unidentified assailants with possible links to the authorities.

Forcible returns of refugees are increasing, with some countries like Azerbaijan exercising extra-territorial powers in attempts to detain and extradite human rights defenders who have fled their country for fear of being unjustly prosecuted.

In Ukraine, human rights defenders and critical civil society groups are increasingly targeted by violent groups who enjoy impunity, and by the authorities. Police in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan use violence to silence LGBTI activists.

In Crimea, any trace of opposition to the Russian occupation is brutally crushed. Ethnic Crimean Tatar human rights defenders and other activists face arbitrary prosecution and constant harassment by Russian security services.

## "WE ARE RESPONSIBLE NOT ONLY FOR WHAT WE SAY BUT WHAT WE FAIL TO SAY..."

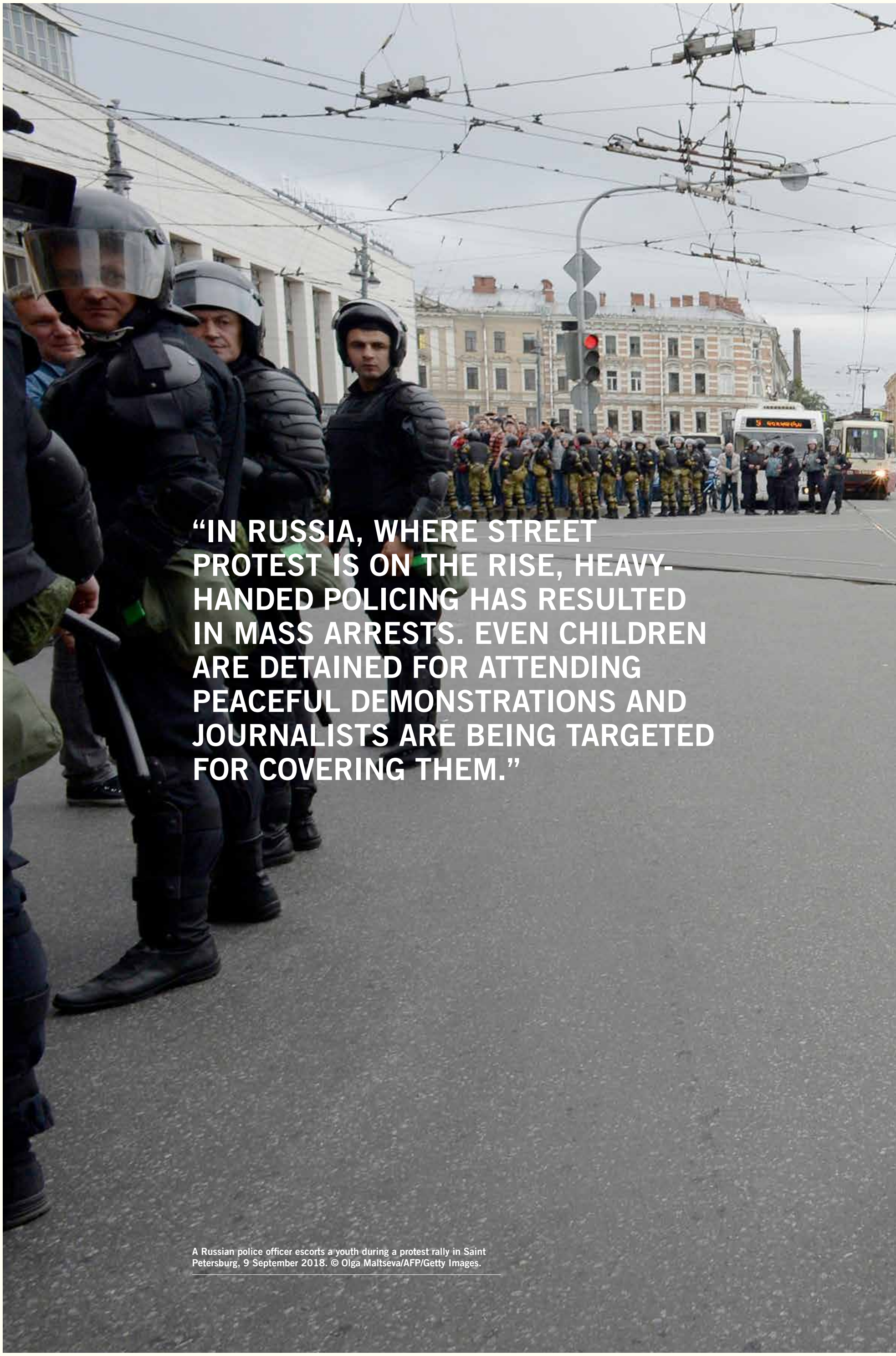
And yet, against this backdrop of xenophobic rhetoric and repressive politics, optimism persists. Activism and protest are growing: a groundswell of ordinary people with extraordinary passion are speaking out for justice and equality. Their actions are helping to define the type of continent in which they want to live, and their courage is contagious.

They are journalists and academics, artists, judges, lawyers and ordinary citizens from all walks of life who are driven by compassion and indignation at injustice and suffering.

In repressive times, stepping up to defend human rights or speaking out to condemn injustice is more dangerous and yet more vital than ever.

Those who speak out become a symbol of hope to others. Unless we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them there will be no one left to stand up for what is right. And Europe's leaders must be front and centre, showing support for them and calling out those who target them.

As the Turkish writer Aziz Nesin said, "we are responsible not only for what we say but what we fail to say by staying silent". We cannot and will not stay silent. ■



**“IN RUSSIA, WHERE STREET PROTEST IS ON THE RISE, HEAVY-HANDED POLICING HAS RESULTED IN MASS ARRESTS. EVEN CHILDREN ARE DETAINED FOR ATTENDING PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS AND JOURNALISTS ARE BEING TARGETED FOR COVERING THEM.”**

A Russian police officer escorts a youth during a protest rally in Saint Petersburg, 9 September 2018. © Olga Maltseva/AFP/Getty Images.

**IN IRELAND, CITIZENS VOTED BY A LANDSLIDE TO OVERTURN THE ABORTION BAN.**

"Yes" campaigners celebrate the official result of the Irish abortion referendum at Dublin Castle, 26 May 2018. The vote resulted in a landslide decision in favour of repealing the constitutional ban on abortions. © Paul Faith/AFP/Getty Images.

# DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE FRONTLINES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

From the mounting body count in the "war on drugs" perpetrated by Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte and his government, to the silencing of political opposition and independent media in Cambodia, to the Myanmar military's violent campaign of murder, rape and arson that caused the flight of more than 720,000 Rohingya women, men, and children from northern Rakhine State to Bangladesh, the state of human rights in many countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific has continued along a deteriorating trajectory in 2018.

**Amid a growing climate of impunity for human rights violations, human rights defenders are increasingly vulnerable.** Governments across the region continue to fall short of, or even ignore, their obligation to protect human rights defenders, who often find themselves subjected to harassment, threats, criminal proceedings and violence. Those on the frontlines – such as youth and land activists, women's rights defenders and trade unionists – are all too often the target of state repression for speaking out in defence of rights.

## TOOLS OF REPRESSION, FROM CYBER SURVEILLANCE TO ONLINE HARASSMENT

Governments have displayed increasing intolerance of peaceful dissent and activism, abusing judicial powers to impose and enforce legislation that restricts the peaceful exercise of rights and shrinks civic space. Threats to a free media continue at a disturbing rate. In Singapore, activists have faced targeted pressure and criticism, including convictions for "scandalizing the judiciary" for expressing themselves on Facebook. In Thailand, scores of human rights defenders, journalists, politicians, lawyers and activists were prosecuted for peaceful assembly, and faced charges of criminal defamation and sedition. In Fiji, three media executives and a letter-writer were put on trial for sedition – and later acquitted – on charges that were politically motivated.

In the Philippines, as in Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia, there has been an increase in the use of social media to fuel hate speech against social, religious or ethnic minorities, particularly on Facebook. At the same time, people are increasingly being penalized for views expressed online, including peaceful criticisms of authorities. Repressive cyber laws are being pushed across the region, raising an unprecedented long-term threat to freedom of expression and the right to privacy. In one such example, in July Viet Nam passed a sweeping and deeply repressive new law that provides censors with the authority to force technology companies to hand over vast amounts of data, including personal information, and to censor users' posts.

Despite committing to abolishing the death penalty, Thailand executed a 26-year-old man convicted of murder, thus ending an execution-free period of nine years.

## ABUSERS HIDE BEHIND MASK OF DEMOCRACY

In Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen's party won the general elections in July — having used legislation and the judiciary to effectively eliminate any meaningful opposition and shut down dozens of media outlets in the lead-up to the vote. Myanmar's power-sharing deal between the civilian government and the military has seen a further erosion of human rights and freedoms — despite the Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy government having a majority in the Parliament, which would allow it to revise or abolish at least some of the most repressive laws.

## PEACEFUL CRITICS STILL TARGETED – DESPITE HOPES IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia's surprise election result in May, which saw former Prime Minister Najib Razak ousted, was seen as a possible gateway to positive human rights change. Prisoner of conscience Anwar Ibrahim was released from jail, marking the end of over two decades of political persecution of the former opposition leader. In October, the government announced plans to repeal the death penalty for all crimes, as well as the repressive Sedition Act. These would represent significant steps forward if implemented.

Elsewhere, politically motivated arrest and detention of those speaking out on human rights violations continue unabated. In Myanmar, Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were each sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for their role in exposing a massacre, led by state security forces, of Rohingya men. In the Philippines in September, Duterte critic Senator Antonio Trillanes IV was arrested and released, and awaits trial on bail. Senator Leila de Lima has been in detention for over a year on politically motivated charges. In a rare positive development, Cambodian housing rights activist Tep Vanny was released from prison after serving two years of her politically motivated sentence. In Viet Nam, blogger Me Nâm (known as Mother Mushroom) was also released after two years in detention, and sent into exile in the USA.

LGBTI people continue to encounter major discrimination. In Malaysia and

**Rohingya Muslim refugees are evacuated in a truck to refugee camps after crossing the Naf River in Teknaf, Ukhia district, Bangladesh, on 8 October 2017. © Fred Dufour/AFP/Getty Images.**

Indonesia, individuals can face intense persecution and harsh penalties under laws regulating sexuality. In August, two Malaysian women were fined and caned in public for "attempting lesbian sex". In seven Pacific countries where homosexuality is criminalized thousands of people face prejudice and live under the threat of jail.

## LACK OF PROTECTION FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Conditions for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrant workers remain extremely precarious throughout the region, made worse by a lack of formal legal protection for asylum-seekers in many countries. In August, authorities in Thailand placed in indefinite detention at least 168 Montagnard refugees from Viet Nam and Cambodia, including pregnant women and children. Earlier in the year, Thai authorities forcibly returned a Cambodian refugee, Sam Sokha, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

For refugees and internally displaced people, access to aid remains fraught. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in Myanmar, where both the civilian and military authorities restrict access for UN and NGO humanitarian bodies. In Kachin and northern Shan states, authorities have blocked humanitarian access to areas beyond government control, while in Rakhine State, more than 125,000 people, mainly Rohingya, remain confined to squalid displacement camps where they rely on humanitarian assistance for their survival.

Australia continues to attract condemnation for its refusal to extricate over 1,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from bureaucratic limbo in the offshore processing centres it operates in Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, in partnership with those countries' governments. High-profile cases involving denial of adequate medical care as well as suicide attempts by young people have led to calls on Australia by the UN, medical bodies, lawyers and broader civil society to correct its failings and live up to its duty of care to these people.

## AN ACCOUNTABILITY VACUUM

Impunity of state security forces who violate human rights continues to flourish. In Indonesia, allegations of abuses regularly surfaced from its disputed Papua province, yet very few were independently investigated or the perpetrators held accountable in the country's courts. Moves towards accountability – including passing legislation criminalizing torture and enforced disappearances in Thailand – continued to be delayed.

The Myanmar government has shown itself to be unable and unwilling to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for the devastating campaign of violence against the Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State. Security forces killed thousands, raped women and girls, hauled men and boys off to detention sites and burned hundreds of Rohingya homes to the ground in what were clearly crimes against humanity and which a UN investigation team said may amount to genocide.

Extrajudicial executions continue in the third year of the "war on drugs" in the Philippines. Widespread evidence of police abuses as well as violations of the right to health - which may amount to crimes against humanity - highlight the urgent need for the UN to launch its own international investigation into the killings.

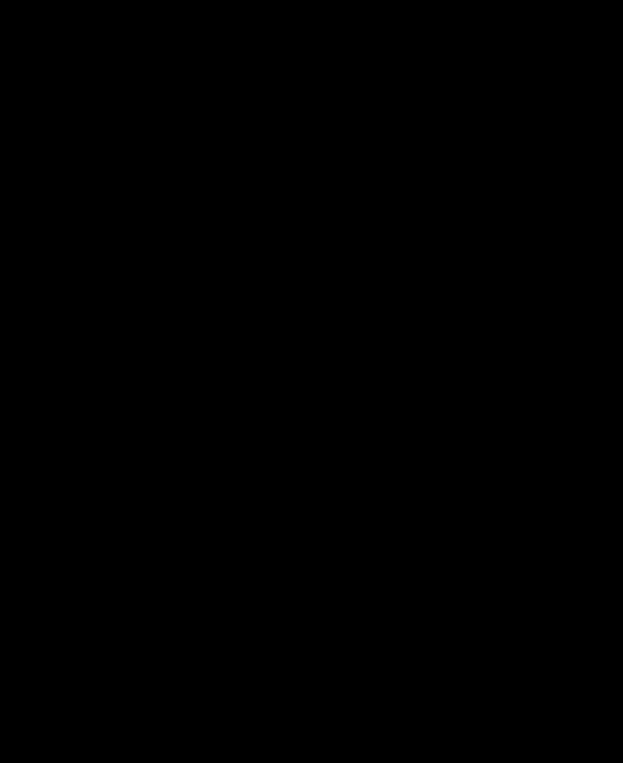
In the absence of national, independent and impartial inquiries in Myanmar or the Philippines, pressure is building at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for proceedings against individuals suspected of crimes against humanity and other crimes. In a positive move in February, the ICC announced the opening of a preliminary examination into the Philippines. In September, the UN Human Rights Council established an accountability mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of atrocities in Myanmar - a step forward on the path to justice, but no substitute for an ICC referral by the UN Security Council. The Philippines, together with China and Burundi, was the only state in the region to vote against the move.

Without a concerted effort to strengthen human rights protections – and the vital work of human rights defenders – the hardliners who loom large in this region are set to continue abusing rights and shattering human lives without consequence. ■

**THE MYANMAR MILITARY'S VIOLENT CAMPAIGN OF MURDER, RAPE AND ARSON CAUSED THE FLIGHT OF MORE THAN 720,000 ROHINGYA WOMEN, MEN AND CHILDREN FROM NORTHERN RAKHINE STATE TO BANGLADESH. IN RAKHINE STATE, MORE THAN**

**125,000**

**PEOPLE, MAINLY ROHINGYA, REMAIN CONFINED TO SQUALID DISPLACEMENT CAMPS WHERE THEY RELY ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR THEIR SURVIVAL.**



Myanmar's commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing speaks during the third session of the Union Peace Conference in Naypyidaw, 11 July 2018. © Thet Aung/AFP/Getty Images.

# REPRESSIVE MEASURES AS WELL AS ROOM FOR OPTIMISM IN EAST ASIA

The human rights year in the East Asia region was marked by troubling and repressive measures such as shrinking space for civil society, renewed crackdowns on lawyers and other human rights defenders, and pessimism regarding the death penalty. By contrast, however, activism against sexual harassment and positive signs around recognition of same-sex relationships in the region gave some cause for optimism as we move into 2019.

**A woman takes her children through a police checkpoint at a night food market near the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, 25 June 2017. © Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images.**

## MASS DETENTIONS

**Among the year's most disturbing developments has been the mass detention of Uighurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).** Up to one million people have been sent for political "re-education", during which they are held indefinitely without a trial, access to lawyers or the right to challenge their detentions. This government "counter-extremism" campaign combines intrusive surveillance, arbitrary detentions and forced indoctrination, and has targeted people who have travelled or have contacts abroad, show signs of religious or cultural affiliation or otherwise fall under suspicion of being "untrustworthy". Family members have been kept in the dark about the fate of their loved ones, leaving them desperate for answers but afraid to speak up in case they too become targets.

The alarming escalation of China's oppression of ethnic minority populations was a focus of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Committee's August review of China also highlighted the marginalization of ethnic language and culture, and stressed how broad and vague legal definitions of "terrorism", "extremism" and "separatism" were stifling and punishing peaceful actions by Uighurs, Tibetans and others. In May, for example, Tibetan language activist Tashi Wangchuk was sentenced to five years in prison on spurious charges of "inciting separatism".

## PEACE TALKS

Another major development in the region has been the ongoing peace talks between North and South Korea, the outcome of which could have significant implications for human rights on the Korean peninsula. For decades, leaders on both sides have used national security as an excuse to justify arbitrary restrictions on rights to freedom of expression and opinion, thought and movement. De-escalation of conflict between the two sides might facilitate more regular contacts between families who have been separated and allow for an easing of severe restrictions in North Korea on access to information and communications.

The absence of human rights from the agenda of talks between South Korea's Moon Jae-in and North Korea's Kim Jong-un has been deeply troubling, despite their efforts to reduce tensions and create positive opportunities. As talks continue, Kim Jong-un and other North Korean leaders must be held accountable for the catastrophic human rights situation in that country, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity as found by a UN commission in 2014.

In China, the year has seen little change in terms of repression of human rights defenders. More than three years after the government launched a broad crackdown against human rights lawyers and other activists, the fates of lawyers Wang Quanzhang, Yu Wensheng and Gao Zhisheng are unknown. There are serious concerns for the wellbeing of imprisoned lawyer Jiang Tianyong and activist Dong Guangping, and human rights defenders Huang Qi and Zhen Jianghua are facing long prison terms. All are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT CHALLENGED

Despite shrinking space for civil society in China, there have been glimmers of optimism. Strong support for the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment has emerged on Chinese campuses and online. One of the movement's leading advocates, Yue Xin, has also led a student campaign to support efforts by striking factory workers to form their own trade union. When the government has tried to silence or punish these activists, their efforts have been met with a vocal response online.

Hong Kong has also increasingly felt the effects of shrinking space for civil society, as the government continues to use vaguely defined charges to pursue political prosecutions of protesters from 2014's Umbrella Movement. This, as well as recent decisions to use "national security" grounds to ban a pro-independence political party and retaliate against people for discussing independence for Hong Kong, are creating a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

## FEAR CONTINUES FOR MANY

There are few signs of progress in the region towards ending the use of capital punishment. China continues to hide the true extent of its use of the death penalty behind claims of "state secrecy". In Mongolia, the President intends to propose legislation to restore the death penalty, which the country's parliament abolished in 2017. In July, Japan carried out an unprecedented execution spree, hanging 13 people for their involvement in the deadly 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway and other illegal activities. It was feared that some of those executed may have had requests for retrial pending, in violation of their right to a fair trial. In August, Taiwan carried out its first execution since 2016, despite President Tsai Ing-wen stating clearly when she took office that her government intended to abolish the death penalty.

This year, hundreds of Yemeni men, women and children fleeing the devastating war and humanitarian crisis at home arrived on the South Korean island of Jeju, where tourists from most countries can enter without a visa. Many in South Korea, however, have responded with fear and hostility. There has been a marked increase in xenophobic rhetoric and even violence, as members of the public react to fear around cultural difference and economic impacts. Unlike asylum-seekers who arrive in other parts of the country, the Yemenis were barred from leaving the island for months while the South Korean government processed their claims, limiting their opportunities to make new lives for themselves. By October, some 300 Yemeni asylum-seekers had been granted "humanitarian stay" status, meaning they can travel to other parts of South Korea but will have to leave the country when the war in Yemen ends.

## SIGNS OF HOPE

East Asia has seen more positive developments in recognizing the rights of same-sex couples. In July, Hong Kong's top court issued a landmark ruling confirming that denial of partnership rights for same-sex couples can be discriminatory – despite a continued lack of recognition for marriage equality there. In Japan, more municipalities are adopting written instruments to recognize same-sex partnerships, and a growing number of Japanese companies are extending equal benefits to same-sex couples. Progress for LGBTI people in the region is not without its challenges and much more needs to be done to address discrimination and stigma; however, there are growing signs of broader social acceptance for equal rights and a rejection of those trying to reverse the progress and stir up intolerance. Attention was focused on the results of competing referendums in Taiwan later in 2018 which could determine whether the government offers only watered-down legal protection to same-sex couples or becomes the first in Asia to recognize marriage equality. ■

# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DEFY REPRESSION AMID SOME HOPES IN SOUTH ASIA

The year began with the death of one of the region's best-known advocates for the dispossessed, Pakistani lawyer and activist Asma Jahangir. For decades, she exemplified the struggles of millions in South Asia. On the streets, she defied political repression, called for an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions, and was beaten and arrested for protesting on behalf of women's rights. In the courtroom, she faced down threats for her work in representing people, including women seeking to escape their violent husbands, bonded labourers trying to win freedom from their oppressive "owners", and religious minorities needing to find sanctuary after attacks by hardline mobs.

**Asma Jahangir during a visit to Amnesty International Netherlands in 1998. Asma Jahangir was a human rights lawyer and founding member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. She was harassed for defending women's rights. © Ilya van marle.**

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

**Human rights defenders in Pakistan felt the loss of Asma Jahangir keenly.** Scores were arbitrarily detained, disappeared, subjected to arbitrary surveillance, intimidated and prosecuted under draconian new laws that criminalize freedom of expression, both offline and online. Cyber-attacks saw malware spread by fake profiles online, surreptitiously infecting activists' devices. Members of the non-violent Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) calling for an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions were charged with sedition and detained for comments they made online.

But there was some good news too. Activists Raza Khan and Sagheer Baloch were released in Pakistan after being subjected to enforced disappearance for nine months. In September, Hayat Khan Preghal, a member of the PTM, was released on bail after being detained for critical comments he made on social media.

Across the border, in India, there was also a pattern of demonizing and criminalizing human rights defenders. Ten prominent activists, including Sudha Bharadwaj, Shoma Sen and Arun Ferreira, were arrested under draconian anti-terror legislation in Bhima Koregaon, Maharashtra state. A Dalit activist, Chandrashekar Azad "Ravan", was held in administrative detention for 10 months without charge or trial.

Women human rights defenders, who face reprisals for their human rights work and are subjected to gender-based discrimination, faced a torrent of online violence and abuse in India this year. Journalist Rana Ayyub and activist Gurmehar Kaur were threatened with sexual violence for exercising their right to freedom of expression. And offline, the civic space continued to shrink as the central government used the controversial Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 as a political tool to harass organizations critical of its views and actions.

In Bangladesh, even as the government vowed to rid itself of the notorious Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, which has seen hundreds charged and prosecuted for what they have said or written, however peacefully, the law was being used to silence critics. Well-known photographer Shahidul Alam was charged under Section 57 of the ICT Act for comments he made on Facebook and an interview he gave. After his arrest, a pall of fear descended across the country, as students and other activists were subjected to surveillance online. In September, the Digital Security Act was passed, expanding on the ICT Act and retaining its most draconian provisions.

## CONTINUING REFUGEE CRISIS

Bangladesh continued to host nearly a million Rohingya refugees, in overcrowded conditions. With the prospect of safe and dignified returns to Myanmar looking remote, international assistance is drying up and the Bangladeshi government has announced the transfer of up to 100,000 Rohingya refugees to a secluded silt island off its coast, which experts believe is vulnerable to flooding and cyclones. Despite the challenges, Bangladesh's attitude towards refugees contrasts sharply with Europe's callous indifference. In 2018, countries across Europe continued to forcibly return thousands of Afghan asylum-seekers even as civilian casualties remained at record levels.

## ATTACKS IN AFGHANISTAN

The hazardous situation in Afghanistan was underscored by deadly attacks by armed groups that claimed the lives of children, aid workers, religious minorities, journalists and many others. At least 34 people were killed in August, many of them children, when a Shi'a neighbourhood was targeted in the capital, Kabul. In April, 10 journalists were killed by a secondary device at the site of an earlier bombing. In September, two more were killed in similar circumstances. It was the deadliest year for journalists in Afghanistan since the conflict there began in 2001. In September, Amnesty International unveiled a mural dedicated to their memory in the centre of Kabul.

## LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

In May, Pakistan's parliament passed one of the most progressive pieces of legislation on transgender rights in the world, making it the first country in Asia to recognize the self-perceived gender identity of transgender people. In India, in a series of landmark rulings, the Supreme Court struck down Section 377 of the Penal Code, which criminalized consensual same-sex sexual relations, Section 497, which criminalized "adultery", and a rule which prohibited women of "menstruating age" from entering the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala.

In Sri Lanka, Sandhya Eknaligoda, a prominent campaigner for justice for families of the disappeared, who has endured years of hostility and smear campaigns, won an important court victory after a hardline Buddhist monk who had threatened her was imprisoned for six months. In September, President Maithripala Sirisena ordered the arrest of an army officer over the 2010 enforced disappearance of Sandhya's husband, Prageeth Eknaligoda. Other positive developments in the country included the long overdue setting up of the Office of Missing Persons, the passing of an Act to set up an Office of Reparations, and the return of some of the private land in the north that had been seized by the military.

In Sri Lanka and Nepal, progress was slow on commitments to truth, justice and reparations for past violations. Both governments also tried to impose new restrictions on NGOs, but backed down after objections from civil society groups. In Nepal, a large number of new human rights-focused laws were hastily ushered through parliament. Victims' groups remained aggrieved that they had not been consulted. For Sri Lanka, the sudden appointment of Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister in October, and the ensuing constitutional crisis, means that human rights and guarantees of transitional justice may be in peril for the future.

There was a change in government in Pakistan, where former cricketing legend turned politician Imran Khan swept to power in July. The new government made a series of heartening pledges regarding human rights, but swiftly began backpedalling on a commitment to grant citizenship to Afghan and Bengali refugees. Faced with resistance from religious hardliners, the government capitulated and reversed the appointment of Atif Mian, an eminent economist belonging to the long-persecuted Ahmadi sect, as an adviser.

Religious bigotry also raised its ugly head in Sri Lanka in March, when hardline Buddhist monks incited violence against Muslims in the city of Kandy, in the island's central hills, and in Ampara in the east. Muslim homes and businesses were set alight. The government imposed a state of emergency, shutting down social media sites that were used as platforms to inflame the riots. In July, President Sirisena said that he would bring back the death penalty to punish drug traffickers, more than four decades after Sri Lanka last executed anyone. In Bangladesh, the government unleashed its own "war on drugs", with paramilitaries gunning down more than 200 suspected drug offenders in a wave of alleged extrajudicial executions.

## FRESH HOPES IN THE MALDIVES

Near the end of the year, hope for the Maldives brightened as the long years of repressive rule by Abdulla Yameen came to a close with his convincing defeat in the September presidential election. Earlier in the year, President Yameen had sought to consolidate his grip on power by imposing a state of emergency, arresting the Chief Justice, another judge of the Supreme Court, a former President and more than 200 protesters. Days after the election, Ahmed Mahlouf, a prisoner of conscience who faced up to 20 years behind bars on trumped-up charges, walked free. Others are expected to follow as new President Ibrahim Solih vowed to roll back his predecessor's assault on human rights. ■

**DESPITE SHRINKING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN CHINA, THERE HAVE BEEN GLIMMERS OF OPTIMISM. STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE #METOO MOVEMENT AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT HAS EMERGED ON CHINESE CAMPUSES AND ONLINE.**

**People attend a protest as a part of the #MeToo movement on International Women's Day in Seoul, South Korea, 8 March 2018. Other countries in Asia also saw protests against sexual harassment, including India, Japan and China. © Reuters/Kim Hong-Ji.**

#Me
Too

**Across the USA this year, women's rights were pushed to the forefront of people's minds by major women's movements and campaigns that swept the country.** The long-standing impunity for sexual harassment and violence against women continues to be a key focus for activists in the face of systemic hostility to women's rights from President Trump's administration. In addition to failing to support a thorough investigation of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh following accusations of sexual assault, the administration also signalled the downplaying of women's rights by, among other things, removing information on sexual and reproductive rights from the State Department's annual human rights reports, raising grave concerns for human rights monitoring at home and abroad. At the USA-Mexico border, President Trump's cruel zero-tolerance policies took a huge toll on families seeking protection from persecution and violence, many of whom were separated under policies that violate international law. However, women across the country made it known that they would not be silent, taking to the streets and halls of Congress, and assuming leadership roles in their own communities taking on issues like community gun violence, showing support for welcoming refugees in their neighbourhoods, and speaking out against family detention and separation.

Dr Christine Blasey Ford swears in at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on 27 September 2018 in Washington, DC. Dr Ford accused Supreme Court nominee Judge Brett Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her during a party in 1982. Amnesty International called for a halt to the vote on Judge Kavanaugh's nomination; however, the Senate confirmed his nomination and he was sworn in on 6 October.
© Win McNamee/Getty Images.

# COURAGE UNDER ATTACK

One of the struggles dominating the Americas region throughout 2018 has been for territory and land, particularly that belonging to Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, coupled with the fight for a healthy environment.

Amada Martínez, representative of the Ava Guarani Tekoha Sauce community, Alto Paraná, Paraguay. © Amnesty International/Gustavo Luis Pereira Verly.

Lenca Indigenous women protest against the murder of Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres, in front of the Public Ministry in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, on 5 April 2016. © Orlando Sierra/AFP/Getty Images.

Environmental and land rights activists throughout the region have demonstrated exemplary bravery in the face of continued threats and acts of violence. Both men and women human rights defenders face these dangers because they dare to raise their voices to denounce environmental damage caused by major economic interests and the damage to their ancestral lands caused by projects that exploit natural resources.

Among these brave defenders, women play a vital role. They face specific risks both relating to their activities and because they challenge the traditional roles that society has assigned to them.

For being "too vocal", these women are ostracized, intimidated, threatened, subjected to enforced disappearance and even murdered. They are not lone victims: their children and families are also targeted. Moreover, women defenders are commonly targeted with sexual violence or threats of sexual attacks in an attempt to intimidate them.

Amnesty International's platform Speakout4defenders tells the stories of these brave women who do not renounce their fight, even in the face of threats and violence.

## INTIMIDATION AND THREATS

In one such incident in August, three armed men intercepted the taxi in which Amada Martínez, a member of Paraguay's Indigenous Tekoha Sauce community, was travelling with her sister and their three young children. When they stopped, one of the men pointed a shotgun at Amada's face. He accused her of having a "loud mouth", and told her to beware that, one day, they would find her alone on the road. Amada has been vocal about the suffering faced by her community, which has been displaced by the construction of a hydroelectric plant. The three armed men were wearing the uniforms of the hydroelectric company.

A month earlier in Chile, defence lawyer Karina Riquelme Viveros was similarly intimidated for her work as a defender of Mapuche Indigenous rights, when two men aimed a laser through the window of her home, where she lives with her six-year-old daughter. The previous day, she had noticed an intimidating group of police intelligence agents taking photos of her in the court where she works. This occurred during a hearing against police intelligence agents accused of trying to frame Mapuche community members as terrorists. Days later, one of the agents returned to the court posing as a member of the public. Although the Chilean Supreme Court has ordered police not to interfere with legal representation during criminal investigations, Karina fears that these intimidation tactics could turn into violent attacks.

Amada Martínez and Karina Riquelme Viveros are not the only women to have discovered that the children of human rights defenders are at risk of intimidation and even specifically targeted to exert pressure on their parents. In April, police illegally raided the home of the son of Liliam López, co-ordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), and took photos of him. Their activities were not known to the local police department.

## ATTACKED WITH IMPUNITY

There is deep concern about the role of the authorities in attacks against human rights defenders. In July, a member of the Venezuelan state armed forces accused Lisa Henrito, defender of the rights of the Indigenous Pemón group in Venezuela, of treason on national television. The official also called on Venezuela's military forces to monitor the activism of the Pemón people – whose land rights have not been recognized by the government. The Pemón communities have organized and campaigned against threats to their land rights caused by a recent government power line project, and the lack of consultation. They fear the project is a precursor to the opening of new mines in the area.

Those who attack human rights defenders often do so with impunity: few criminal investigations into the attacks against women defenders result in those responsible being identified or brought

**ON AVERAGE, ONE ACTIVIST IS KILLED**

# EVERY THREE DAYS

**IN COLOMBIA.**

to justice. This includes those who order the attacks. The lack of sanctions against perpetrators sends a dangerous message to society: a women defender can be attacked without fear of punishment. In Ecuador, for example, an unidentified man threw rocks and broke the windows of Patricia Gualinga's home, while yelling death threats at her. Patricia is the leader of the Kichwa Indigenous Peoples of Sarayaku and a member of the Amazonian Women's Collective, and has been campaigning against oil extraction projects in her community. The authorities have hindered Patricia's attempts to get justice, refusing to show her CCTV images that could have helped identify the perpetrator. In the past year, three other women human rights defenders from the Amazonian Women's Collective – Nema Grefa, Salomé Aranda and Margoth Escobar – have suffered similar threats.

## VOICES SILENCED

Justice systems in the Americas have been misused to harass and silence human rights defenders. In Colombia in April, the authorities detained Sara Quiñonez and her mother Tulia María Valencia, both defenders of the rights of Afro-Colombian people, and accused them of "rebellion". Since 2015, Sara has twice been forced to move to a new house after receiving threats because of her activism. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian advocates are targeted with alarming regularity in Colombia, while the government fails to address the dramatic spike in killings of human rights defenders in the country. It is estimated that in Colombia one activist is killed every three days.

Governments' failure to protect human rights defenders, and in some cases their deliberate actions to target them, are demonstrated by the events surrounding the death of Berta Cáceres. A Honduran environmental human rights defender and Indigenous leader, Berta successfully pressured the world's largest dam builder to pull out of a project in the Río Gualcarque, which would have severely affected the livelihoods of the Indigenous Lenca community and compromised their access to food and water. Berta was murdered in her home in 2016, having received numerous death threats in the preceding years. Despite the previous threats and attacks suffered by Berta, she was not under any protection on the day of her death. International recommendations were made that the Honduran government should provide round-the-clock security, and yet the protection offered was severely lacking.

## SEEKING JUSTICE

While the examples above paint a bleak picture, there are rays of hope that some perpetrators of attacks on human rights defenders could be held accountable. Two years after her death, justice for Berta seems finally to be on the horizon as nine people have been arrested for her murder, including individuals connected to the Honduran military. However, it will be a slow process, and justice will only be fully served when those who ordered her killing are identified and brought to trial.

Yet these glimmers of hope are insufficient in an environment where impunity is not an exception but rather the rule. On 28 July in Guatemala, the neighbours of Juana Raymundo alerted the police after finding her body by a small river between the Nebaj and Acambalam communities. Juana, a Mayan Ixil nurse, campaigned tirelessly for peasant farmers' access to land and rural development. Her killers have yet to be found.

To protect human rights defenders, it is imperative that protection measures are enforced, not just for individuals, but for whole communities, particularly Indigenous groups. Women in the region, and their families, often bear the brunt of attacks designed to silence defenders and prevent them from carrying out their vital work. For as long as human rights defenders, and women defenders, continue to bravely stand up and speak out, governments across the region have a duty to protect them. ■

**Graffiti commemorating the murdered environmental activist Berta Cáceres in Honduras. © Amnesty International/Sergio Ortiz.**

# FIVE WOMEN LEADING THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN 2018

**In December 2018, hundreds of thousands of ordinary people all over the world will come together to write letters, scribble postcards, draw pictures and send emails – all of them focused on one thing: making change happen.**

They will be taking part in one of the biggest campaigns for human rights in the world: Write for Rights. And this year they will be supporting extraordinary women who are leading the struggle for justice, often in the face of fierce opposition, discrimination and violence. In 2018, the campaign is highlighting cases where women human rights defenders are speaking out for change against all the odds. We are highlighting five cases below – go to **amnesty.org/writeforrights** to take action on these and other women human rights defenders featured in the campaign. Write a letter, change a life!

**Nonhle Mbuthuma, South Africa**

**"When you take my land, you take my identity." Nonhle Mbuthuma is leading the fight for her community against a mining company which wants to mine titanium on their ancestral land. For that she faces constant threats and intimidation, and has even survived an attempt to kill her.**

**But Nonhle is determined to resist. As she says, "This land belonged to my grandparents, who inherited it from their parents. What am I going to leave for my children? Mining is not an option." Around 5,000 people may be forcibly evicted if the company is allowed to mine the land.**

**"They tried to intimidate us and they failed," Nonhle told Amnesty International recently. "I'm still standing. Nothing is going to separate us from the land." Letter-writers are showing their support for Nonhle and telling the President of South Africa to protect her now.**

© Amnesty International.

**Geraldine Chacón, Venezuela**

Geraldine Chacón always dreamed of defending others. At 14 years of age, she stood for her local youth government. And at university, she started a network of Amnesty International activists. As her mother says, “Any injustice she saw, she fought against.”

That’s why at the age of 24 Geraldine now works for an organization which empowers young people in some of the poorest areas of Caracas, her home city. But she’s being hounded by the authorities just for trying to make her country a better place to live. This year, they imprisoned her for four months in appalling conditions and banned her from leaving the country simply for her human rights work.

The harassment and intimidation that Geraldine has endured is part of a wider crackdown on those who express any form of dissent or criticize the authorities in Venezuela. The judicial case against her still isn’t closed so she could be arrested again at any moment, with no warning. Letter-writers have been telling the Venezuelan authorities to stop harassing Geraldine.

© Fabiola Ferrero/VII Mentor Program.

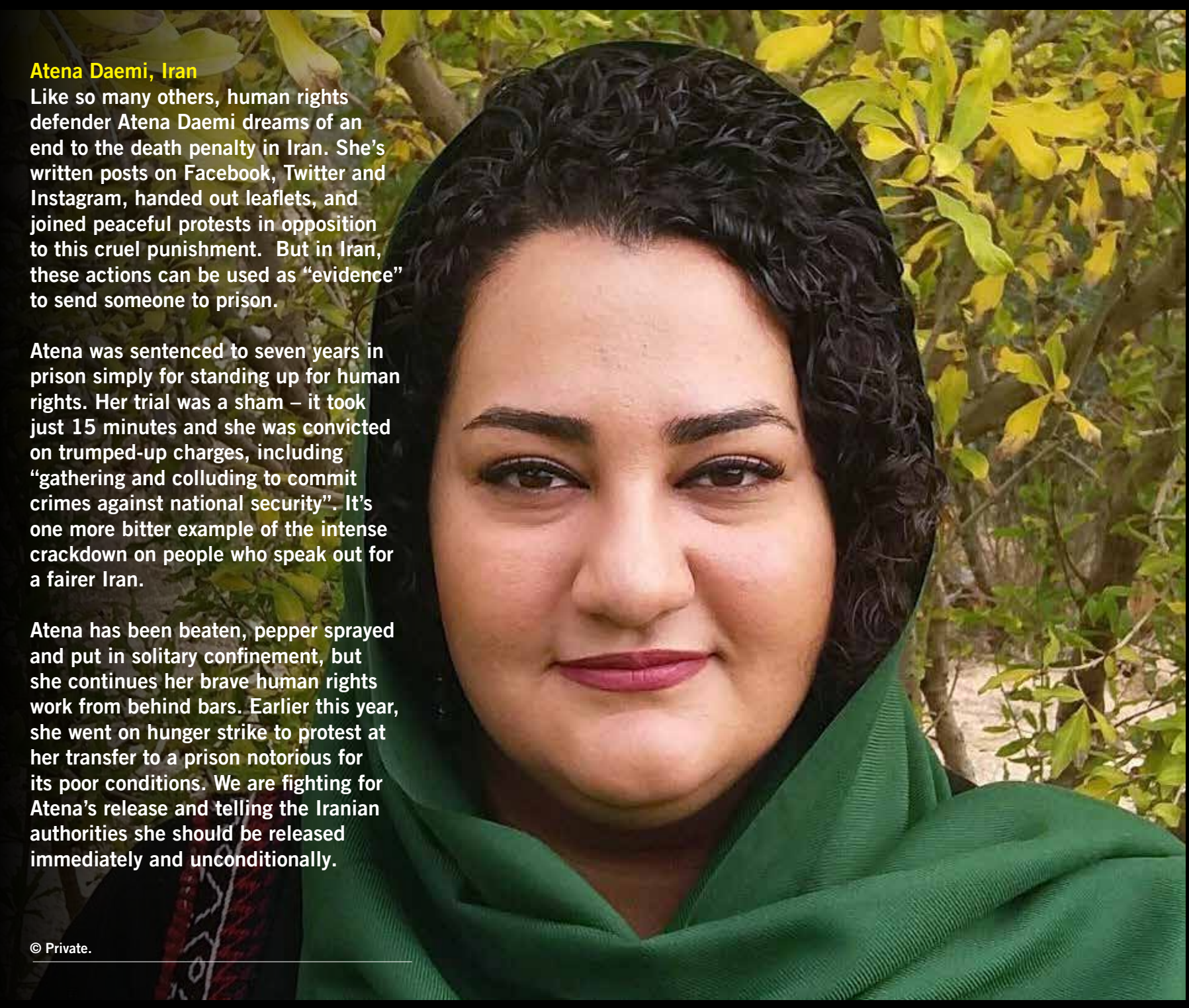
**Pavitri Manjhi, India**

Pavitri Manjhi is taking a stand. She's part of an Adivasi Indigenous community who are at risk of being kicked off their land to make way for two power plants. They stand to lose their farms and livelihoods. But she's leading the fight back.

Villagers say they were forced to sell their land by agents acting on behalf of two private companies. Many haven't even been adequately paid. As head of her village council, Pavitri brought people together to file nearly 100 formal complaints. And for that she faces ongoing intimidation.

For decades, Adivasi people have been forced from their land and had their rights trampled on to make room for business developments. But Pavitri isn't going anywhere. She's determined to help her community stand up to big business and protect their ancestral lands. The Indian authorities are receiving letters telling them to give Pavitri the security she needs to protect her from threats, harassment and intimidation.

© Amnesty International.



**Atena Daemi, Iran**

Like so many others, human rights defender Atena Daemi dreams of an end to the death penalty in Iran. She's written posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, handed out leaflets, and joined peaceful protests in opposition to this cruel punishment. But in Iran, these actions can be used as "evidence" to send someone to prison.

Atena was sentenced to seven years in prison simply for standing up for human rights. Her trial was a sham – it took just 15 minutes and she was convicted on trumped-up charges, including "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". It's one more bitter example of the intense crackdown on people who speak out for a fairer Iran.

Atena has been beaten, pepper sprayed and put in solitary confinement, but she continues her brave human rights work from behind bars. Earlier this year, she went on hunger strike to protest at her transfer to a prison notorious for its poor conditions. We are fighting for Atena's release and telling the Iranian authorities she should be released immediately and unconditionally.

© Private.

**Vitalina Koval, Ukraine**
**"Don't be afraid to do what you believe in, what your heart is beating for." Vitalina Koval uses her passion to stand up for LGBTI people in Ukraine. "I want everyone to be equal in spite of their skin colour, sexual orientation, gender identity or beliefs," she says.**

**But she and other activists across Ukraine have been violently attacked by anti-human rights groups, just for speaking out against hate and discrimination. On one peaceful demonstration to mark International Women's Day, a group shouted insults and hurled red paint, causing chemical burns to Vitalina's eyes.**

**But she refuses to give in. "I've been attacked so many times," she says, "but I'm not afraid any more, because I think fear is why you fail." Members and supporters have been telling the Ukrainian authorities to protect Vitalina and other activists defending women's and LGBTI rights.**

© Amnesty International.

## Write for Rights: Success stories

In the last 12 months, people power through Write for Rights has helped to create real change. Here's how:

**Teodora Vásquez** was released from prison in El Salvador in February. She had suffered a stillbirth and was sentenced to 30 years for "aggravated homicide" under draconian anti-abortion laws. She spent over a decade behind bars.

In March, **Jerryme Corre** was released in the Philippines after being tortured by police and spending six years in jail on trumped-up drug-related charges. Thousands of supporters had campaigned for his release since 2014.

**Mahadine**, an online activist in Chad, was released in April after spending more than 18 months in prison on fabricated charges. He had been facing a life sentence for a Facebook post critical of the government.

In July, political cartoonist **Zunar** was finally acquitted in Malaysia. He had faced nine sedition charges for allegedly tweeting insults against the judiciary.

Around the world, women are leading the charge for freedom, justice, dignity and equality. These are all women human rights defenders who won't back down, and who will keep working for a better, fairer world. Now's the time to stand with them, every step of the way.

**Write a letter, change a life today. ■**

**WRITE FOR RIGHTS: IN NUMBERS**

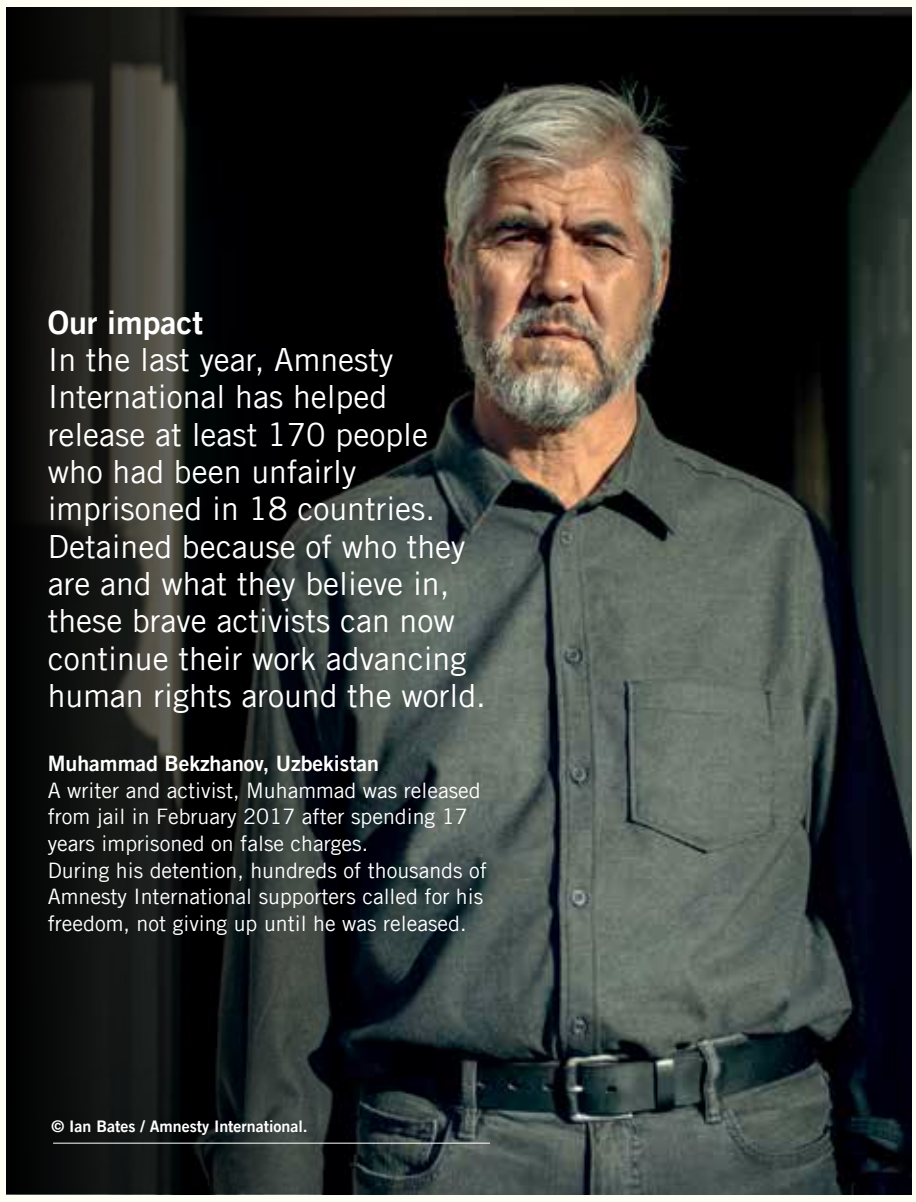
**5.5 MILLION**

**ACTIONS IN 2017**
**208 COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES (AT LEAST) TAKING PART**

# THE **“NOT ENOUGH”** IMPACT REPORT 2018

**In these eight stories of Not Enough Impact, we celebrate the gains the movement has made in the last year, and the brave people that have helped make them possible.** More importantly, we take the opportunity to reflect on what is still to be done, and the people who persist in the face of injustice.

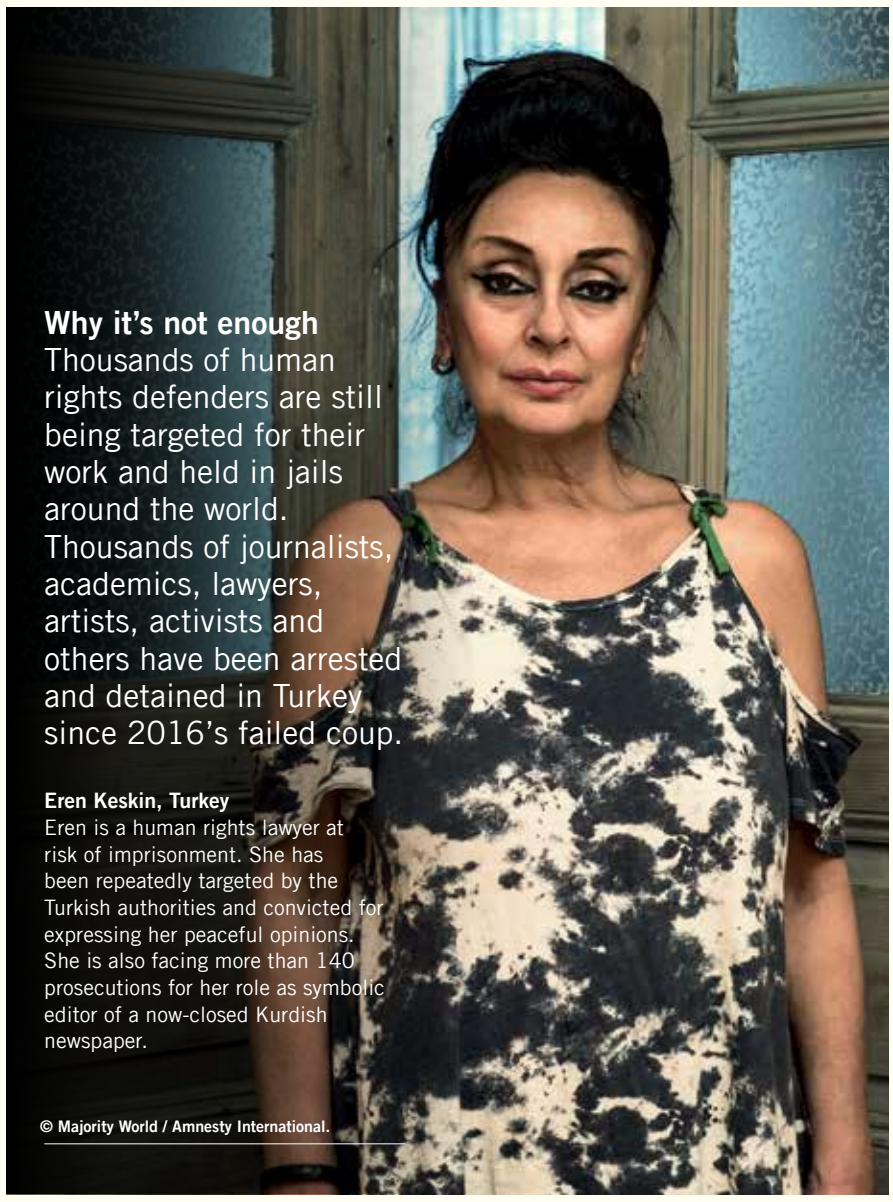
## DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



**Our impact**
In the last year, Amnesty International has helped release at least 170 people who had been unfairly imprisoned in 18 countries. Detained because of who they are and what they believe in, these brave activists can now continue their work advancing human rights around the world.

**Muhammad Bekzhanov, Uzbekistan**
A writer and activist, Muhammad was released from jail in February 2017 after spending 17 years imprisoned on false charges.
During his detention, hundreds of thousands of Amnesty International supporters called for his freedom, not giving up until he was released.

© Ian Bates / Amnesty International.



**Why it’s not enough**
Thousands of human rights defenders are still being targeted for their work and held in jails around the world. Thousands of journalists, academics, lawyers, artists, activists and others have been arrested and detained in Turkey since 2016’s failed coup.

**Eren Keskin, Turkey**
Eren is a human rights lawyer at risk of imprisonment. She has been repeatedly targeted by the Turkish authorities and convicted for expressing her peaceful opinions. She is also facing more than 140 prosecutions for her role as symbolic editor of a now-closed Kurdish newspaper.

© Majority World / Amnesty International.

## LGBTI RIGHTS EVERYWHERE

**Our impact**
Last year, Amnesty International helped to pass 41 laws that strengthened human rights, including the rights of LGBTI people.
After thousands of Amnesty International activists called on Taiwan to “say yes” to marriage equality, its highest court ruled that same-sex marriage is a constitutional right.
Taiwan is now close to becoming the first jurisdiction in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage.

**Victoria Hsu, Taiwan**
Victoria was the lead lawyer in Taiwan’s historic marriage equality court decision. Victoria and the lawyers and activists at Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights have been at the heart of the fight for marriage equality in Taiwan, and they continue to lobby for greater rights and freedoms for the LGBTI community.

© Duncan Longden / Majority World / Amnesty International.

**Why it’s not enough**
Many LGBTI communities still live in fear of discrimination and violence.
In 2017, the Chechen government orchestrated a “gay purge”, in which more than 100 men were hunted down, abducted, tortured and some even killed. To this day, no one has been charged with these crimes.

**Mikhail Tumasov, Russia**
Mikhail chairs the Russian LGBT Network, campaigning for the rights of LGBTI people in Russia, and offering emergency support for those in danger. Although Mikhail and his team have evacuated more than 130 people from the region since April 2017, there have already been several attempts to kidnap those who have been relocated.

© Christo Geoghegan / Amnesty International.

## KEEPING ACTIVISTS ONLINE

**Our impact**
A free and safe internet is an essential tool for activists everywhere. Over the last year, Amnesty International exposed and stopped malware and phishing attacks against activists, journalists, bloggers and peaceful protesters – preventing privacy breaches that would threaten their work.

**Diep Saeeda, Pakistan**
An activist from Lahore, Diep is one of many who have been targeted for phishing attacks and other attempts to get access to her personal devices. Amnesty International used digital forensics and malware analysis to help Diep understand these attacks and protect her devices, allowing her to continue her important work.

© Ayesha Villain / Majority World / Amnesty International.

**Why it's not enough**
While new technology can be a powerful force for good in the world, it can also pose real threats to human rights activists both online and off. In June 2018, an Amnesty International staff member was targeted by spyware technology sold by Israeli surveillance company NSO Group.

**Danna Ingleton, UK**
Danna is an important part of Amnesty International's technology and human rights team. Together, Danna and her team are strengthening Amnesty International's ability to harness technology in order to monitor, promote and protect human rights everywhere.

© Christo Geoghegan / Amnesty International.

## EXPOSING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

**Our impact**
Human rights crises cannot be addressed until they are exposed. For more than a year, Amnesty International has conducted careful investigations, gathering evidence of crimes against humanity in Myanmar. The evidence is a powerful part of Amnesty International's campaign for an end to the violence, a comprehensive arms embargo, and access for humanitarian actors.

**Micah Farfour, USA**
As Special Adviser for Remote Sensing in Amnesty International's Crisis Response Team, Micah analysed satellite imagery which – with support from testimony, photos and videos – found evidence of crimes against humanity by the Myanmar military. Her team is made up of analysts and on the ground investigators who have proved a litany of grave abuses - including ethnic cleansing, unlawful killings and arbitrary arrests. The Crisis Response Team was the first to confirm the use of anti-personnel mines along the border with Bangladesh.

© Ryan David Brown / Amnesty International.

**Why it's not enough**
The conflict in South Sudan remains one of the world's most neglected crises, with 7 million people in dire need of humanitarian aid and protection. After campaigning by Amnesty International and others, the UN passed a resolution establishing an arms embargo on South Sudan in July 2018. Still, the violence and human rights violations continue.

**Joan Nyanyuki, Kenya**
Joan is Amnesty International's Regional Director for East Africa. She and her team refuse to be silent, continually speaking out about the gross and under-reported human rights violations in South Sudan.

© Lameck Nyagudi / Majority World / Amnesty International.

## DIGNITY FOR REFUGEES

**Our impact**
There are more refugees than ever before, with millions of people fleeing conflict, violence and persecution around the world.
Amnesty International has helped to establish and strengthen community sponsorship programmes in at least five countries, supporting refugees to live safely and with dignity.

**Shankar Kasynathan, Australia**
As Amnesty International's Refugee Campaign Co-ordinator in Australia, Shankar led a campaign asking community leaders to support sponsorship programmes that relocate refugees.
Within a year, more than 50 community leaders across the country had agreed. They've now joined forces with 19 local governments to support Amnesty International's work.

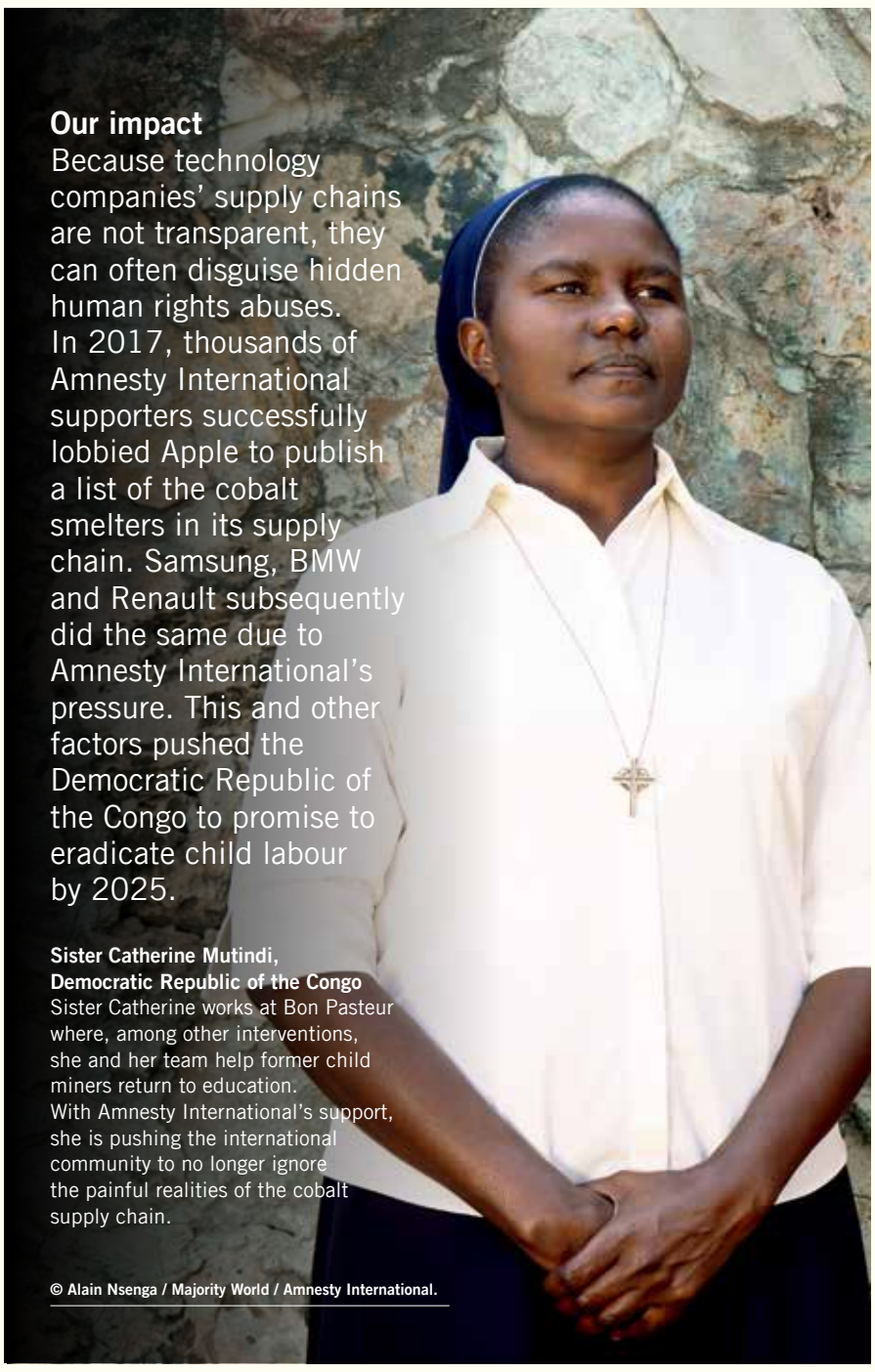
© David Fowler / Majority World / Amnesty International.

**Why it's not enough**
Many governments still use inhumane means to stop people from seeking asylum in their countries.
Because of xenophobic rhetoric and cruel new laws in the USA, only 11 Syrian refugees had been accepted into the country by April this year.
On the USA/Mexico border, more than 15,000 Central American parents and children have been separated as a "deterrent and punishment" for irregular crossing.

**Aaron Tovo, USA**
Aaron is an Amnesty International volunteer in Minnesota. In 2016, his group was the first to present successful City Council resolutions to welcome and resettle Syrian refugees in the USA - first in St. Paul, then Minneapolis.
The group continues to lobby elected officials for greater rights for refugees, particularly those from the Middle East and Central America.

© Richard Tsong-Taatarii / Amnesty International.

## HOLDING CORPORATIONS TO ACCOUNT



**Our impact**
Because technology companies' supply chains are not transparent, they can often disguise hidden human rights abuses.
In 2017, thousands of Amnesty International supporters successfully lobbied Apple to publish a list of the cobalt smelters in its supply chain. Samsung, BMW and Renault subsequently did the same due to Amnesty International's pressure. This and other factors pushed the Democratic Republic of the Congo to promise to eradicate child labour by 2025.

**Sister Catherine Mutindi, Democratic Republic of the Congo**
Sister Catherine works at Bon Pasteur where, among other interventions, she and her team help former child miners return to education.
With Amnesty International's support, she is pushing the international community to no longer ignore the painful realities of the cobalt supply chain.

© Alain Nsenga / Majority World / Amnesty International.

**Why it's not enough**
Many of the world's biggest companies still fall short on human rights.
Amnesty International's 2018 *#ToxicTwitter* report revealed the scale and nature of violence and abuse facing women on Twitter, and showed the company's failure to take any meaningful action in response.
Many women, especially those who face abuse because of their different identities online, are effectively silenced on Twitter, forced to self-censor or leave the social media platform entirely.

**Renee Bracey Sherman, USA**
Renee is a writer, reproductive justice activist and expert on abortion storytelling.
As an outspoken advocate working to end abortion stigma, Renee receives racist and misogynistic hate messages and violent threats on Twitter nearly every day.

© Jessica Chou / Amnesty International.

## GROWING A DIVERSE GLOBAL MOVEMENT

**Our impact**
Amnesty International is a global movement of people who stand up for human rights. In 2017, almost 7 million Amnesty International supporters took action - protesting, writing, petitioning and much more - to defend and advance human rights everywhere.

**Emily Helsby, UK**
Emily has been an Amnesty International activist since she was 16.
As part of our Youth Advisory Group and Student Action Network Committee, Emily and her peers have helped us connect to more young people around the world.

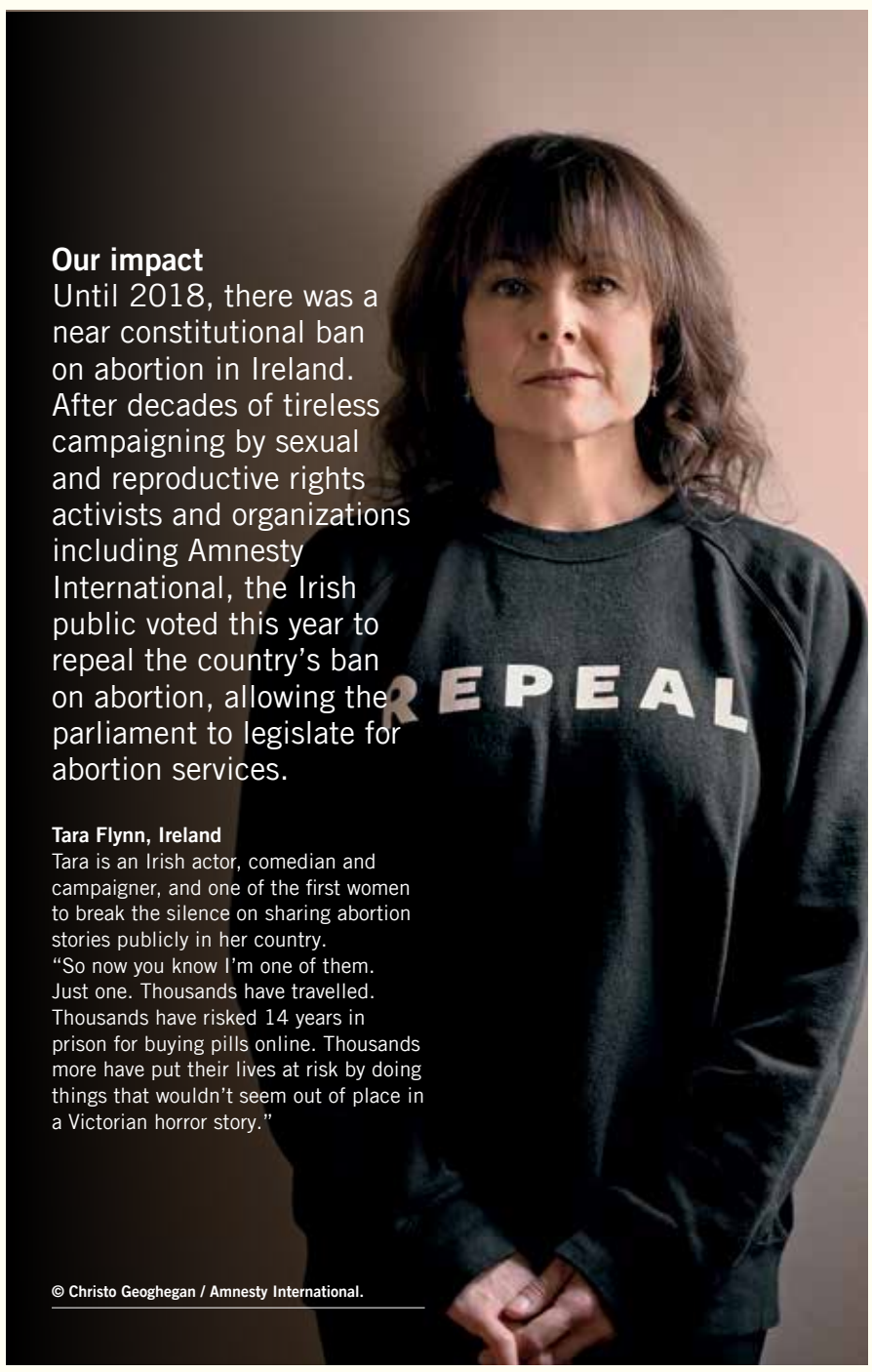
© Christo Geoghegan / Amnesty International.

**Why it's not enough**
We welcome more and more supporters each year, but more needs to be done to diversify the Amnesty International movement.
This year, we are focussing on being more inclusive, encouraging more young women to join and ensuring that they have a platform to stand up for human rights.

**Pashtana, Afghanistan**
Pashtana has recently become part of the Amnesty International movement in Afghanistan.
"I joined Amnesty because I feel included, I do tasks that I am passionate about and most importantly Amnesty has given me a safe space to grow in a diverse community of activists."

© Gulbuddin Elham / Majority World / Amnesty International.

## FIGHTING FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE




**Our impact**
Until 2018, there was a near constitutional ban on abortion in Ireland. After decades of tireless campaigning by sexual and reproductive rights activists and organizations including Amnesty International, the Irish public voted this year to repeal the country's ban on abortion, allowing the parliament to legislate for abortion services.

**Tara Flynn, Ireland**
Tara is an Irish actor, comedian and campaigner, and one of the first women to break the silence on sharing abortion stories publicly in her country.
"So now you know I'm one of them. Just one. Thousands have travelled. Thousands have risked 14 years in prison for buying pills online. Thousands more have put their lives at risk by doing things that wouldn't seem out of place in a Victorian horror story."

© Christo Geoghegan / Amnesty International.

**Why it's not enough**
After a marathon 16-hour debate in August, Argentina's Senate rejected a law that would have saved women's lives by legalizing abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. The result was a setback but not the end, and the campaign for legalized abortion in Argentina continues.

**Noel De Toledo, Argentina**
Noel is part of a group of young Amnesty International activists campaigning for safe and legal abortion in Argentina.
"We, as young people, have made this cause our own and we will continue fighting for abortion to be legalized and sex education to be a mandatory part of the school curriculum. This green wave is unstoppable."

© Javier Heinzmann / Majority World / Amnesty International.

# Birthright

**Activist Helen Thomas shares a birthday with the UN's most famous declaration. Here she reflects on what it means to be born "free and equal", and the work that remains to be done in securing that reality for everyone.**

© Private. Helen Thomas at the age of two, standing in her cot at the Victoria Hospital for Sick Children. Kingston-upon-Hull, UK, 1951.

**I came into the world on a freezing winter night in 1948 in my parents' small cottage in the north of England.** My mother had laboured for hours, finally giving birth at midnight on the ninth of December.

Those were difficult, post-war years. My parents had married a week before war was declared. Reunited after years of separation, my mother struggled to raise four children in a world of bombsites, rationing and poverty. Her existence was a continuous round of domestic labour, and it must have seemed that events in the outside world had little impact on her life.

On the night of my birth, 500 miles away in Paris, another woman was labouring to bring something new into the world, also the result of many months of gestation. She, however, was a former US First Lady, a diplomat and a UN representative. Her progeny was expected to change the lives of millions, myself included. It was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For months, a committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt had battled to bring forth a list of fundamental rights and freedoms that all countries in the infant UN could agree belonged to all their citizens. As I made my first angry cries, Roosevelt was giving a night-time speech before the General Assembly, and declaring the Universal Declaration "a great document". On 10 December, it was adopted by the General Assembly and every person on the planet received recognition of their human rights. At least, on paper.

Many decades passed before I understood the monumentality of what had happened in the moments of my birth. The Universal Declaration went beyond the notions of "good and evil" that I grew up with, beyond the division of nations and cultures. Within the first hours of my life, I was reborn "free and equal in dignity and rights". I had acquired freedom from torture and discrimination, full equality before the law, and had become entitled to free movement, thought, conscience and religion among other rights. Yet for many years I knew nothing of it.

Only now, from reading the history books, do I know that the Universal Declaration's 30 Articles sparked new discussions, seeped into various laws and national constitutions, and formed the foundation of human rights treaties.

The war had left a bleak landscape in Britain, but also legacies of egalitarianism. One such legacy was Britain's free and universal National Health Service (NHS), barely five months old when I was born. The history books tell me that the new framework of human rights had an immediate impact on the fledgling NHS; however, when I came to benefit from its medical services, I found it utterly lacking in respect for the dignity and rights of patients.

At the age of two, I toddled out of the garden gate, into the road and under the wheels of a lorry. In a heart-stopping instant, the course of my life was altered irrevocably.

Following the accident, I became the first in my family to receive free hospital care, which my parents could never have afforded otherwise. Thanks to the NHS, I can walk today. Yet hospital regimes could be cruel. Children were tied to cots, sometimes for weeks. Medical procedures for children were frequently carried out without pain relief in the belief that it would not benefit them. Procedures were frequently conducted without the consent of the patient or their family. In the early days, parents could only see their children for one hour each week. Such practices went against the human rights of patients, yet were common.

The rights to education and freedom from discrimination also took a long time to trickle down. When I enrolled at school, some staff refused to teach a "damaged" child. I was often separated from my classmates, and was prevented from coming into school on crutches, lest I became a "liability".

During my childhood, discrimination against women and girls, within the family and wider society, also meant fewer places for girls in the better schools. I wasted years on an education that was outdated and irrelevant. I learned the minutiae of the French Revolution, but nothing about the founding of the UN, its relevance for humankind, or the Universal Declaration.

At 16, I began nursing, and received a salary that allowed me to save up for a passport and a suitcase. Arriving in Johannesburg, South Africa, in the late

**Left: A group of Japanese women read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights during a visit to the UN interim headquarters in Lake Success, New York, USA. 24 February 1950. © UN Photo.**
**Above: Shrimati Lakshmi Menon of India addresses the UN General Assembly prior to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Palais de Chaillot, Paris, France, 9 December 1948. © UN Photo.**

1960s, I found a wide-open world of sunshine and opportunity. And apartheid. As a white, literate English woman, I could walk into almost any job. Utterly unqualified, I got a job as the manager of a swanky restaurant. Under me, the lone white employee, were Xhosa kitchen workers, Asian waiters and Malay bar staff. I found the premise of apartheid absurd – a privileged few keeping a tight hold on what they had managed to grab, and using a false ideology of the inferiority of others to justify it. It would have been all too easy and rewarding to go along with it.

Yet I didn't.

Was it the vicious nonsense of apartheid that awoke me? Coming from such ignorance of human rights, I hardly know, except to say that the injustice was so self-evidently painful, it was intolerable. Mothers could be separated from their babies; black people killed with impunity. I realized that protection of the rights I took for granted was not available to all.

When my white fiancé began furtively training non-white apprentices in his mechanic's workshop, his white workmates harassed and punished him, even trying to set him on fire. Refusing to show proof of our "pure white descent" on our marriage certificate, we crossed the border and married in Swaziland. Returning to South Africa, we faced further harassment because most of our friends were registered as "coloured". Refusing to play along with the white supremacy myth left us exposed in a climate of oppression, police violence and state spies. We boarded a slow boat to India to avoid arrest.

We arrived during the Maharashtra drought in Mumbai, where half of the city's 14 million inhabitants lived and died on the streets. I was again shocked by how commonplace the extremes of poverty and disease could become. The Universal Declaration wasn't in evidence there either.

Returning to England in the 1970s, and the advantages of free education, I gained a PhD in medical research. I fostered a refugee boy from apartheid South Africa, and had three children of my own.

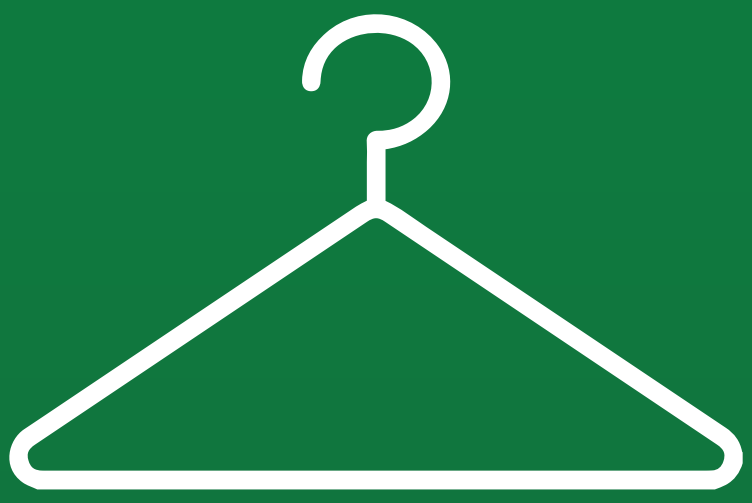
Today, I volunteer for initiatives that support refugees, campaign for improvements to the local environment, and help supply a food bank. Otherwise, like most of us, my life will not leave much of an imprint on the universe.

At 70 years old, I wonder what progress the world has made towards achieving the recognition of and respect for the rights that Eleanor Roosevelt aspired to. Every person is born free and equal in dignity and rights, yet at school my children, like me, were not taught of the Universal Declaration's existence. They did, however, learn about the rise of fascism in 1930s Europe, and its nightmarish culmination at Auschwitz and elsewhere; events that led to the Universal Declaration being adopted. My youngest daughter saw these crimes of fascism as something that "ignorant, old people" had done. Now she sees her own generation slipping into the same pattern. How can we protect our freedoms if we don't know where they stem from?

My first grandchild is due to be born this winter. Will he remain as ignorant of his rights as my generation? Or will he be taught of their existence, and have the courage to do what my generation frequently failed to do: to secure, for himself and others, those rights and freedoms that are his birthright? Otherwise, this moment in human history when we strove towards something better will be lost to the constant, competing human inclinations towards greed, revenge, selfishness and the lust for power that continually threaten to strip us of our rights.

Human rights are too often enjoyed and controlled only by elites, and understood by the few. To sustain them, I believe they must be known and understood by the many. We must educate every child about the Universal Declaration, why it matters, and all the human rights that they possess. We must make each individual feel a shared responsibility to uphold those rights and to fight for them. ■

# ADIÓS



GOODBYE TO GOVERNMENTS
RESTRICTING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS,
TO THE THIRD LEADING CAUSE OF
MATERNAL DEATHS WORLDWIDE,
TO CLANDESTINE ABORTIONS,
TO ABORTION BEING A CRIME.

IN 2019, WE'LL FIGHT TO
DECRIMINALIZE ABORTION IN
ALL COUNTRIES WHERE IT IS
STILL A CRIME.

JOIN THE FIGHT.

JOIN US.

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL