

Introduction to the 2013 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

In the early morning hours of August 21, 2013, artillery and mortar shells equipped with sarin gas exploded amidst the agricultural neighborhoods of Ghouta on the outskirts of Damascus. Those exposed to the nerve agent foamed from the nose and mouth, convulsing, desperate for air. Rows of victims, covered in white burial shrouds, soon lay motionless on hospital floors. At least 1,429 **Syrian** civilians, including 426 children, and many of the brave activists who had raced to the scene with video cameras to show the world what had happened, died on that day. The poisonous gas attack, perpetrated by the Syrian army, marked the most lethal chemical weapons attack in decades. It is one of many horrors in a civil war filled with countless crimes against humanity, from the torture and murder of prisoners to the targeting of civilians with barrel bombs and Scud missiles, which has claimed more than 100,000 lives.

The tragedy that has befallen the Syrian people stands apart in its scope and human cost. But it is not the only major human rights calamity of 2013 – some born of negligence and others of malice, some committed by physical force, and others by legislative abuse.

In April, amid growing concerns about the hazardous labor conditions and fire safety standards in **Bangladesh**, the collapse of an eight-story factory building killed more than 1,000 garment workers and injured more than 2,500, leaving hundreds more with permanent disabilities, making it one of the world's worst garment industry tragedies in recent memory. In August, according to most nongovernmental organizations, **Egyptian** security forces killed approximately 600-900 protesters in breaking up two sit-in demonstrations, making them by far the most violent disruptions of protests in 2013.

Three years ago, the promise of the Arab Awakening gave hope to millions. In different ways, from **Libya** to **Tunisia** to **Yemen**, governments and their people have made progress along the inevitably long and arduous path of building democratic institutions checked by the rule of law. Just as inevitably, in the Middle East and beyond, those threatened by demands for pluralism have pushed back.

From Independence Square in **Ukraine** to Gezi Park in **Turkey**, authorities resorted to violence to disperse peaceful protests around the world, seriously injuring scores of people. **Cuba** continued to organize mobs to physically assault peaceful marchers, **China** tightened controls on the internet and stepped up a

crackdown on anti-corruption protesters and other activists, **Vietnam** continued to use vague national security laws to curb freedom of expression and association both online and offline, and **Russia** continued to suppress those critical of the government.

More than six decades after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a widening gap persists between the rights conferred by law and the daily realities for many around the globe. More than one third of the world's population still lives under authoritarian rule. Serious human rights violations continue to occur, often unchecked and en masse, in closed societies. Millions are denied civil liberties, persecuted, harassed or silenced for their beliefs, subjected to torture, detained arbitrarily and unlawfully, or labor in harsh or coercive conditions, often without mechanisms for redress or accountability.

And yet, as demonstrated this past year, the courageous pursuit of human dignity remains enduring and undeterred. At the end of 2013, hundreds of thousands of **Ukrainians** were braving violence and political repression to demand their rights and freedoms. **Libyans** risked their lives, marching to replace the rule of militias with the rule of law. The world came together to mourn the passing of human rights icon Nelson Mandela and saw a new generation celebrate a new champion, Malala Yousafzai, the youngest person nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. We witnessed the continued release of political prisoners in **Burma** and the implementation of a law that prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in **Haiti**.

The Congressionally mandated annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* reflect continued U.S. interest in, and support for, human rights worldwide. As in years past, the reports chronicle the triumphs and trials, as well as the progress and perils that characterized the state of human rights across the globe in 2013.

The past 12 months have seen notable human rights developments in five key areas:

- a continued crackdown by governments on civil society and the freedoms of association and assembly;
- growing restrictions on free expression and press freedom;
- accountability deficits for security force abuses;

- lack of effective labor rights protections; and
- marginalization of vulnerable groups, in particular:
 - religious and ethnic minorities;
 - women and children;
 - LGBT persons and communities; and
 - persons with disabilities

Continued Crackdown on Civil Society and the Freedoms of Association and Assembly

In 2013, President Obama declared “we are seeing a growing number of countries that are passing laws specifically to stifle civil society. They are forcing groups to register with governments, eroding human rights protections and restricting NGOs from accessing foreign funding, and cracking down on communication technologies that connect civil society groups around the globe. In more extreme cases, activists and journalists have been arrested on false charges, and some have been killed. We are also seeing new and fragile democracies cracking down on civil society, which, I believe, sets them back and sends a dangerous signal to other countries.” This dangerous trend is evident in every region of the world.

In **Bahrain**, the government issued decrees restricting the rights of political groups to assemble, associate, and express themselves freely and to communicate with foreign governments and international organizations. Travel bans sometimes were imposed and enforced on political activists, and the government maintained the revocation of citizenship of 31 such individuals. Limits on civil society’s ability to engage in political dialogue continued to hinder reform and reconciliation.

In **Belarus**, persons remained imprisoned on politically motivated charges, and security forces beat protesters and detainees and reportedly used torture or mistreatment during investigations and in prisons. The **Cuban** government continued to organize mobs to assault and disperse those that assembled peacefully. While the government tolerated the Damas de Blanco’s Sunday marches after Mass in the suburbs of Havana, government-organized mobs broke up marches planned by the Damas in other locations, particularly in Matanzas Province.

In **China**, authorities carried out a crackdown against groups seen as politically sensitive, including members of the New Citizens Movement, a loosely organized group that urged the government to increase transparency and combat corruption. NGO sources reported that at least 29 people associated with the New Citizens Movement were arrested on charges stemming from activities to promote good governance.

Governments also increasingly used legislation to silence civil society. In **Ecuador**, for example, Presidential Decree 16, issued in June, required all social organizations, including NGOs, to reregister in a new online registration system within one year or face dissolution. The law provides the government the discretion to dissolve organizations, including civil society organizations, foundations, and churches, on multiple grounds, such as compromising the interests of the state, engaging in political activity, threatening public peace, deviating from the organization's stated purpose, or not providing access to information requested by the government.

In **Ethiopia**, implementation of the civil society organization law prohibited charities, societies, and associations that receive more than 10 percent of their funding from foreign sources from engaging in advocacy activities that promote human rights and democracy and a range of other activities. In July, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern that civil society space in Ethiopia had "rapidly shrunk" since the enactment of this law. The government also jammed foreign broadcasts, took actions to close independent newspapers, and continued to arrest, harass and prosecute journalists.

In **Russia**, the government selectively employed its new law on "foreign agents," a law against "extremism," and other means to harass, pressure, discredit, and prosecute individuals and entities that had voiced criticism of the government, including election monitoring watchdogs, civil society, non-governmental organizations, independent media, and political opposition, as well as religious minorities and vulnerable groups, such as the LGBT community.

In the run-up to the November elections in **Tajikistan**, human rights and civil society groups faced increasing pressure from the government, including forced disappearances of political activists and the shutting down of NGOs for alleged administrative irregularities.

Growing Restrictions on Free Expression and Press Freedom

Human rights are not just about freedom from violence, torture, unlawful detention, discrimination, and oppression. Human rights include the freedom to speak, communicate, and criticize. Although the right to freedom of expression is enshrined under international law, in 2013, many governments continued to restrict free expression, online and off, targeting journalists as well as those who challenged government positions and beliefs.

In **Azerbaijan**, the government intensified its crackdown on peaceful dissent and employed a variety of measures to impede freedom of expression, including arrests of democracy activists and journalists and closing the facility of the Free Thought University, a nonpartisan forum established by young activists to facilitate the development of analytical skills and independent thinking.

In **Cambodia**, although the law prohibits pre-publication censorship or imprisonment for expression of opinions, the threat of being charged with defamation, disinformation, or incitement under the penal code prevented citizens from freely expressing their views. The government, military forces, and the ruling political party continued to dominate the broadcast media and influence the content of broadcasts.

In **China**, the government systematically used its laws to silence dissent and punish individuals, as well as their relatives and associates, for attempting to exercise their right to free expression, including onerous restrictions on foreign journalists such as visa requirements and government approval prior to meeting with international organizations or representatives.

In the **United Arab Emirates**, authorities continued to restrict freedom of expression and, in some cases, engaged in arrests tied to Islamist political activities and calls for democratic reforms. There are ongoing trials of citizens accused not of any violent act but simply of having ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Bloggers and others were charged with insulting the nation or endangering Emirati security. At the same time, in **Saudi Arabia**, the government targeted leadership of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association and handed down harsh sentences, such as a sentence of seven years and 600 lashes to Ra'if Badawai for participation in an organization that espouses "liberal thought." In **Vietnam**, the government strengthened monitoring and surveillance of the internet, further limited privacy rights, and continued to restrict political rights, imprisoning and prosecuting activists under vague national security laws. On October 2, 2013, a Hanoi court

convicted Le Quoc Quan, a prominent activist and human rights lawyer arrested in December 2012, on charges of tax evasion and sentenced him to 30 months in jail.

In **Turkey**, domestic organizations estimated that as many as 73 journalists, writers, and translators remained incarcerated at year's end, most charged under the anti-terror law or for connections to an illegal organization. Self-censorship was common, as individuals feared criticizing the state or government publicly would result in civil or criminal suits or investigations. There were more than 100 acts of violence against journalists in **Ukraine**, many of which occurred in December at the hands of Ministry of Interior riot police, who targeted clearly identified members of the media during violent crackdowns on "Euromaidan" protesters. The ratings for media freedom in Ukraine by international groups such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders have declined three years in a row.

In **Venezuela**, the combination of laws and regulations governing libel and media content, as well as legal harassment and physical intimidation of individuals and the media, resulted in practical limitations on freedoms of speech and press. National and international groups condemned government efforts throughout the year to restrict press freedom and create a climate of fear and self-censorship.

On the other hand, the **Jamaican** parliament passed a new Defamation Act in November that replaced the 162-year-old Libel and Slander Act and the 52-year-old Defamation Act. The new act provides fair remedies for persons whose reputations have been harmed by the publication of defamatory matter, promotes "speedy and non-litigious methods of resolving disputes," and ensures that there are no "unreasonable limits" on freedom of expression, especially on "matters of public interest."

Accountability Deficits for Security Force Abuses

Accountability for security force abuses is essential to the success of peaceful democratic transitions and to the realization of the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Around the world, authoritarian governments used security forces to consolidate power and suppress dissent, to the detriment of their country's long-term stability, security, and economic development. Simultaneously, transitioning democracies dealt with predictable setbacks in their quest for political change, and new democracies struggled to deliver effective governance and uphold rule of law. Counteracting impunity for security forces will require these countries to invest in independent and effective judiciaries,

civilian-controlled and responsible security forces, and transparent and accountable democratic government institutions. Accountability is crucial to their future stability and economic development.

In **Sudan**, conflict between government and rebel forces in Darfur, Blue Nile, and Southern Kordofan states continued and government forces committed human rights violations and engaged in sometimes heavy, frequent, and indiscriminate aerial bombardments. In November, the Sudan Armed Forces began an aggressive military campaign against rebel forces in Southern Kordofan. Rebels also committed human rights abuses in Darfur and Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states (the Two Areas). Inter-tribal conflict along with clashes between government and rebel forces markedly increased insecurity in Darfur and the humanitarian and human rights situation deteriorated. Except in rare cases, the government took no steps to prosecute or punish officials who were the perpetrators of violence. In late September and early October 2013, widespread protests broke out in Khartoum, and security forces killed at least 84 persons (NGOs and media allege security forces killed over 200) and arrested nearly 2,000 protestors, including journalists and members of opposition parties.

Amid ongoing violence and instability, **Libya** has made some progress in improving respect for human rights, but the interim government has not succeeded in its efforts to exercise effective control over security forces or demobilize militia groups that engaged in unlawful detention, killings, and torture. The absence of effective justice and security institutions remains a significant human rights problem for the country, and building this capacity is essential for progress to a more stable democracy.

In **Nigeria**, the internal conflict with Boko Haram resulted in the deaths of thousands, and government forces reportedly killed hundreds of people, destroyed homes and property, and unlawfully detained large numbers of local youth, contributing to widespread insecurity. Nigerian government detention centers such as Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri were reportedly the site of at least 950 deaths in the first six months of the year alone because of torture, starvation, and extrajudicial executions.

In **Russia**, the government failed to take adequate steps to prosecute or punish most officials who committed abuses, resulting in a climate of impunity. Government forces, insurgents, Islamist militants, and criminal forces continued to engage in extrajudicial killings, torture, and abductions, particularly in the North Caucasus.

In **Afghanistan**, while local security forces have demonstrated increasing responsibility and effectiveness in fighting the Taliban, reports of abuses by some police and military officials threaten to undermine the Afghans' hard-fought security gains unless there is effective accountability.

In **Burma**, while the central government made overall progress on reforms and releasing political prisoners, military and security forces continued to act with impunity. There were credible reports of extrajudicial killings, rape and sexual violence, arbitrary detentions, torture and mistreatment in detention, deaths in custody, and systematic denial of due process and fair trial rights, overwhelmingly perpetrated against the Rohingya ethnic minority in Rakhine State. There were also reports of local and state government and security officials, acting in conjunction with Rakhine and Rohingya criminal elements, smuggling and trafficking thousands of Rohingya out of the country, often for profit. In July, the government disbanded the NaSaKa, the notorious security force responsible for gross human rights violations, in an effort to begin addressing the crisis in Rakhine State. Security or government officials have not yet been investigated or held to account.

In **Zimbabwe**, the government controlled and manipulated the political process, including targeting members of non-Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) parties and civil society activists for torture, abuse, arrest, and harassment.

Lack of Effective Labor Rights Protections

Labor rights are vital to the promotion of democratic ideals and social cohesion. Defending these rights and improving working conditions can lead to positive, long-term economic outcomes, including higher levels of foreign direct investment.

Dangerous and exploitive working conditions remained all too common throughout the world and across a number of different sectors during 2013. Workers in gold mines in **Nigeria** continued to be afflicted with lead poisoning. In the **Gulf** states, migrant workers remained vulnerable to exploitation and, in some cases, were subjected to horrific abuse.

In many of these exploitative working situations, the workers were unable to voice their concerns. In line with the trend of governments increasingly cracking down on civil society, workers organizations and workers attempting to organize were

constrained by governments' inability or unwillingness to enforce labor protections, as well as government interference in their activities and violence and threats against labor leaders. For example, in 2013, the governments of **Swaziland** and **Zimbabwe** routinely interfered with trade union activities. In **Belarus**, authorities harassed and at times dismissed members of independent unions, severely limiting the ability of workers to organize and bargain collectively. And in Guatemala, several labor leaders were killed or reported death threats and other acts of intimidation.

According to research by the group, *Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing*, informal employment was on average 45 percent of total non-agricultural employment across the Middle East and North Africa. Millions in Southeast Asia are trapped in the informal economy, laboring in fields and factories for very low wages with very few protections. In **Russia**, human rights activists documented evidence of forced labor of migrant workers involved in construction projects for the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. Reports of abuses were widespread and included nonpayment or severely delayed payment of wages, excessively long hours, and withholding of passports and identity documents.

At the same time, 2013 did see some positive developments for labor rights protections with the entry-into-force of International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 189. ILO Convention 189 sets forth protections for domestic workers regarding fundamental rights at work, fair terms of employment, decent working conditions, and minimum labor and social protections. Several countries, including the **Philippines**, took steps to enact domestic legislation to protect the rights of domestic workers. The government of **Colombia** took some steps to address the misuse of cooperatives, although employers have turned to other forms of subcontracting to subvert worker protections. **Uzbekistan** notably permitted the ILO to observe its annual cotton harvest for child labor for the very first time, but it has much further to go to address the challenge of forced adult and child labor in that sector.

Marginalization of Vulnerable Groups

As we mark the 65th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year, the idea that all people are "born free and equal in dignity and rights" is not yet a reality, and religious and ethnic minorities, women and girls, and LGBT persons are persecuted and subjected to repressive policies by too many governments, while discrimination against persons with disabilities remains a major problem in every region of the world.

Religious and ethnic minorities continued to face extreme restrictions and were targets of repression by governments and subject to societal discrimination across the globe. In **China**, the government continued to implement repressive policies against ethnic Uighurs and Tibetans.

In **Pakistan**, religious minorities faced a specter of growing violence during the year, including a deadly September church bombing in Peshawar that claimed more than 80 lives and three other incidents that killed at least 244 Shia Muslims. Religious minorities also faced discriminatory laws, societal intolerance, and a lack of accountability for crimes against them.

In **Iran**, the government continued its egregious repression of Baha'i whose seven leaders remained in prison as did Christian pastor Saeed Abedini at year's end. Attacks against Christians and Shia Muslims continued in **Egypt** as did attacks against Christians, Yezidis, Sabeen Mandaeans, and other religious minorities in **Iraq**, often with a lack of accountability for the perpetrators. Ahmadi Muslims continued to face violence and repression in places such as **Indonesia**, as well as disenfranchisement in places such as **Pakistan**.

Anti-Semitism also remained a significant problem in 2013. According to a survey of eight European member states by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, harassment of Jews continued, with one-quarter of respondents stating they experienced some form of anti-Semitic harassment in the 12 months before the survey. In **the Middle East**, media occasionally contained anti-Semitic articles and cartoons, some of which glorified or denied the Holocaust and blamed all Jews for actions by the state of Israel.

Threats to religious practice also emerged during the year. For example, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a non-binding resolution implying that religious male circumcision – as practiced by Jews and Muslims, and other religions – is a human rights violation.

We also saw a proliferation of extremist-organized mass riots directed against Romani persons and increase in government officials overtly espousing anti-Roma rhetoric in **Europe**. This contributed to a rising tide of intolerance towards the continent's largest ethnic minority.

Women and girls were subjected to violence and discrimination around the world, and sexual violence and rape continued to be a grave problem in the **Syrian** conflict and in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**. Reports of sexual violence

against women while protesting in **Egypt** rose dramatically in 2013. Despite improvements in **Afghanistan** and the establishment of a free and independent media, the country remained a dangerous place for women and children, who faced increased targeted violence and endemic societal discrimination. NGOs and human rights activists noted that Afghan police often did not prevent or respond to violence against women and in some cases arrested women who reported crimes, such as rape, committed against them. In addition, those detained for moral crimes were almost exclusively women.

In 2013, LGBT persons also remained the target of widespread discrimination and violence. A new law passed by the national assembly in **Nigeria** was pending signature at year's end. It further criminalizes consensual same-sex relations and imposed restrictions on freedoms of association and assembly for members of the LGBT community. In **Uganda**, where a new law was also awaiting signature at the end of the year, LGBT persons were subject to societal harassment, intimidation, threats to their well-being, and were denied access to health services. **Russia** banned the so-called "propaganda" of nontraditional sexual relations to minors, which effectively criminalized public expression and assembly for anyone who would advocate for LGBT equality.

In **Cameroon**, consensual same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable by a prison sentence of six months to five years, and authorities actively enforced the law and arrested, tried, jailed, and beat alleged LGBT individuals during the year. Reports indicate that there may be as many as 200 individuals incarcerated on charges of same-sex sexual relations. As of year's end, the government has identified no suspects in the brutal murder of Eric Ohena Lemembe, a journalist, LGBT activist, and Executive Director of the Cameroon Foundation against AIDS. Civil society members and human rights organizations reported that the investigation was "uniformly unprofessional." In **Zambia**, the government enforced laws against same-sex sexual activity and advocacy with increasing frequency and ignored societal discrimination against LGBT individuals.

While countries are paying more attention to the human rights of persons with disabilities, this community continued to face discrimination and challenges in 2013 as lack of access to quality inclusive education for students with disabilities and inconsistent or nonexistent integration of accessible design in infrastructure disability remained prevalent across many regions. These problems were compounded by weak non-discrimination protections for persons with disabilities and lack of effective enforcement of laws.

One positive development of 2013 was the further implementation of a 2012 law by the government of **Haiti**. The law prohibits any discrimination in employment practices against persons with disabilities, requires the government to integrate such persons into the state's public services, and imposes a two percent quota for persons with disabilities in the workforces of private sector companies. The government took several steps to continue strengthening and expanding local understanding of the existing legal framework for citizens with disabilities and continued to hold public awareness campaigns to change the societal perception of weakness associated with physical or mental disability.

Country Highlights

The paragraphs below describe additional aspects of the human rights situation not mentioned earlier in this introduction in specific countries of interest, including countries where abuses were particularly troubling or where significant progress was made.

Africa

Violent conflict in the eastern **Democratic Republic of the Congo** continued in 2013, contributing to numerous and severe human rights abuses. On December 12, 2013, after the national army (FARDC) defeated the M23 rebel movement a month earlier with support from the UN stabilization mission's force intervention brigade, the M23 and the Congolese government signed unilateral declarations formally ending the conflict. The M23, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, the Allied Democratic Forces, as well as other rebel and militia groups, were responsible for grave human rights abuses committed throughout the year, including unlawful killings, rape, and torture. Members of the FARDC were also responsible for grave human rights abuses. Impunity for those who committed grave violations of human rights remained a serious problem.

In the **Central African Republic**, the predominantly Muslim Seleka armed group committed grave human rights abuses both leading up to its March seizure of power and following Seleka leader Michel Djotodia's assumption of the presidency. In September, Christian armed "self-defense" groups known as the anti-Balaka and members of the former national military targeted both Seleka members and Muslim civilians in a campaign of retaliatory violence that involved grave human rights abuses including unlawful killings, forced disappearances, rape and torture, and recruitment of child soldiers. The absence of civilian administration, defense, and police forces led to a security vacuum where

lawlessness and human rights abuses prevailed. At the end of 2013, estimates were that one million persons had been internally displaced due to increasingly sectarian violence. Additionally, it is estimated that as many as 1,000 people were killed in December alone in Bangui.

The internal conflict in **South Sudan** worsened after political in-fighting between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and former vice president Riek Machar Teny erupted on December 15 leading to political instability and widespread violence, including ethnically targeted killings. Throughout the year, the government intimidated and harassed civil society activists and journalists, restricting the movement of NGOs and freedoms of privacy, speech, press, and association. Security forces continued to commit human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, intimidation, violence, discrimination against women and children, lack of access to justice, and arbitrary arrest. Impunity continued to prevail and corruption amongst government officials was pervasive. At the end of 2013, peace negotiations were ongoing, but conflict-related abuses remained a serious problem.

East Asia and Pacific

Despite progress towards reform in **Burma**, significant human rights problems throughout the country persisted, including conflict-related abuses in ethnic minority border states, politically motivated arrests, widespread societal discrimination and violence against Muslim populations, and a general lack of rule of law, resulting in corruption and widespread land confiscation without adequate compensation or due process. The government formed the Political Prisoner Review Committee and released an additional 330 prisoners, bringing the total number released to more than 1,100, but continued to make politically motivated arrests under flawed laws. The continuing humanitarian and human rights crisis in Rakhine State remained the most troubling exception and threat to the country's progress during the year.

In **Cambodia**, a flawed and poorly managed electoral process disenfranchised a significant number of eligible voters during the July 28 national elections. The national election committee failed to address specific weaknesses raised by civil society and international organizations despite ample notice. As a result, key aspects of the electoral process before, during, and after election day lacked transparency and independence. The ruling Cambodia People's Party refused to agree to several demands of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) party, including an investigation into election irregularities. As a result,

the opposition refused to sit in the National Assembly. The CNRP also staged numerous demonstrations in protest of the conduct of the elections. Government security forces generally exercised restraint, however, several civilians and police were injured and one person was killed during clashes at roadblocks located away from the protest site.

In **China**, while the government announced the abolition of Reeducation Through Labor and a change in its birth-limitation policy that will permit more couples to have two children, authorities continued to tighten restrictions on basic freedoms. China continued its crackdown on human rights activists, increased repression in ethnic Tibetan and Uighur areas, and continued to severely restrict the freedoms of expression, religion, association, and assembly. During the year, at least 26 Tibetans self-immolated in protest and at least 100 Uighurs were killed in clashes with security forces amid reports of increasing economic discrimination and tightened restrictions on religious and cultural practices. In September, authorities implemented new measures to control and censor the internet and particularly targeted bloggers with large numbers of followers, leading some to close their online accounts. There were prohibitions on independent unions and a lack of protection for workers' right to strike, as well as the use of forced labor, including prison and child labor. Although authorities prosecuted a number of abuses of power, particularly with regard to corruption, the procedures of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were opaque and selectively applied to senior officials, and citizens who promoted efforts to combat corruption were themselves arrested and detained. Public interest lawyers who took on cases deemed sensitive by authorities continued to face harassment and disbarment.

Human rights conditions in the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)** remained deplorable. The government was responsible for extrajudicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary detention, arrests of political prisoners, and torture. The judiciary was not independent and did not provide fair trials or due process. The DPRK government continued to control almost all aspects of citizens' lives, denying freedoms of expression, religion, assembly, and association. The government also tightly controlled all forms of media, severely restricted freedom of movement, and subjected its citizens to forced labor. A vast network of political prison camps indefinitely held approximately 100,000 people, including family members of the accused, in harsh and life-threatening conditions.

The human rights situation in **Vietnam** remained poor in 2013. Government authorities restricted internet and press freedoms and the freedoms of association and assembly and persecuted unregistered religious groups. There were

government restrictions on citizens' liberties, particularly their right to change the government, and corruption in the judicial system and police remained a significant problem. Some positive developments were reported in 2013. For example, the government signed the UN Convention Against Torture, improved engagement with international NGOs, and increased Protestant church registrations. Although societal discrimination based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV/AIDS status persisted, a lively public debate about the rights of LGBT persons took place, and LGBT persons were generally tolerated.

Europe

In **Belarus**, power remained concentrated in the presidency, and the inability of citizens to change their government was a significant problem. Authorities routinely detained or arrested dozens of individuals, including opposition figures, members of the independent media, social media activists, and civil society activists, for reasons widely considered to be politically motivated. They used administrative measures to detain political activists before, during, and after planned demonstrations and protests. Authorities continued to commit frequent serious human rights abuses, including beating detainees and protesters and reportedly using torture and mistreatment during investigations and in prisons. The sustained government crackdown continues to have a chilling effect on public activism and independent media. The government continued to infringe on citizens' privacy rights and further restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, and movement. Authorities harassed human rights groups, NGOs, and political parties, refusing to register many of these, yet threatening them with criminal prosecution for operating without registration. Discrimination continued against ethnic minorities and other vulnerable populations.

In **Russia**, beyond what has already been described, officials denied due process in politically motivated cases, including the continued detention and trial of protesters arrested following the May 2012 demonstration on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow. Allegations of torture and life-threatening prison conditions persisted.

Ukraine also experienced serious human rights problems throughout the year, including increased government interference and pressure on media outlets and government tolerance of increased violence toward journalists. There was intensified pressure on civil society, NGOs, and civic activists, and the sustained practice of politically motivated prosecutions and detentions, most notably the

continued imprisonment of former prime minister Yuliya Tymoshenko. Elections in October 2012 and by-elections in December 2013 for the 450-seat parliament did not meet international standards for fairness or transparency. Government pressure on “Euromaidan” protesters, including sporadic violent crackdowns, was continuing at the end of the year.

Near East

In **Egypt**, anti-government protests and demonstrations throughout the spring culminated in massive demonstrations against the government in Cairo on June 30 and the ousting of President Morsy and his government. The military suspended the 2012 constitution, and six weeks of confrontation between security forces and demonstrators opposed to Morsy’s removal followed while security forces detained President Morsy at an undisclosed location. On August 14, Ministry of Interior forces supported by military units forcibly dispersed large Muslim Brotherhood (MB) organized sit-ins, which according to most NGOs resulted in the deaths of 600-900 persons. On December 25, 2013, the interim government declared the MB a terrorist organization. Under both the interim and Morsy-led governments, incidents of security force violence were not investigated, fostering an environment of impunity for security force personnel. Arrested suspects were subject to torture, actions were taken to stifle freedom of expression, free media and religious freedom, and there was discrimination and violence against religious minorities and women and girls.

Despite a high turnout in **Iran’s** June 14 presidential election, extensive candidate vetting based on arbitrary criteria continued the government’s manipulation of the electoral process and severely limited citizens’ right to change their government through free and fair elections. Restrictions on civil liberties included limitations on freedoms of assembly, speech, press, and religion, including the continuing repression of Christians and Baha’i, as well as other minority religions. At year’s end, Christian pastors Saeed Abedini and Farshid Fathi remained in prison on charges related to their religious beliefs. Citizens were subjected to politically motivated violence and repression, cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as arbitrary arrest, beatings, and rape, and security forces committed human rights abuses throughout the year. A lack of an independent judiciary contributed to pervasive impunity in all levels of the government. The government took few steps to prosecute or hold accountable officials who committed human rights abuses.

The human rights situation in **Syria** worsened as the civil war continued and government forces committed numerous human rights abuses. The regime

regularly attacked areas under opposition control and continued to use indiscriminate and deadly force to quell protests. The most egregious human rights problems were the widespread and systematic attacks against civilians and use of torture and sarin gas, the perpetuation of massacres, forced displacement and starvation, exacerbated by the blocking of humanitarian assistance by the authoritarian Assad regime. Impunity was pervasive and deeply embedded and the judiciary lacked independence. The government did not punish, arrest, or prosecute officials who violated human rights and often sheltered those in its rank who committed human rights abuses. Throughout the country, human rights activists continued to document the horrific violations committed by the regime and the abuses carried out by opposition entities, but they were subject to deadly attacks, torture, and prolonged detention while the government continued to restrict freedom of speech, religion, movement, and association. Other serious human rights problems included kidnappings and disappearances, the use of rape and assault as punishment and a war tactic, arbitrary arrest, increased human trafficking and torture.

South and Central Asia

In **Afghanistan**, Nai Media Watch reported that violence against journalists increased in 2013 in comparison with the previous year and, at year's end, there was no accountability for perpetrators of this violence. Widespread disregard for the rule of law and official impunity were serious problems throughout the year, as was torture and abuse of detainees, increased targeted violence and endemic societal discrimination against women and girls, extrajudicial killings by security forces, arbitrary arrest and detention, including of women accused of so-called moral crimes, trafficking in persons, and pervasive official corruption.

In **Bangladesh**, politically motivated violence, official corruption, and related impunity, attacks on religious minorities, constraints on civil society as well as poor working conditions and labor rights remained serious human rights problems. Renewed attention on the country's readymade garment industry after the tragic Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013 resulted in the formation of new coalitions for worker safety and an increase in the minimum wage. Increased restrictions on internet freedom and telecommunications were used as the basis of arrest of some members of civil society and ordinary citizens perceived to be critical of the government. Broader concern over political violence and the tightening of political space was paramount as the year ended amid a stalemate before the 2014 elections. The October 2013 amendments to the Information and Communication Technology Act and subsequent cases against bloggers, human

rights activists, and journalists signaled a troubling increase in the restriction of freedom of expression.

In **Sri Lanka**, over four and a half years after the end of the conflict, the government has not made sufficient progress on reconciliation and ensuring justice and accountability for alleged war crimes. Ongoing serious human rights problems include disappearances and a lack of accountability for thousands who disappeared in previous years, as well as widespread impunity for a broad range of human rights abuses, such as torture by police and attacks on media institutions and the judiciary. Continuing attacks and harassment against civil society activists, and religious minorities contributed to an environment of fear and self-censorship.

In **Uzbekistan**, significant problems continued in 2013 with respect to torture and abuse of detainees by security forces, denial of due process and fair trial, and widespread restrictions on religious freedom, including harassment of religious minority group members and continued imprisonment of believers of all faiths. Restrictions on civil society and independent media were compounded by the chilling effect of the government's continued harassment, arbitrary arrest, and politically motivated prosecutions and detentions of human rights activists, journalists, and others who criticized the government. Government-organized forced child and adult labor in the annual cotton harvest continued, although the authorities' decision to permit the International Labor Organization to comprehensively monitor the harvest in 2013 was a welcome step toward addressing this challenge.

Western Hemisphere

In **Cuba**, the government used threats, extrajudicial physical violence, intimidation, mobs, harassment and detentions to prevent free expression and peaceful assembly. Human rights activists reported frequent government monitoring and disruption of cell phone and landline services prior to planned events or key anniversaries related to human rights. The targets of harassment by government-organized mobs were at times physically assaulted or suffered property damage. Government security officials at the scene often did not arrest those who physically attacked the victims or respond to victims' complaints and instead frequently orchestrated the activities. State security forces aggressively detained women to prevent them from marching sometimes injuring them in the process. These detentions were conducted without legal justification. On multiple occasions security forces forced peaceful political protesters into state security vehicles, drove out of town, and released the protesters in remote areas.

In **Ecuador**, violations against the integrity of the person, restrictions on freedoms of expression, speech, press, and association, and violence and discrimination against vulnerable groups, including women and children, remained the main human rights challenges. The government used legal mechanisms, such as libel laws and administrative regulations, to suppress freedom of the press and limit freedom of assembly, particularly targeting indigenous communities protesting laws affecting their community lands. The government sometimes took steps to prosecute or punish security forces and government officials who committed human rights abuses, although political influence and an inefficient judiciary resulted in impunity in some cases. Corruption was widespread, and a lack of transparency in the judicial sector continued to be an issue despite some attempts at procedural reform.

In **Venezuela**, all branches of government have come under significant control of the executive branch, most notably the judicial branch. The National Assembly's passage of presidential decree powers further concentrated power in the executive branch. A politicized judiciary intimidates and selectively prosecutes political, union, business, media, and civil society leaders critical of government policies or actions. Nicolas Maduro ascended to the presidency amid allegations of pre- and post-election fraud based on a number of irregularities, including government interference, the use of state resources by the ruling party, and voter manipulation. Over the past year, the government continued to take actions to impede freedom of expression and restrict freedom of the press. Additionally, there were many reports of unlawful killings.