



ANNUAL REPORT

2020


الكرامة
Alkarama

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ABOUT ALKARAMA

WHO WE ARE

Alkarama is a Geneva-based non-governmental human rights organisation established in 2004 to assist all those in the Arab world subjected to or at risk of extrajudicial execution, enforced disappearance, torture, and arbitrary detention. Acting as a bridge between individual victims and international human rights mechanisms, Alkarama works towards an Arab world where all individuals live in freedom and dignity, and are protected by the rule of law. In Arabic, Alkarama means dignity.

WHAT WE DO

ASSIST VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Alkarama brings *pro bono* legal assistance to victims of the most serious human rights violations, without any discrimination. The organisation focuses its efforts on violations of the right to life, human dignity, physical integrity and freedoms such as [extrajudicial executions](#), [enforced disappearances](#), [torture](#), and [arbitrary detention](#).

Using the international human rights mechanisms and working closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), we document individual cases of violations through direct contact with the victims, their families or lawyers, and submit complaints on their behalf to the United Nations (UN) Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies, asking them to intervene with the State in question to put an end to these violations.

Alkarama also gives a voice to the victims or their families by sharing their stories, as well as the recommendations issued by the various UN mechanisms on their cases, both on our website and through our social media channels. We also use the media, lobbying, advocacy campaigns, and collaboration with other NGOs and civil society to ensure the protection of victims.

ADVOCATE FOR REFORMS TO RESPECT AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS IN ALL ARAB COUNTRIES

Based on our expertise on the Arab world and the individual cases Alkarama documents, we prepare in-depth reports on the human rights situation in each of the 20 countries we cover. These can be public reports, submissions to the Treaty Bodies – such as the Committee against Torture ([CAT](#)), the Human Rights Committee ([HRCtee](#)), and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances ([CED](#)) – ahead of a country's review, or contributions to the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review ([UPR](#)) that takes place every four to five years. We also work with local civil society to participate in the reviews of National Human Rights Institutions in the Arab region by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions ([GANHRI](#)).

On the basis of information submitted to them, all of these mechanisms issue recommendations aimed at improving the human rights situation in a given country, which can in turn be used by the local civil society to lobby for their implementation.

RAISING AWARENESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ARAB WORLD

Alkarama also brings media attention to the cases and situations it covers, helping victims have their voices heard and shedding light on a country's human rights situation through press releases and public reports and analyses published in various media outlets. To reach a broader audience, we increasingly rely on social media.



FORWARD BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

As the world went through an unprecedented health crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic, societies in the Middle East and North Africa experienced with a greater impact their respective governments' corruption and disregard for fundamental rights.

More than ever, the pandemic has shown that political accountability and the rule of law is key in accessing both civil and political rights and essential services such as access to appropriate health care. Yet, across the region, the incapacity of governments to put in place adequate prevention and treatment has been coupled with arrests of those who publicly denounced it.

Even more concerning, the pandemic has been used as yet another pretext to unduly restrict fundamental rights and guarantees, particularly against individuals deprived of their liberty. While international institutions, including the World Health Organisation, called upon states to release detainees, particularly the most

vulnerable and those detained for political offences, Arab states from Saudi Arabia to Egypt used the pandemic to deny political detainees any contact with the outside world.

Meanwhile, reports documenting widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law across the region have not been followed by any steps to ensure accountability. Calls for genuine peace processes and investigations by UN experts remain unheard by states in war-torn countries such as Yemen, Syria and Palestine.

Despite the dire humanitarian and human rights situation across the region, civil societies have relentlessly continued to denounce injustices, paying an increasing price for it. More than ever, Alkarama firmly believes in its mission to support individuals, without discrimination, in claiming their inalienable rights and respect for their dignity.

The march toward greater freedom and accountability can suffer from setbacks; it cannot be stopped. But, over the past year, just like over the last decade, we witnessed the resilience and strength of those who, across the region, defy the fatalism that authoritarian regimes try to impose with violence on their societies.

After the years and crises we withstood, we remain steadfast to our commitment to support struggles against injustice in

the Arab world; we hope for many years to come. We are grateful to all those who keep standing with us in this struggle, particularly UN independent experts. We are thankful to all human rights defenders in the region who helped us carry out our mission despite the risks they faced. This report is dedicated to them.

Alkarama



A protester during a Hirak Friday protest holds a sign with the slogan "A civilian state, not a military one" (Bilal Bin Salem / AFP).

ALGERIA

Our concerns

Serious and continuous violations to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly as well as use of force against Hirak demonstrators and activists;

Gross and sustained violations of the right to freedom of expression with systematic arrests of any person critical towards the government and the army, and arrests of political opponents, human rights defenders and other peaceful activists;

Use of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners of conscience in detention, and denial of medical treatment;

Absence of independence of the judiciary.

The Hirak movement persisted throughout 2020, defying an increasing repression from the authorities. For example, on Friday 21 February 2020, Algerians marched en masse across cities in the country, demonstrating their determination to keep up their demand for a "civilian state, and not military one".

However, measures taken to manage the COVID-19 health crisis have been used as a pretext to further limit fundamental freedoms and attempt to stifle the Hirak. The protest movement persisted, in particular through the use of social media. Many peaceful activists were arrested and sentenced to prison terms for publishing on Facebook under vague charges such as "harming the national interest".

Close relations to former President

Bouteflika have been prosecuted including former head of the "Forum of Business Leaders" (FCE), Ali Haddad, who was sentenced in July to 18 years in prison for corruption. Two former prime ministers of Bouteflika, Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal, were sentenced for similar acts to 12 years in prison. In addition, eight other former ministers were sentenced to imprisonment on similar charges.

After composing his government on 2 January, Abdelmadjid Tebboune announced the holding of a constitutional referendum aimed, according to the official discourse, to move from a presidential to a semi-presidential regime. Nonetheless, the constitutional revision endorses restrictions on the independence of the judiciary and freedom of expression.

The referendum was held on the symbolic date of 1 November 2020, which is the anniversary date marking the start of the Algerian War of Independence. According to official figures, the referendum was approved by 66.8%, but after a vote marked by massive abstention, with an official turnout of 23.7%. It is apparent that far from responding to popular demands, this referendum only increased the deficit of credibility and legitimacy of the institutional system.

Continuous and severe violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Alkarama has continued to bring to the attention of the various UN mechanisms the serious violations of the rights of victims of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances committed during and after the civil war.

This is the case of [Ahmed Khalil Mahmoud Braih](#), one of the founders of the Polisario Front, who was kidnapped by DRS agents in the centre of Algiers on the morning of 6 January 2009. This official in charge of human rights in the Tindouf camps had expressed his disagreement with the movement regarding the serious violations committed in these refugee camps. However, according to an agreement between the Polisario and the Algerian state, the Sahrawi movement has exclusive jurisdiction to investigate the complaints of refugees although they are on Algerian soil. This deprives them of any recourse before the Algerian courts. Therefore, Braih's family was unable to claim their right to justice and truth before an Algerian Court of law.

The case was referred to the Human Rights Committee in November 2016 by Alkarama and on 27 July 2020, the Committee issued a [decision](#) granting the family's requests. The decision even goes beyond the individual situation of the Braih family by raising the issue of the lack of effective remedy before Algerian courts for Sahrawi refugees on the national territory.

Furthermore, the human rights situation in the Saharawi refugee camps has been put on the agenda of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) by Alkarama. On 5 June 2020, the WGAD adopted [Opinion 7/2020](#), stating that the detention of [Fadel Breica](#) was arbitrary. Mr Breica had been arrested while visiting his sick mother in a refugee camp in Tindouf. His family had requested the assistance of Alkarama, which submitted an urgent appeal to the UN Special Procedures on 6 August 2019. Mr Breica is an active human rights defender. Founder of the Sahrawi Initiative Movement for Change, he calls for a new approach to resolving the conflict in Western Sahara.

In its [decision](#), the WGAD reaffirmed Algeria's responsibility regarding the violations committed against Mr Breica on its territory by a non-state actor (the Polisario Front). It also reiterated its concerns regarding the transfer of the administrative and jurisdictional authority of certain regions of the country to the Polisario Front, including the camps in the Tindouf region.

Alkarama also seized the Human Rights Committee concerning Algerian lawyer [Messaoud Menniche](#), who was kidnapped on 6 April 199 by the State security services in the wilaya of Blida. The aim of this communication, submitted on 28 July 2020, was to request the Committee to urge the

Algerian authorities to comply with the demands of the lawyer's family to know the truth about his fate. Like thousands of families of victims of enforced disappearances, the Menniche family is facing a legal impossibility to request an investigation into his disappearance, as a consequence of article 45 of the 2006 Charter for Peace and Reconciliation.

In its [complaint](#), Alkarama reiterated to the Human Rights Committee its demands for the abrogation of such articles, which are contrary to the State's international obligations towards victims of serious crimes.

Restrictions to fundamental freedoms

While the year 2019 was [highlighted](#) by the largest popular uprisings since the country's independence, freedom of assembly was increasingly infringed upon by the authorities this year.

Hundreds of people have been arrested for peacefully exercising their freedom of assembly, association and expression. Security forces used violence to disperse peaceful gatherings, and arbitrarily arrested demonstrators. In addition to arrests and repressive legislative measures, the authorities also blocked a number of news websites. Algeria is ranked 146th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#) for 2020, down five places from 2019 and 27 from 2015.

On 17 March 2020, the government imposed a general lockdown as a sanitary measure to prevent the propagation of Covid-19. However, after the partial lifting of the measure, early returns of demonstrators in the months that followed were all dispersed by violence and participants were arrested.

On 24 March 2020, the Algiers court's correctional chamber [sentenced](#) Mr. Karim Tabou to one year's imprisonment. He had been sentenced in first instance on March 18, 2020, four days earlier, to one year's imprisonment including six months firm and was thus to be released on Thursday, 26 March. Yet the public prosecutor's office fixed the date of the appeal trial without even informing his lawyers. Mr. Karim Tabou had been charged with "undermining the morale of the army" for having advocated for the establishment a state based on the rule of law in which the army must keep to its constitutional role. This is the primary demand of the peaceful demonstrators throughout the country calling for the establishment of a civilian rule in Algeria.

Alkarama [submitted](#) an urgent request to the United Nations Special Procedures to inform them about the details of Mr Karim Tabou's situation, particularly his worrying state of health and his conviction following an unfair trial.

In November 2020, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#)

concerning the deteriorating human rights situation in Algeria in response to the sentencing of journalist [Khaled Drareni](#). The parliamentarians called on the Algerian government to stop arresting demonstrators, journalists and other peaceful activists for expressing their views on social media. A UN panel of international human rights experts [condemned](#) the prison sentence handed down to journalist Khaled Drareni, now a symbol of press freedom in his country. In a [statement](#) dated 16 September 2020, the experts called on the Algerian authorities to overturn the sentence and release him immediately.

FOCUS: CENSORSHIP AND PROPAGANDA USED BY THE GOVERNMENT AGAINST THE HIRAK

Following the reforms of the Penal Code introduced through Law No. 20-06 of 28 April 2020, Alkarama [called](#) on several independent experts to jointly address the situation of fundamental rights and freedoms in Algeria, a situation that has steadily deteriorated since the advent of Hirak in February 2019. Violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association have become systematic with many political opponents, journalists and other peaceful activists prosecuted and convicted under the pretext of "attacking the morale of the army" or "the integrity of the national territory".

This law, adopted in the absence of parliamentary debate, illustrates the Algerian authorities' willingness to deploy additional repressive means to perpetuate these violations. UN experts [said](#) the new law paved the way for more arrests and detentions of dissidents, such as demonstrators and supporters of the Hirak movement.

In its analysis provided to the UN experts, Alkarama recalled the principles identified by experts from several international institutions contained in the [“Joint declaration on freedom of expression and “fake news”, disinformation and propaganda”](#). The instrument sets out a positive obligation for States to promote an environment ensuring free, independent and diverse communication, including through media diversity. It highlights that such an environment remains essential to combat misinformation and propaganda.

These principles safeguarding free expression rights were trampled upon just a few months later by the Algerian authorities. On 4 September 2020, Alkarama [submitted](#) a complaint to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, following a campaign of disinformation and denigration carried out by the official authorities through the APS (Algeria Press-Service) and ENTV (Public Television Establishment, the official channel of the Algerian state).

In its urgent appeal, Alkarama [called](#) on the High Commissioner to officially deny the false information spread by those channels, and according to which a complaint filed by Algerian demonstrators to the OHCHR, condemning arbitrary detentions in the country had been “rejected” by the UN. The disinformation campaign followed the successful media coverage of an August 2020 action by a group of peaceful activists. The activists marched from Chambéry, France, to Geneva to protest against unfair detentions in Algeria, before depositing a letter with the OHCHR secretariat.

The authorities' disinformation campaign had begun in the form of an Algeria Press-Service (APS) press release read on the official ENTV [newscast](#) of 1 September 2020. In an [article](#) dated Tuesday 1 September and published in French, Arabic and English by the APS, government sources claimed that a so-called "UN Litigation Office in Geneva" dismissed the complaint lodged by a group of Algerian political activists "24 hours after its submission and examination of its contents by the Office's legal delegates". The reasons given for this summary rejection of the complaint were based on a fictitious interview with a fictitious person, whom APS describes as the secretary of an imaginary “United Nations Dispute Tribunal”.

Commissioner for Human Rights

(OHCHR) issued an official denial describing the information as "false" and a "complete fabrication". The OHCHR also requested the sources to clear "any ambiguity for their readers and listeners by explaining that the story is a pure fabrication".

Alkarama pointed out that the false information relayed by various media in recent days was in direct violation of the Algerian State's obligations under international law to ensure that the information they disseminate is reliable and trustworthy, especially with regard to information on matters of general interest, including the protection of human rights.



Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdul Latif Al-Zayani (right) and Meir Bin Shabat, head of the Israeli national delegation in Manama announce in a joint statement the start of full diplomatic relations between their countries, (Reuters, 18/10/2020).

BAHRAIN

Our concerns

Continued repression of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association;

Systematic repression and harassment of peaceful dissidents, political opponents and human rights defenders;

Persistent use of torture by security forces, absence of independent investigations into allegations of torture and failure to hold perpetrators accountable.

In September 2020, emulating the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain opened up formal diplomatic relations with Israel. Cooperation between the two states began in the field of security, intelligence and counterterrorism, with meetings in Bahrain between the head of the Mossad and the heads of the kingdom's security and intelligence services.

Serious and systematic human rights violations committed by Bahraini security forces attracted international media attention during the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix in November 2020. During the competition, several civil society organisations called on British racer Lewis Hamilton to publicly denounce human rights violations committed in the country. While the champion made public statements calling on the Formula One team to take

into account the human rights situation in the countries it visits, the race organisers reiterated their commitment to the competition and confirmed that it will continue for the next few years.

Fundamental rights and guarantees in detention, right to a fair trial

Questions about corporate responsibility to respect human rights arose publicly this year. This occurred at a time when cases of death sentences handed down after unfair trials attracted the attention of the media and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

As early as February 2020, several independent United Nations experts publicly [called](#) on the Bahraini authorities not to execute two citizens, Mohamed Ramadan and Husain Moosa, who had been sentenced to death following unfair trials on charges of terrorism. The two men were arbitrarily arrested in February 2014 after a police officer was killed in a bomb attack. They reported having been subjected to severe torture at the hands of the country's security services in order to force them into self-incrimination.

Notwithstanding the acknowledgement by the country's Court of Cassation of the grave violations of their fundamental rights and the torture

they suffered, the two men were sentenced to death in January 2020 by the Court of Appeal. The experts [underlined](#) having raised many similar cases with the country's authorities in the past. They reminded the Bahraini authorities that any death sentence handed down on the basis of evidence obtained under torture renders the execution arbitrary and unlawful.

In July 2020, the OHCHR spokesperson issued a [commentary](#) expressing the Office's deep concern about the confirmation of the death sentence by the Court of Cassation.

Restrictions on fundamental freedoms

This year again, the Bahraini authorities have carried out arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions and judicial persecutions against political opponents and other peaceful activists.

Freedom of speech and of the media have been rendered completely inoperative by restrictive laws, including the Cyber Crime Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act. The criminalisation of all criticism of royal authorities and their allies has led to the arrest of journalists, users of social media and to the closure of the last critical media outlets.

There has been increased monitoring

and control of social media leading to the arrest and prosecution of individuals for publications on these platforms as well as the closure of many accounts.

Freedom of association remains non-existent in politics, and since 2017 all opposition parties have been dissolved and banned from re-establishing themselves in the country.

In September, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on arms exports reiterating its demands "for an end to the export of surveillance technology and other equipment likely to facilitate internal repression to several countries", including Bahrain.

Finally, as in most countries across the region, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a pretext to further intrude on the privacy of the country's citizens and residents and to collect private data. The use of mandatory applications on private telephones allowed authorities to locate, monitor and collect data from all those suspected of engaging in activities regarded as subversive.



A Djiboutian soldier looks at a US rapid reaction force transport ship in the port of Djibouti, where the United States has about 900 military personnel at Camp Lemonnier.

DJIBOUTI

Our concerns

Rampant corruption and impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations;

Practice of torture and ill-treatment in detention;

Severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms and independent media.

The human rights situation in Djibouti remains strongly dependent on its geopolitical status. Its position as a “global military base” has been used by the ruling elite to ensure world powers’ toleration of its authoritarian practices and their silence on the abuses documented in the country by civil society organisations. According to [documents](#) made public in 2020 by Wikileaks, the Djiboutian authorities had authorized, as early as 2009, the private military company Black Water, known for its serious violations against Iraqi and Afghan civilians, to conduct counter-piracy operations in the Red Sea from Djibouti.

Ruled since May 1999 by Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, the country is eroded by rampant corruption. Civil society and independent media, are subject to

judicial persecution, and [more than one in three Djiboutians](#) live in chronic food insecurity.

Violations of fundamental rights and guarantees in detention

In June, the detention in inhumane conditions of a former Djibouti army pilot in Gabode prison echoed the case of [Mohamed Djabha](#), the oldest political prisoner in Djibouti who died in prison on 2 August 2017. As in the case of the former political prisoner, Lieutenant Fouad Youssouf Ali was prosecuted for treason after fleeing the country to Ethiopia where he was preparing to file an asylum application. Despite the risk of violation of his fundamental rights, he was extradited from Ethiopia to Djibouti in April. Charged with treason, a crime punishable by life imprisonment, the pilot had recorded a video from his cell in the Djibouti prison showing cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions of detention.

The video published by the pilot Fouad Youssouf Ali denouncing his detention conditions triggered a wave of mass protest in the country, giving rise to demonstrations in the capital. Security forces used disproportionate force against peaceful demonstrators, including firing live ammunition into the crowd of protesters. As the repression intensified, arbitrary arrests were carried out against individuals based on mere suspicions of having or wanting to participate in the

demonstrations.

This situation highlights the country's severe shortcomings in terms of protection of the rights of people in detention, an issue repeatedly [raised](#) by Alkarama with United Nations mechanisms.

Severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms

As a result of the many legal and administrative obstacles to the creation of associations, civil society in Djibouti suffers from a lack of visibility. As such, independent associations cannot carry out their activities without being monitored and punished.

Lack of freedom of assembly, disproportionate use of armed force and arbitrary arrests of peaceful demonstrators are systematic practices. [Alkarama has noted](#) that over the past five years, restrictions on fundamental freedoms and the repression of people who legitimately and peacefully use them have only increased. The "exceptional security measures" taken by the authorities in November 2015 and the state of emergency decreed in December of the same year have been hardened by even more restrictive measures taken under the pretext of the fight against COVID-19.

The situation in terms of freedom of expression and the press remains one of the most critical globally, with Djibouti ranking 176th out of 180

countries in the latest Reporters without borders' [World press freedom index](#). During the June 2020 demonstrations, two journalists were arrested by security forces for covering the mass arrests of peaceful demonstrators and the disproportionate use of force to disperse them.

Restrictions against civil society and opposition political parties have been further tightened in the run-up to the next presidential elections scheduled for 2021. Meetings of opponents are systematically prevented or punished, and participants arrested before being held incommunicado for several days. The practice of arbitrary arrest followed by incommunicado detention has been [entrenched](#) in the government's repressive policies for several years.



The Egyptian delegation during the Universal Periodic Review before the United Nations Human Rights Council (Source: United Nations WebTV).

EGYPT

Our concerns

Crackdown on peaceful dissent and political opposition through the use of repressive laws, including counter-terrorism legislation;

Arbitrary detention following mass and military trials of individuals including political opponents and peaceful protesters, journalists, human rights defenders;

Systematic practice of torture as well as inhuman conditions of detention and denial of medical care in prisons;

Increased use of enforced disappearance, secret and incommunicado detention of political opponents.

The dire human rights situation in Egypt was strikingly apparent during the adoption of its [Universal Periodic Review](#) outcome by the UN Human Rights Council on 12 March 2020. Despite countless UN reports documenting widespread and severe violations of fundamental rights and guarantees, the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations Office at Geneva rejected all UN recommendations related to enforced disappearance, torture, unfair trials and summary executions. He claimed that such recommendations were either “not related to the Human Rights Council”, “hostile as they contained untrue and politicised allegations” or considered as “factually erroneous”.

This reaction from the state representative only reinforces the need

for continued pressure from international experts and civil society to end the impunity in which the authorities commit violations.

The severity of the situation [also raised concerns](#) of the European Parliament which confirmed, in a December 2020 resolution, the dangerous situation for human rights in the country. Alkarama [welcomed](#) this resolution as an essential first step towards combating impunity.

[The European Parliament's decision includes 19 points](#), the most important of which is the call for a thorough and comprehensive review of the EU's relations with Egypt, as "the human rights situation (in that country) requires serious consideration", according to the text published in the decision. The resolution also called on EU countries to consider taking restrictive measures against senior Egyptian officials involved in serious violations.

Continued crackdown on fundamental freedoms

In 2020, Alkarama called on several institutions to take adequate measures given the frightening deterioration of freedoms and human rights in Egypt since the coming to power of Marshal Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi. Alkarama highlighted that since 2014, the military-led repression has been targeting all forms of dissent in a context of a state of emergency. This

ruthless repression is silencing all forms of political opposition and human rights activities since the military takeover. This past year again, Alkarama intervened on behalf of dozens of victims of gross violations of fundamental rights by submitting complaints and urgent appeals to the UN special procedures.

During the [adoption of the UPR](#), numerous states and civil society noted that « protesters, lawyers and human rights defenders were harassed, threatened, arrested, disappeared and killed in Egypt". However, their calls "for amendments to laws that violated the rights of freedom of assembly and expression", and "to end the climate of reprisals" were met with a blanket denial of the existence of such violations by the Egyptian delegation. The latter [justified](#) their refusal by declaring that they "contained false allegations due to inaccuracies in their formulation or content", while qualifying recommendations to investigate former president Morsi's death in detention as "hostile".

Among the most prominent cases of repression, [the arrest of three members of the EIPR in November 2020 after they had met with diplomats](#) triggered international condemnation, including the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR,) who said the arrests were a "worrying development that underscores the extreme vulnerability of civil society activists in the country".

The OHCHR also expressed their concerns that recent arrests and detentions were “part of a broader pattern of intimidating organisations defending human rights and of the use of counter-terrorism and national security legislation to silence dissent. While the EIPR staff was [released](#) on bail a few weeks after the appeal, thousands of peaceful activists remain in detention in inhumane conditions due to a [repressive and partial judicial system](#).

These new arrests prompted UN human rights experts to [highlight](#) that these special chambers of the courts, created at the end of 2013, fundamentally violated the right to a fair trial. They added that these courts were part of a larger approach in which legislation and mechanisms relating to terrorism and national security were used as tools to punish and silence legitimate criticism and other forms of expression in Egypt. The experts underscored that such practices could not be justified by national security and undermined, rather than promoted, safety and human rights.

Systematic and widespread nature of enforced disappearances in Egypt

Before the UPR review, Alkarama submitted a [report](#) to the Human Rights Council highlighting systematic practices of arbitrary detention and torture and the reoccurrence of enforced disappearances.

Besides, the report denounced the vague and flawed 2015 anti-terrorism law, which allowed for systematic repression of human rights activists, journalists, and peaceful opponents. Lastly, Alkarama raised concerns over the use of the death penalty to crackdown on dissenting voices and persons making use of their fundamental right to freedom of expression.

Despite concerns raised by the UN Working Group on Involuntary and Enforced Disappearances (WGEID) on the systematic and widespread nature of enforced disappearances in Egypt, the government continues to deny the existence of such practice. Thus, investigations are never opened, and the perpetrators never brought to account. The [report](#) raises concerns over the reoccurrence of enforced disappearances since 2015 as Alkarama has submitted dozens of cases to the WGIED.

The [report](#) highlights several cases of abducted individuals by the security forces and placed in secret detention, who then appeared in courts with signs of torture. Simultaneously, officers altered the dates of their arrest to hide the period of enforced disappearance. Other individuals have been found dead allegedly during counter-terrorism operations when they had been enforcedly disappeared.

**Focus: Slow death in detention:
Egypt's policy to silence dissent in
times of a pandemic**

In October 2020, several UN experts [collectively condemned](#) this use of its judiciary system to silence dissidents and human rights defenders. Alkarama had previously corresponded with United Nations special procedures, warning them that the government has ordered collective death executions against political opponents in unfair trials. Subsequently, UN experts [urged the authorities to treat such cases with dignity](#), but more executions were pronounced by the State Security Courts, put in place by the anti-terrorism laws. In their [statement](#), the experts affirmed that Egypt is 'using exceptional Terrorism Circuit Courts' to target human rights defenders, silence dissent, and lock up activists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is well documented, including by Alkarama in its [report on deaths in detention](#), that Egypt's prisons and detention facilities are overcrowded, unsanitary and that detainees are routinely denied medical care access. In August 2020, a dozen UN human rights experts jointly [declared](#) being concerned by the fate of imprisoned human rights defenders in Egypt at grave risk of COVID-19. They highlighted that "lengthy and unnecessary pre-trial detention of scores of Egyptian human rights defenders is putting them at a grave

The situation of President Mohamed Morsi [was first submitted to the United Nations by Alkarama on 10 July 2013](#) in a complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD). On 13 November 2013, the WGAD [adopted an opinion](#) declaring the deprivation of liberty of President Morsi and his collaborators to be arbitrary and calling for their immediate release.

In April 2020, the [Spokesperson](#) for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Rupert Colville, raised the issue of overcrowding in Egyptian prisons and the risk of the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus among the country's more than 114,000 inmates". He, therefore, urged the Egyptian government to release those convicted of non-violent offences and those who are in pre-trial detention".

One such person is [Dr Hossam Abouelezz](#), the former governor of Qalyubia, arbitrarily detained since September 2013 in inhumane conditions. On 9 October 2020, Alkarama sent a complaint to the [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#) (WGAD) on behalf of Dr Hossam Abouelezz, asking for urgent action, given that Dr Abouelezz was detained in solitary confinement and denied access to his family, to a lawyer and medical care. For the past seven years, Dr Abouelezz has been detained in the infamous Tora Maximum Security Prison – also known as the "Scorpion prison", in solitary confinement in a

small cell without any natural light. He is denied any form of communication with the outside world, including his family – who does not even know if he is still alive.

Alkarama affirmed that these brutal conditions of detention amount to a form of torture against both the former governor and his family and are putting his life directly at risk amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. In its conclusions, Alkarama recalled that since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, numerous [experts recommended](#) that states “[u]ndertake the immediate, unconditional release of all prisoners whose incarceration is illegal or arbitrary under international law, including all children, prisoners of conscience, religious prisoners as well as political prisoners”.

Lastly, in its December 2020 resolution, [the European Parliament expressed](#) its concern about prisoners’ fate detained “in overcrowded places in squalid conditions during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic”, calling on the authorities to reduce the overcrowding in places of detention urgently.



The Iraqi delegation during the universal periodic review before the United Nations Human Rights Council (Source: United Nations WebTV)

IRAQ

Our concerns

Excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests of demonstrators;

Reprisals against human rights defenders, journalists, and other peaceful activists and opponents;

Violation of the right to freedom of expression, including censorship of traditional media and social networks;

Serious violations of fundamental rights and freedoms in the fight against terrorism, including death sentences imposed following unfair trials.

The practice of enforced disappearance remains widespread and systematic, with more than 150 cases submitted by Alkarama to the [UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances](#) (CED) in the past years. The vast majority of them have yet to be clarified by the authorities. Furthermore, the Iraqi Anti-Terrorism Law of 2005, with its vague provisions, keeps being used to arbitrarily arrest and detain thousands of individuals, including peaceful opponents and human rights defenders. Additionally, these counterterrorism laws and policies systematically subject individuals suspected of terrorism to unfair trials and arbitrary executions.

Despite the gravity of the human rights situation, the Iraqi authorities have shown no political will to acknowledge the violations and end the prevailing

impunity of its security forces and their affiliated militias. This absence of appropriate measures to ameliorate the human rights situation has been evident during the adoption of the UPR of Iraq's outcome on [12 March 2020](#) before the UN Human Rights Council. After its review, which took place on 11 November 2019, Iraq eventually published in March 2020 that out of 298 recommendations received, 245 were supported by Iraq while 48 were "noted", i.e., rejected.

Alkarama noticed with concern that recommendations that were "noted" were all calling to end violations of the right to life, liberty and security of persons, particularly under the pretext of counterterrorism. These recommendations were formulated in [Alkarama's report](#) submitted before the review, calling for appropriate action to end torture, secret detention, and death sentences following unfair trials. It is with no surprises, but still with great concern, that Iraqi representatives in Geneva [justified](#) their rejections of these recommendations by stating that Iraq "is conducting a battle against the forces of darkness and the fiercest terror groups".

Against this background, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons voiced concern in a [report on her recent visit to Iraq](#) – which took place from 15 to 23 February 2020 – for the humanitarian needs of the 1.4 million people who

remain displaced within Iraq and the challenges faced by humanitarian organisations to have access to them.

Continued crackdown on freedom of assembly and expression, and reprisals against human rights defenders

In Iraq, civil society activists are subjected to feverish campaigns of intimidation and systematic arrests and disappearances since the renewal of anti-government demonstrations in October 2019. Crackdowns on demonstrations are systematic and carried out by security forces and various militias, with excessive use of violence and lethal force, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators, including dozens of girls and minors. The UN has reported that since the protests erupted at the start of October, they have confirmed at least 490 deaths and 7,783 injured.

This phenomenon is amplified by the myriad of militias acting under the control of the government and which are known to use executions, enforced disappearances and torture against peaceful opponents.

The treatment of arrested demonstrators is particularly cruel, as reported by survivors, with gruelling accounts of torture and death threats to force them to stop their legitimate and peaceful activism. Among them, [Alkarama defended](#) two activists, Khalil

al-Jumaili and [Asma al-Azzawi](#), and peaceful protesters Shaker al-Khafaji and Ali al-Sudani, who were disappeared forcibly for periods ranging from more than two weeks to about two months. At the same moment, activists such as Asma Al-Azzawi were abducted as a form of reprisals for their participation on and coverage of the peaceful demonstrations taking place in Tahrir Square in central Baghdad.

These systematic abuses against peaceful activists have also been included in a [report by UN Assistance Mission for Iraq \(UNAMI\) Human Rights Office](#) which described cases involving “123 people who disappeared between 1 October 2019 and 21 March 2020” amongst whom 25 remain missing today. This year was also marked by a number of executions of human rights defenders, including [women](#), by militiamen as a form of reprisals for participating or defending peaceful protesters. In August 2020, doctor and human rights defender [Riham Yaqoub](#) was shot dead while two other female advocates were also victims of assassinations attempts.

On 7 February 2020, the [Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) affirmed being alarmed “at the escalation in violence in the central Iraqi city of Najaf on 5 February when supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr allegedly shot dead anti-Government demonstrators”.

Persistence of violations of fundamental rights in detention, unfair trials and arbitrary executions

Violations in detention remain a major concern for Alkarama as they constitute a real and systematic threat to the right to life and security of all those deprived of their liberty. From peaceful activists to individuals suspected of belonging to a terrorist group, all report having been subjected to secret detention, torture, coerced confessions, denial of legal and medical assistance and ultimately unfair trial, possibly leading to a death sentence. According to [OHCHR reports](#), about 4000 prisoners, most of them charged with terrorism offences, are on death row in Iraq.

On 17 November 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [Michelle Bachelet said](#) her Office has received credible and “deeply troubling reports” that 21 men reportedly convicted of terrorism-related charges were executed on Monday in Nasiriyah Central Prison, also known as Al Hoot, in Iraq. She called on the Iraqi authorities “to halt any further executions” expressing her deep concern “about the fate of the several hundred prisoners who may be at imminent risk of execution in Iraq”.

Echoing the concerns raised by Alkarama in its reports and individual complaints, [the High Commissioner stressed](#) that the administration of

justice in terrorism-related cases in Iraq was riddled with violations of fair trial rights, and frequent allegations of torture or ill-treatment. While in such circumstances death penalty sentences amount to an arbitrary execution, Bachelet also highlighted that they did not provide the justice that victims deserve but instead created more injustice.

In January 2020, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a [report](#) on the Administration of Justice in Iraq highlighting the patterns of violations identified by Alkarama in its work over the past years. More precisely, it concluded that “basic fair trial standards were not respected in terrorism-related trials”. The [UN report’s conclusions](#) followed an “independent monitoring of 794 criminal court trials mainly involving ISIL defendants held in eight Iraqi provinces from 1 May 2018 through 31 October 2019. The majority of the hearings, 619, concerned people facing anti-terrorism charges”.

Furthermore, the practice of enforced disappearance remains widespread and systematic, with more than 150 cases submitted by Alkarama to the [UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances \(CED\)](#) in the past years. The vast majority of them have yet to be clarified by the authorities. It is on this

basis that the [CED concluded](#) in its November 2020 report on Iraq that “a pattern of enforced disappearance persists over much of the territory of the State, and that impunity and re-victimization prevail in these cases”. It also [highlighted](#) with concern the discrepancies between the figures provided by the State (between 13,993 and 16,000 disappeared persons since 1968), and “those reported by other reliable sources” including Alkarama, which go as high as between 500,000 and 1 million disappeared persons since the 2003 US-led invasion.

The Iraqi authorities replied to the CED’s concern with the same worrisome denial of a well-documented pattern of systematic enforced disappearances. More precisely, the Iraqi representation [asserted to the CED](#) that “there are no secret detention facilities” in the country since it was “prohibited by domestic law”. At the same time, they failed to respond to the Committee allegations about 420 places of secret detention, including in Camp Justice, Camp Honor, Jadriya bunker, al-Muthanna airport prison, Baghdad airport prison, and the city of Jurf al-Sakhar.

This absence of cooperation from the Iraqi authorities with the CED has been experienced by Alkarama, which in turn decided to keep increasing international pressure on the government in order to obtain clarifications. As a striking example,

on 17 August 2020 Alkarama urged again the Iraqi authorities to implement the Committee's reiterated recommendations to locate [Mounir Al Jabouri](#). This young man was arrested on 14 April 2014, along with two of his cousins, by members of the 17th Division of the Iraqi Army. Since then, all the efforts of Al Jabouri's family to locate him over the years have remained unsuccessful. While information was arriving by unofficial channels to the family about his potential detention by militia of the Popular Mobilisation Units, the CED made several requests to Iraq's authorities to locate Mr Al Jabouri. However, in its replies, the government refused to comply with the CED's request by refusing to provide any information or carry out a genuine investigation. On the contrary, in one of its latest reply, the State party tried to question the credibility of the request considering it as based on "false" information. The CED reminded Iraq of its obligations to investigate and requested again information from the government, highlighting that it was an international obligation on their part to do so.



The King of Jordan, Abdullah II, delivers his speech at the opening of the Nineteenth extraordinary session of the Parliament (Source: Royal Hashemite Court, 10/12/2020).

JORDAN

Our concerns

Increased reprisals and criminal prosecutions against journalists, unionists, and other peaceful activists;

Disproportionate restrictions on the rights to freedom of association, including union rights, and to freedom of peaceful assembly;

Violations committed by the Directorate General of Intelligence including the practice of torture and incommunicado detention.

In recent years, Alkarama had documented recurrent cases of arrests of journalists, activists and ordinary citizens for having merely expressed criticism of the Royal family, the government or leaders of allied countries. This year the repression has expanded to include all forms of online and media expression that is critical of the authorities' policies in handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The state of emergency declared in March 2020 in response to the growing pandemic was used as a pretext for an even more severe restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms in the country. Thus, in addition to arbitrary arrests of individuals critical of the Royal family or government policies, authorities also detained public figures who criticised the poor health crisis management.

Following the dissolution of the House of Representatives – the lower house of the Jordanian parliament – carried out unilaterally by the king in September 2020, elections were held in November to fill the 130 seats of the chamber. The official turnout announced was one the lowest ever recorded with only 29.88 per cent of voters participating. This low rate was explained by civil society as a consequence of a general climate of public discontent amidst a dire economic situation and poor health crisis management.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

On the basis of the state of emergency declared in March, the government promulgated restrictive decrees, including an April 2020 executive decree providing for up to three years' imprisonment for anyone publishing or sharing information about the Covid-19 pandemic that could be likely to “create panic”. Coupled with the criminalisation of “fake news” introduced with the [2019 amendments](#) to the Cybercrime Act, these new provisions have paved the way for waves of arrests of public figures for publicly debating the government's management of the health crisis.

Meanwhile, arbitrary arrests of individuals critical of the government, the monarchy or their allies remain a recurring practice. On 26 August 2020, cartoonist [Emad Hajjaj](#) was arrested for “harming Jordan's relations with a

friendly state” after publishing a cartoon on social media about the normalisation of relations between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel. The cartoon, which was deemed offensive, depicted Emirati leader Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan holding a dove flying an Israeli flag spitting on his face. The image was a reference to Israeli pressure on the United States to refrain from selling fighter jets to the UAE despite the normalisation of their relations.

Restrictions on fundamental freedoms

In July, police forces raided the premises of the Teachers' Union in the capital. The raids were followed by the arrests of several dozen union members and the closure of the syndicate's premises. The mass demonstrations that followed the crackdown were violently dispersed by security forces, who also proceeded to arrest journalists who were covering the events.

Earlier, in September 2019, this independent union organised a four-week-long strike in response to the authorities' failure to honour their vow to increase teachers' salaries. From then, tensions between the union and the government escalated in April 2020, following the government's announcement to freeze civil servants' salaries presented as a measure to address the health crisis.

The crisis peaked on 25 June 2020, when the Attorney General decided to close down the union's premises for two years and suspended all members of its board of directors. The board members were prosecuted on vague charges of corruption, while the government accused them of “supporting the Muslim brotherhood”.

On 7 August 2020, the spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) [took a public stance stating](#) that OHCHR was “deeply concerned at the decision by the Jordanian authorities to close an independent trade union, suspend its board for two years, and replace its leaders with a Government-appointed committee to run the union's affairs in the interim”

Lastly, the increasing use of “gag orders” exemplifies the growing restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the press in the country. In Jordanian law, the executive, through the Attorney General, can impose a ban on any private person or public media to disseminate information or comment on ongoing investigations. Such measures were taken in the case of the closure of the teachers' union and the arrest of its members. On 19 August 2020, [several experts called](#) for the release of the union's members and the lifting of the gag orders which, according to the experts, had prohibited any public debate on the case.



The Kuwaiti delegation during the Universal Periodic Review before the United Nations Human Rights Council (Source: United Nations WebTV, 29/01/2020).

KUWAIT

Our concerns

Violations of fundamental rights and guarantees of persons deprived of their liberty, including lack of protection against torture and ill-treatment in detention;

Restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and the press, as well as freedom of association and peaceful assembly;

Continued discriminatory practices and marginalisation of the Bidoon community, as well as gender inequality in the Nationality law;

The [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) of Kuwait, which took place on 29 January 2020, had provided an opportunity for civil society organisations to raise their concerns with the Human Rights Council. Alkarama had proposed in its [alternative report](#) a total of 25 recommendations to the Kuwaiti authorities aimed at improving its human rights situation. As a reminder, the UPR consists of a peer-review by States of their respective human rights records, after which recommendations aimed at greater respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are made.

The [final report](#) containing all the recommendations, questions from the Human Rights Council delegations and the government's response, was adopted in July 2020. All concerns raised by Alkarama in its report, as well

as the 25 recommendations made, were taken up by the State delegations. The issues raised concerned mainly the respect of prisoners' rights, fundamental freedoms and the laws related to the transmission of Kuwaiti citizenship.

The recommendations made by States regarding these key issues in the country were mostly [rejected](#) by the Kuwaiti government, raising concerns within civil society.

Violations of fundamental rights and guarantees in detention

The persistence of violations of fundamental rights and guarantees of persons deprived of their liberty remains one of the main recurring [concerns of Alkarama](#). The Kuwaiti Penal Code does not define torture in accordance with Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) and still allows impunity for perpetrators, particularly as acts of torture are often considered as mere misdemeanours.

Access to legal assistance from the outset of detention is still not guaranteed, leaving detainees without a proper defence during interrogations, putting them at a greater risk of forced confessions. This lack of protection remains all the more worrying as no reform was undertaken to put in place an effective independent mechanism of prevention, monitoring, and complaint.

During the UPR, [exchanges](#) between the representatives of Kuwait and other States led the delegation to affirm that the authorities had authorised visits to places of detention by local, regional and international organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. The problem remains however that the National Human Rights Institution, which should be competent to receive complaints and investigate conditions of detention, lacks independence from the executive.

Severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms

In its report, Alkarama had raised the restrictions imposed by various laws on public gatherings, the formation of associations and their activities, as well as on press and publication activities. For example, it stressed that these laws allow for the arrest and prosecution of individuals for simply making use of their rights and freedoms. Yet, during the UPR interactive dialogue in Geneva, the Kuwaiti delegation simply denied that these laws posed any problem in terms of respect for fundamental freedoms, therefore rejecting any suggestion for legislative reform.

Among the most problematic laws, those relating to press and publications, as well as the law on cybercrime and the law on communications, contain particularly repressive provisions. Still again, Kuwaiti officials rejected all recommendations to amend them,

stating that since [these laws](#) were compatible with Kuwait's international obligations, there was no need for any reform.

Similarly, provisions pertaining to the creation and functioning of associations and political parties, as well those regulating online publications criminalise content or opinions deemed “critical” against the Emir. Such provisions considered in international law as “lèse-majesté” have already served as a basis for arbitrary detentions. Nonetheless, Kuwaiti authorities still [consider](#) that these restrictions on freedom of opinion conformed with the standards and provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), rejecting all calls for reforms to these legislations.

Focus - Discrimination against the “Bidoon” and lack of will for genuine reforms of nationality laws

The issue of [statelessness](#) in Kuwait is intimately linked to the history of the country, raising important challenges for the Bidoon in accessing their civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Although Kuwait is one of the richest countries in the world, this stateless community is often [marginalised](#), deprived of their social, economic, civil and political rights, and denied access to basic services.

In the [UPR report](#) adopted in June 2020, some countries made recommendations that were in line with Alkarama’s concerns on this subject. In its [report](#) to the Human Rights Council, Alkarama highlighted the profound discrimination against the Bidoon community, left to live in slums, and restricted in their access to education, health care, freedom of movement, political participation, as well as their rights to marriage and family life. Besides, more people are made stateless with the practice of citizenship stripping against political activists.

Yet, during the [dialogue](#) between Kuwait and UN member states, the lack of genuine political will on the part of the emirate authorities to end statelessness in the country was blatant. For example, [Austria had called](#) the authorities to “[d]etermine and publish clear, objectively verifiable criteria for naturalization and provide by law judicial remedies”. While such measures amount to no less than a fundamental obligation of the authorities to provide legal certainty to those concerned by the issue and to avoid arbitrary denial of nationality, the government nonetheless rejected the recommendation.

One of the reasons for the perpetuation of statelessness in the country is the differential treatment between men and women in the transition of Kuwaiti

citizenship to their children.

Laws pertaining to nationality still deny Kuwaiti women the right to transmit their nationality to their children. Thus, when a Kuwaiti woman marries a member of the Bidoon community, their children are fated to statelessness, with serious consequences for their rights to health and education. Regrettably, recommendations made to Kuwait to amend the Nationality Law so that Kuwaiti women have equal rights with men in the transmission of citizenship have all been [rejected](#) during the UPR.



Beirut Port after the explosion caused by ammonium nitrate (4/8/2020).

LEBANON

Our concerns

Disproportionate use of force against peaceful demonstrators and reprisals against activists and cyber-activists for any criticism of the government and security services of the country;

Recurrent violations of the fundamental rights and guarantees of individuals arrested by the internal security forces and the armed forces, particularly in counterterrorism cases or criticism towards the authorities;

Lack of effectiveness of the newly established National Human Rights Institution and Torture Prevention Mechanisms.

Throughout the year 2020, Lebanon has been through a “[triple tragedy](#) of the socio-economic crisis, COVID-19 and the ammonium nitrate explosion”, which have shown the inability of the government to manage the country.

As the Lebanese Pound lost 80% of its value in 2020, access to fundamental rights and healthcare became even more complicated, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. As poverty rose, the most vulnerable people in the society are severely impacted, including the 969’641 registered Syrian refugees living in the country.

Amidst this crisis, on 4 August 2020, an explosion at the Port of Beirut devastated the city. The Port of Beirut handled approximately 70% of the country’s total imports in a country that

has always relied on imports for 80% of its food.

According to [UN experts](#), the explosion had in fact “destroyed the country’s main source of food and has further pushed Lebanon to the brink of a hunger crisis”.

On 8 July 2020, Alkarama submitted its [report to the human rights council](#) in view of the Universal Periodic Review of Lebanon. In its report, Alkarama highlighted its concerns on the country’s humanitarian and human rights situation and proposed recommendations to the government during its review.

Demonstrations and public criticism of a government system that has proven complete inefficient in finding solutions to this multi-layered crisis have been met with repression. The use of force against demonstrators and criminal prosecutions of individuals for criticising the government remains a significant concern in a country where fundamental rights and guarantees in detention are too often violated.

Continued crackdown on freedom of assembly and expression

This year, Alkarama continued to document numerous cases of individuals arrested and detained for having criticised or opposed the government during demonstrations or on social media.

Demonstrations were marked by excessive use of violence by security forces and armed supporters of different groups. On 21 January 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed her concern over the increasing number of violent clashes between protesters and security forces.

The UN High Commissioner, therefore, recalled that law enforcement officers must “abide by international norms and standards on the use of force, particularly the principles of legality and proportionality”, while “demonstrators should exercise this right peacefully and assemble without resorting to violence”.

Violations to fundamental rights and guarantees in detention

Alkarama’s main concerns remain the lack of sufficient fundamental guarantees for individuals deprived of their liberty, particularly concerning the prevention of torture and ill-treatment in detention. In 2020, many demonstrators were arrested, and some have reported having been severely beaten during their arrest and interrogations.

Furthermore, in its report to the Human Rights Council in view of Lebanon’s UPR, Alkarama highlighted the issue of arbitrary detention as a significant cause of concern, both in terms of excessive use of pre-trial

detention and systematic violation of procedural guarantees. Action in this regard is all the more crucial since, in its previous UPR session, the Lebanese representation rejected recommendations calling it to end arbitrary detention.

However, the newly established mechanisms still have to prove their effectiveness. Alkarama highlighted that the newly created National Human Right Institution, which also acts as a National Prevention Mechanisms for torture, is not operational. No budget or actual means have been granted to the institution to carry out its mission.

This lack of appropriate prevention and complaint mechanisms for detainees who might be subjected to abuses remains a crucial concern. A significant number of cases documented by Alkarama and other civil society organisations show that various security institutions systematically use torture to extract confessions, especially in suspicion of terrorism. Furthermore, it seems that abuses and violence are also used against protesters as a form of punishment and intimidation in the context of clashes that marked this year's protests.

Lastly, Alkarama highlighted its worries about the routinely used practice of extracting confessions under duress, a method used by official security forces and non-state actors interacting closely with state institutions.

Confessions extracted under torture are admitted in trials and often constitute the only incriminating evidence. Therefore, the recommendations included in its UPR report emphasise the importance of ensuring the effectiveness and independence of prevention and complaint mechanisms to prevent and investigate cases of abuses against detainees.



Mohamed Aujjar: Head of the independent fact-finding mission on Libya.

LIBYA

Our concerns

Persistent violations of international humanitarian law, including airstrikes by Haftar's LNA against civilian targets;

Systematic violations of human rights by all parties to the conflict, particularly arbitrary arrests, torture, and secret detentions;

Absence of independent complaints or monitoring mechanisms and failure to prosecute those responsible for abuses, fostering a climate of complete impunity.

As the country remains divided, Libya's humanitarian and human rights situation kept deteriorating this year, with increased involvement of local armed militias and foreign mercenaries in the conflict. In June 2020, a [UN report](#) highlighted the severity and multiplication of violations related to mercenary activities, calling for independent investigations into their use by the warring parties. Furthermore, the experts warned that "reliance on foreign actors has contributed to the escalation of the conflict in Libya and undermined prospects for a peaceful resolution, all at a tragic cost for the local population".

Enforced disappearances, arrests and arbitrary detention of thousands of individuals by the warring parties, and

and civilian casualties of the war remain a significant concern. Amid the war, the fate of thousands of migrants remains particularly dire. On 28 April 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [expressed](#) her concern about collective expulsions this year from eastern Libya of at least 1,400 migrants and refugees, most of them coming from Sudan, Niger, Chad, and Somalia. They were deported without access to legal assistance to demand asylum or other protection needs, violating Libya's international human rights law obligations on non-refoulement.

Later in the year, in August 2020, UN [High Commissioner Bachelet appointed](#) the experts to form the "Independent Fact-finding Mission", a team of independent experts to document human rights violations and abuses. The Fact-Finding Mission on Libya was [established](#) earlier on 22 June 2020 by the Human Rights Council with the mission "to document alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by all parties in Libya since the start of 2016".

On 11 November 2020, Libya's human rights record was examined by the UN Human Rights Council's [Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#) Working Group. Following the interactive dialogue, 285 [recommendations](#) were issued by other member States, echoing the concerns of Alkarama on human rights and humanitarian violations committed by

warring parties in complete impunity. The Libyan government will have to provide its position on each recommendation, i.e., to either accept or reject them, before the 46th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2021.

Arbitrary detentions, torture and enforced disappearances and reprisals against peaceful activists

The conflict in Libya remains fuelled by foreign involvement and increased use of mercenaries in the war, particularly by the Libyan National Arab (LNA) of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. Severe violations continue to be [perpetrated](#) in complete impunity, including summary executions, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, gender-based violence, as well as reprisals against human rights defenders, activists and journalists.

The multiplication of unofficial detention centres both under the control of the Ministries of Justice, Defence and Interior and in facilities managed by armed groups and militias created a breeding ground for secret detention, torture and executions.

In its June 2020 [report](#), The UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries expressed alarm at widespread reports about mercenaries and related actors, particularly since the start of the offensive by LNA to seize the capital Tripoli in April 2019.

For example, [Russian private military](#) personnel, such as the “Wagner Group”, were found to have been deployed on the Tripoli frontline to support the LNA from at least September 2019 to May 2020. The LNA and mercenaries affiliated with it were accused of arbitrarily detaining five civilians and summarily executed three of them in al-Sbeaa village near Tripoli during this period.

On 4 August 2020, Alkarama submitted a complaint to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) concerning the situation of [Dr Abdurahman Mohamed Arjili Ghoma](#), the former Deputy Minister for War Victims and Missing Persons, abducted on his way to work by armed men in Tripoli on 8 June 2016. During his term as Deputy Minister, Dr Arjili denounced some armed groups for committing severe human rights violations, raising fear that his abduction and detention were done as reprisals for his positions. Three days after his abduction, his family received information that he was detained by members of a militia close to the RADA forces led by Ahmed Kablane. They went to their premises on the same day, but the person who talked to the family denied Dr Arjili's presence and threatened them to refrain from further research. Alkarama requested the WGEID experts to intervene promptly with the Libyan authorities and urge for his immediate release.

On [23 June 2020](#), following [Alkarama's urgent appeal](#) of 11 October 2016, the United Nations Working Group on arbitrary detention ([WGAD](#)) [published Opinion 13/2020](#) declaring the detention of Libyan cleric [Moustafa Abdelkhalek Al Darsi](#) arbitrary. He was abducted in Zliten in January 2016 by members of RADA forces who did not acknowledge Mr Al Darsi's detention until 28 May 2016. To date, Mr Al Darsi remains unaware of the charges against him, and he has never been presented before a judicial authority.

In its decision, the WGAD preliminarily reaffirms that the Special Deterrence Force, a militia group nominally acting under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, must be considered a State organ, and its conduct shall be considered an act of Libya. Therefore, the WGAD called upon the government to take urgent action to immediate release Mr Al Darsi, stressing that the current global context of the COVID-19 pandemic posed a particular threat.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, abductions and executions of clerics and other dissenting voices that do not conform to the “Madkhali” ideology – embraced by most RADA members – appeared to be increasing in Libya.

Violation of Humanitarian Law: Attacks against civilian property and persons

On 27 January 2020, OHCHR and UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) published a [joint report](#) detailing their inquiry into the July 2019 airstrike on the Tajoura Detention Centre. This airstrike conducted by the LNA resulted in the death of at least 53 migrants and refugees. In the report, the UN called for accountability, highlighting that no steps were taken to ensure that such violations would not be repeated in the future.

The report notably [found](#) that the airstrikes were likely conducted "by aircraft belonging to a foreign state", but added that it was unclear "whether these air assets were under the command of the LNA or were operated under the command of that foreign state in support of the LNA."

OHCHR and UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) also expressed their shock about the discovery of eight mass graves in Tarhouna earlier in January 2020 and called for a "prompt, thorough, effective, transparent, and independent investigation to establish the facts and circumstances of human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by all parties in Libya".

On 18 June 2020, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms Nada Al-Nashif provided an [update](#) on human rights in Libya to the Human Rights Council. In her address, she highlighted that since the April 2019 offensive launched by the LNA, a severe deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation has been documented. As of June 2020, at least a million people needed humanitarian assistance, and since April 2019 offensive, at least 201,000 people were forced to flee their homes, mostly in and around the capital.

She added that so far for the year 2020, UNSMIL [recorded](#) at least 146 civilians killed and 235 civilians injured, mainly caused by indiscriminate bombarding on civilian areas, noting that the vast majority of casualties were to be attributed to the LNA. Furthermore, from 6 to 10 April 2020, the al Khadra Hospital in Tripoli, which was receiving patients with COVID-19, was struck at least on three separate occasions by rockets attributed to the LNA.



The head of the National Human Rights Committee (left) presents its annual report on the human rights situation in the country to the president of Mauritania (source: AMI).

MAURITANIA

Our concerns

Systematic violations of the right to peaceful assembly through the use of excessive force and arrests of demonstrators;

Judicial persecution of human rights defenders, activists and peaceful political opponents;

Torture and poor prison conditions, as well as lack of independent and effective preventive and complaints mechanisms.

The human rights situation in the country continues to be problematic, with no significant improvement in recent years, particularly concerning [issues previously raised by Alkarama](#) with the UN human rights mechanisms.

Violations of fundamental freedoms continue to be systematic, including through crackdowns on demonstrations, strict control of associations, as well as undue restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and the press. Furthermore, persons deprived of their liberty cannot access their fundamental guarantees, particularly peaceful activists and human rights defenders, as well as those arrested and prosecuted under the anti-terrorism law.

A range of legislative provisions that criminalise acts of free expression and

freedom of the press. On 25 June 2020, the National Assembly adopted the “law on the dissemination of false information” introduced by the government to “guarantee access to accurate and reliable information to strengthen the freedom of expression and information”.

Freedom of expression and participation in public life

Participation in public life remains restricted by a restrictive legal framework regulating associative activities, providing for the arrest of participants in some cases.

Between 13 and 15 February 2020, the judicial police in Nouakchott arrested 15 people for participating in an unauthorised meeting. These arrests were based on article 8 of law n°64.098 of 9 June 1964 on associations, which states that “those who in any capacity assume or continue to assume the administration of associations operating without authorisation or whose authorisation has been revoked as stated in article 4 [of the law], shall be punished by imprisonment of one to three years and a fine of 3,000 to 540,000 UM”.

The arrests targeted participants in a meeting held in a private venue, on 9 February 2020, by a political movement called “Alliance pour la refondation de l’Etat Mauritanien” (AREM).

The members of the movement, which advocates, among other things, secularism and respect for individual freedoms, were denied access to a lawyer upon arrest. On 16 March 2020, several UN experts sent an urgent appeal to the government on their cases, calling for their release.

Furthermore, the 25 June 2020 “law on the dissemination of false information” introduced by the government as a mean to “strengthen the freedom of expression and information”. Following the adoption of the law by the parliament, the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression issued a communication to the government highlighting the many issues raised by the law and calling for its revision.

The expert expressed her concern over the overly broad and vague definition of “false information” adopted by the law. Furthermore, the law provides for several measures criminalising the “broadcasting of information” deemed as “false” or “likely to alter the sincerity of the forthcoming ballot”. Such dispositions could serve, as expressed by the expert, to “restrict freedom of expression on the basis of vague criteria and subject to arbitrary interpretation” and “to disproportionately sanction the dissemination of critical and controversial information, in an electoral context where the importance of public debate is probably at its peak”.

Arbitrary detentions and violations of fundamental guarantees of persons deprived of their liberty

Although Law No. 2015-033 on torture enshrines several fundamental safeguards for persons deprived of their liberty, prosecutorial authorities ignore its provisions, particularly against peaceful activists.

In cases of suspicions of terrorism, the guarantees are entirely set aside in favour of the Law No. 2010-035 of 21 July 2010 on terrorism, which violates fundamental rights of persons in detention. Primarily, it provides that individuals arrested under this law can remain in police custody for periods of 45 days outside of any judicial control and without any access to legal assistance. Such blatant violation of fundamental safeguards exposes detainees to an increased risk of torture and ill-treatment after their arrest to coerce them into self-incrimination.

The Code of Criminal Procedure provides for 48 hours of police custody for ordinary law cases, renewable once, but this period is often extended because non-working days are not counted in this period. Moreover, detainees are repeatedly denied access to a lawyer and a medical examination upon admittance into detention facilities.

Furthermore, such detentions quickly

turns into enforced disappearances as registers are not updated upon arrests. These violations, which are common in counter-terrorism cases and against peaceful activists and human rights defenders, are one of the main [concerns of Alkarama](#) in the country.

Moreover, magistrates remain under the control of the President of the Republic, who chairs the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, making illusory any form of independence of the judiciary. Independent and effective prevention and complaint mechanisms for persons deprived of their liberty are not available. In fact, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which [was downgraded](#) by the [Subcommittee on Accreditation](#) of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in November 2017 following a [report by Alkarama](#), still lacks independence. This absence of effective mechanisms to prevent arbitrary detention and ill-treatment fosters a climate of widespread impunity.



Moroccans demonstrate against the normalisation agreement with Israel (Source: Achkayen Press / Youtube)

MOROCCO

Our concerns

Violations of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and freedom of the press, as well as judicial harassment of journalists;

Lack of independent and effective torture prevention and complaints mechanisms and continuing impunity for perpetrators of abuses;

Lack of independence of the judiciary leading to numerous unfair trials.

In Morocco, the human rights situation kept degrading in the previous years, with fundamental rights and freedoms still curtailed by the royal power's control over every country's institution, including the judiciary.

On 22 January 2020, [the Human Rights Committee published](#) the follow-up information provided by the Government of Morocco on the [concluding observations](#) of its sixth periodic review by the Committee, which took place in October 2016.

At that time, the Committee had asked the government to inform it as a matter of priority of the measures taken to remedy a series of shortcomings, which had been highlighted in [Alkarama's report](#). Amongst these priority recommendations were the reform of

the anti-terrorism law, the prevention of torture and respect for freedom of association. However, the information provided by the government does not detail any concrete measure taken to implement these recommendations.

While the authorities announced the implementation of reforms to strengthen fundamental rights and liberties, journalists continued to be subjected to judicial harassment. “Red lines” such as criticism of the king or covering issues related to the country’s territorial integrity or Islamism continue to limit press freedom. Furthermore, the lack of protection for fundamental guarantees of persons deprived of their liberty has yet to be addressed.

Violations of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly

Violations of fundamental freedoms take the form of both restrictive legal frameworks governing their exercise and arbitrary arrest and detention followed by unfair trials of individuals for having exercised these freedoms.

Among its priority recommendations following the latest review of Morocco, [the Human Rights Committee stated](#) that the government should “as a matter of urgency, take all necessary steps to put an end to violations of the right to freedom of association ». Furthermore, it requested the authorities to “ensure that it does not

exert any undue influence over human rights defenders and that they are free to work without fear of reprisals or unjustified restrictions on their activities ».

However, journalists writing on politically sensitive subjects are still subjected to judicial harassment and violations of their right to privacy in reprisal for their activities. On 27 July 2020, several independent UN experts sent a [joint communication](#) to the Moroccan government regarding the journalist Omar Radi. This investigative journalist and human rights defender had notably addressed issues of corruption and violations of the rights of Hoceima demonstrators. Since 2019, he has been subjected to harassment, surveillance and intimidation by the authorities because of his journalistic work and critical writings on human rights issues.

The experts pointed to studies published in June 2020 by international media showing that Mr Radi was subjected to telephone surveillance while facing trial in December 2019. The Israeli surveillance company NSO Group is said to have infiltrated his phone on numerous occasions at the request of the authorities. The authorities have opened no investigation into the alleged illegal surveillance. On the contrary, after the study’s publication, the authorities attacked the journalist in the press, accusing him of being a “spy” and a

“traitor” in a campaign of defamation and intimidation aimed at discrediting him. On 24 June 2020, the journalist was summoned by the national brigade of the judicial police in Casablanca for “suspicions of receiving funding from foreign intelligence agencies”. He has since been banned from travelling and is being monitored daily by the country’s intelligence services. Eventually, on 5 July 2020, Mr Radi was arrested a second time and charged with violence after being harassed by three plainclothes police officers.

These facts largely contradict [the government’s assertions](#) in its information provided to the Human Rights Committee that “the law governing the status of professional journalists provides for the consolidation and recognition of the rights and freedoms of journalists, in particular, the judicial protection of the confidentiality of sources and the right of access to information”.

Violations of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly

On 21 July 2020, several UN experts sent a [joint communication](#) to the Moroccan government regarding the arrest, detention and criminal prosecution of Mr Khatri Dadda, a human rights defender and photographer based in Western Sahara. Mr Dadda filmed several demonstrations of Sahrawi activists during which the police allegedly used brutality against the

demonstrators in the town of Smara.

The experts expressed their grave concern about the conditions of his arrest and prosecution. He was arrested without an arrest warrant, allegedly forced to make a self-incriminating confession used as evidence to convict him. The investigating judge reportedly stated that the authorities had a video proving that he had committed acts of violence against the police. However, Mr Dadda and his lawyer were never allowed to view this video nor to challenge it. Following a summary trial, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for violence against public officials.

The treatment of detainees, particularly in cases related to Western Sahara and counter-terrorism cases, continues to be a major concern, raised on multiple [occasions](#) by Alkarama. In such cases, a pattern emerges in which persons deprived of their liberty are subjected to ill-treatment and denied their right to fundamental guarantees, including their right to a lawyer and a fair trial. These violations also stem from a lack of adequate and independent prevention and complaints mechanisms, a subject on which Alkarama had repeatedly [expressed](#) its concern to the UN mechanisms.



The enthronement ceremony of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, the new Sultan of Oman (Source: Electronic Statement, 01/11/2020).

OMAN

Our concerns

Restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;

Systematic practice of arbitrary detention and reprisals against human rights defenders and peaceful activists;

Lack of independent monitoring and complaint mechanisms and absence of independence of the judiciary.

In January 2020, there has been a shift at the top of the executive. Haitham bin Tarek al-

Said ascended to the throne following the death of Sultan Qaboos who had been ruling Oman for the past 40 years.

In 2020, [Oman ratified](#) two major human rights conventions : the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT), the United Nations Convention on Enforced Disappearances (UNCED). This accession to these two major international Human Rights treaties took place while the Universal Periodic Review of Oman, originally scheduled on 5 November 2020 was postponed to 2021. During [previous UPR-sessions](#) the ratification of the UNCAT and the UNCED has been persistently recommended by Alkarama.

After the announcement of the ratifications [Alkarama called](#) upon the Sultanate of Oman to implement its conventional obligation and cooperate in good faith with the treaty bodies

By ratifying the two instruments, the Sultanate of Oman committed itself to take all necessary measures to prevent torture and enforced disappearance, investigate and punish state agents who would commit such acts and offer redress to victims. Above all, this opens the possibility for victims to send information on violations to the relevant treaty bodies, the Committee Against Torture and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, through reports and urgent actions.

On 8 July 2020, [Alkarama submitted to its report the Human Rights Council](#), in view of Oman UPR. Alkarama reiterated its concern over the lack of prevention mechanisms for acts of torture and arbitrary detention, as well as the lack of independence of the judiciary. Any separation of powers remains therefore illusory in a country where the Sultan monopolises both the executive and legislative powers and exercises a firm control over the judiciary by appointing and dismissing members of the government, of the legislature, as well as senior judges.

Furthermore, fundamental freedoms continue to be restricted by laws criminalising criticism of the Sultan.

The country's internal security regularly summons and arrest opponents or peaceful activists, leading to criminal proceedings against them based on provisions that criminalise any criticism of the State, its institutions or the Sultan.

Restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly

While the Constitution enshrines the respect for individual freedoms, laws regulating their exercise strips them of their substance. Often justified by the authorities on the basis of the maintenance of public order or State security such restrictions are embedded in several laws including the 2011 Cybercrime law. According to this law, online statements deemed to be critical of the royal power, the government as well as political or geopolitical choices can lead to arrests and incommunicado detention. This legislation has been repeatedly used to prosecute and silence human rights activists, bloggers and any other voices critical of the government. In its UPR report, Alkarama highlighted the necessity to revise and repeal all dispositions that are in violation of individual rights to freedom of expression.

Amongst many worrying developments, [Alkarama highlighted in its report](#)

article 116 of the new Penal Code of 2018. This article allows the executive to severely punish individuals and organisations to up to ten years imprisonment if they are found to have “the “intent to oppose the principles of the state”. Such a vague definition, all the more based on the existence of an intent allow for a selective punishment of any form of opposition to the state in pre-emptive manner, creating new forms of self-censorship in an already restricted civil society space.

Arbitrary arrest and detention

In 2020, Alkarama continued to receive reports of arbitrary arrests and abuses in detention, particularly as reprisals against individuals for having exercised their right to freedom of expression or assembly. Arbitrary arrests are generally carried out by the internal security services, who are responsible for the surveillance and monitoring of society outside of any independent judicial control. Alkarama highlighted this major issue in its report, adding that due to its complete subservience to the executive, the judiciary is, in fact, instrumental in quelling any dissent and undermining the rule of law in Oman.

For the past decade, Alkarama has shed light onto a worrisome pattern of violations to the rights of individuals deprived of their liberty. This pattern, particularly visible in political cases, consists in an arbitrary arrest of the victim who is presented neither with a

judicial warrant nor being given reasons for the arrest. Afterwards, the detaining authorities often refuse to provide the family any information about the fate and whereabouts of their relative for periods ranging from several days to several weeks, thus creating a situation of enforced disappearance. Reports show that while in custody, victims are subjected to lengthy questionings, submitted to psychological pressure and physical duress, in order to punish or force the person to give out information on civil society members who are communicating with international organisations.

Such violations keep being repeated in impunity partly due to an absence of efficient and independent mechanisms capable of preventing such abuses and providing victims with effective remedies. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is perceived by local civil society as a non-independent state institution, with its members appointed by the Sultan.



An aerial photo of the Israeli settlement of Tuqu', in the occupied West Bank, south of Bethlehem (Source: Agence France-Presse, 17/11/2020).

PALESTINE

Our concerns

Effective annexation and continued occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel and its policy of forced eviction through the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of illegal settlements leading to a situation of apartheid;

Use of armed force against demonstrators, including children, by the security forces and acts of violence committed by settlers against Palestinians;

Impunity and lack of accountability measures against Israel by the UN Member States, in violation of their obligation to uphold international law;

Impunity and lack of accountability measures against businesses engaging in trade and commerce with the illegal settlements;

Arbitrary detentions, including the misuse of administrative detention of Palestinian prisoners, many of whom are minors.

While the new Israeli government adopted a plan to expand from July 2020 the annexation of important parts of the West Bank, settlements continued to grow with the help of hundreds of businesses from around the world. The new plans provided that further annexations would be extended to cover most of the Jordan Valley and the totality of the more than 235 illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. UN experts highlighted under this new plan, which was endorsed by the January 2020 American Peace to Prosperity Plan, Palestinians would lose “approximately 30 per cent of the West Bank”.

As the economic and humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories becomes direr, the Israeli authorities have continued to forbid entry and exit of Gaza, blocking aid deliveries and

refusing access permits for humanitarian and human rights personnel. The Covid-19 pandemic has been [particularly straining](#) for the Palestinian health services, which already lack essential equipment and medicine due to Israeli restrictions. In east Jerusalem, Israeli authorities [impeded](#) local authorities' efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 by raiding testing clinics and arresting medical personnel.

Denial of permits and visas has targeted both human rights defenders, NGOs and UN staff who have not been allowed to enter the Palestinian territories for one year. This situation has degraded even more after the [February 2020 UN report](#) on business activities in Israeli settlements to which Israel retaliated by freezing its relations with OHCHR.

From the extension of the “occupation” of Palestinian territories to a 21st-century apartheid

On 16 June 2020, Mr Michael Lynk, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967](#) with Forty-seven of the independent Special Procedures mandates appointed by the Human Rights Council, issued a [statement condemning](#) the new annexation plan, calling on the international community to ensure accountability. The experts also qualified the project as “inadmissible”,

highlighting that annexation was prohibited “precisely because it incites wars, economic devastation, political instability, systematic human rights abuses and widespread human suffering”.

The statement also [summarises](#) the situation in Palestine in strong words recalling that the UN had stated on many occasions “that the 53-year-old Israeli occupation is the source of profound human rights violations against the Palestinian people”. These violations are so significant and systematic that they cover today all aspects of Palestinian lives. They include “land confiscation, settler violence, discriminatory planning laws, the confiscation of natural resources, home demolitions, forcible population transfer, excessive use of force and torture, labour exploitation, extensive infringements of privacy rights, restrictions on the media and freedom of expression, the targeting of women activists and journalists, the detention of children, poisoning by exposure to toxic wastes, forced evictions and displacement, economic deprivation and extreme poverty, arbitrary detention, lack of freedom of movement, food insecurity, discriminatory law enforcement and the imposition of a two-tier system of disparate political, legal, social, cultural and economic rights based on ethnicity and nationality”. Alkarama has been working on many of these aspects for the past years, with [complaints](#) and

public reports highlighting the severity and extent of the abuses.

The [statement](#) rightly recalls that human rights violations against Palestinians “would only intensify after annexation”. They affirmed that “[w]hat would be left of the West Bank would be a Palestinian Bantustan, islands of disconnected land completely surrounded by Israel and with no territorial connection to the outside world” therefore imposing “a vision of a 21st-century apartheid”.

Severe violations of the right to life, liberty and security

On 24 April 2020, a group of UN human rights experts [urged](#) Israel “not to discriminate against thousands of Palestinian prisoners facing high-risk exposure to COVID-19” and called for the Israeli authorities to “release the most vulnerable – particularly women, children, older persons and those with pre-existing medical conditions”. According to UN figures, more than 4,520 Palestinian prisoners, including 183 children, 43 women and 700 detainees with pre-existing medical conditions, are detained in Israeli prisons.

Violations to the right to life still take the form of extrajudicial and summary execution of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli army, particularly children. On 17 December 2020, a [UN expert called](#) the Israeli authorities to investigate the

killing of a 15-year-old boy by an Israeli soldier earlier in the month. The experts highlighted that at least six Palestinian children living in the West Bank were [killed](#) in 2020 by Israeli security forces using live ammunition. Furthermore, at least 1,048 Palestinian children have been [injured](#) by Israeli forces across the Occupied Palestinian Territory between 1 November 2019 and 31 October 2020. The dire situation of Palestinian children and their need for international protection has also been [highlighted by the UN Committee](#) on the Rights of the Child, following its review of the report of the State of Palestine in January 2020.

FOCUS: Business and human rights in settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

On 12 February 2020, [OHCHR published](#) their report concerning business enterprises “involved in certain activities relating to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ». This report results from a long process that started in March 2016, when the Human rights council voted a resolution 31/36 mandating the Office « to produce a database of business enterprises » involved in a list of activities.

The list of activities [included](#) in the resolution goes from the “supply of equipment and materials facilitating the construction and the expansion of settlements and the wall”; “the supply of surveillance and identification

equipment for settlements” as well as for “the wall and checkpoints”; the supply of equipment for “the demolition of housing and property, the destruction of agricultural farms, greenhouses, olive groves and crops; the collection of security services, equipment and materials to enterprises operating in settlements; the provision of services and utilities supporting the maintenance and existence of settlements, including transport; to the banking and financial operations helping to develop, expand or maintain settlements including loans; the use of natural resources for business purposes as well as the pollution, and the dumping of waste in Palestinian villages, and other activities.”

The report identifies 112 business entities on which the UN Office had “reasonable grounds” to consider that they are or have been involved in one or more of the specific activities listed in Human Rights Council resolution 31/36. On this basis, the UN created a [database](#) of businesses engaging in trade and commerce with the illegal settlements, which will be updated annually. Among other measures, the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory [called](#) upon states “to enact domestic legislation that would ban the importation of goods produced in illegal settlements domiciled in any occupied territory”.



In Qatar, the executive, legislative, and judicial powers are concentrated in the hands of the Emir (Source : Agence France-Presse).

QATAR

Our concerns

Lack of respect for legal safeguards and violations of the right to a fair trial, particularly in the context of the fight against terrorism;

Restrictions on the rights to freedom of opinion and expression.

In 2020, Qatar remained for the most part under sanctions imposed in 2017 by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. On 12 November 2020, The UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures and human rights [urged](#) the four Gulf states to lift their unilateral sanctions against Qatar. After a two-week [visit](#) to Qatar, the expert concluded that the sanctions created obstacles to Qataris' ability to access fundamental rights and freedoms such as family life, education, work, health, private property, religion, expression, and access to justice. The expert also highlighted that by closing land, air, and sea borders to Qataris, the measures affected Qatari students studying abroad and Muslims wanting to carry on the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia. She [called](#) on the Gulf states to resume their cooperation and

settle their disputes based on the rule of law.

On 30 August 2020, two laws were passed allowing migrant workers to change jobs freely, introducing a monthly minimum wage of 1,000 Qatari riyals (about 275 USD) and imposing on employers an obligation to provide workers with adequate housing and food either directly or through allowances. A few days later, two UN human rights experts [issued](#) a joint press release stating that, if effectively enforced, these new laws “should effectively dismantle” Qatar’s “kafala” system and “protect migrant workers from exploitation”.

Despite this progress in protecting foreign workers’ rights, Alkarama main concerns remain violations of the fundamental rights and guarantees in detention and undue restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of peaceful assembly.

Violation of legal safeguards and the right to a fair trial, in particular in the context of the fight against terrorism

The lack of protection of fundamental rights and guarantees of persons deprived of their liberty, especially in counter-terrorism cases, remains one of the main flaws in Qatar’s legislation and practices. Disregard for the rights of individuals deprived of their freedom

often leads to fair trial rights’ violations, which constitutes another of Alkarama’s primary concerns. These violations, which often appear in cases related to the fight against terrorism, were raised by Alkarama with United Nations human rights experts in many [instances](#).

Despite many [recommendations](#) to the authorities from UN experts to ensure access to independent entities in detention areas to inspect detention conditions and hear complaints from detainees, today, the country lacks such a mechanism. The National Human Rights Council or the human rights department of the Ministry of the Interior, which are allowed to carry out visits to prisons, lack genuine freedom and independence from the executive to execute their mission.

Amongst the most problematic disposition in Qatari law, Article 117 of the Qatari Code of Criminal Procedure provides for the detention of a suspect in police custody for up to nine days, without any effective way to challenge the detention before an independent judicial authority. Furthermore, Qatar’s anti-terrorism law allows for further derogations to the already restrictive provisions of the Qatari Code of Criminal Procedure. In practice, the absence of protection of fundamental rights in detention in the anti-terrorism law, coupled with a vague definition of terrorism, has led to secret arrests, torture and prolonged pre-trial detention periods.

Restrictions on the rights to freedom of opinion and expression

The situation of freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly in Qatar remains a cause of concern for Alkarama and UN experts.

The criminalisation of any criticism of the Emir remains one of the main limitations of freedom of opinion and expression and the right to participate in public affairs freely. By continuing to punish with up to five years' imprisonment for any person who "challenges by any public means the Emir's exercise of his rights or authorities, or criticises his person", Article 134 of the Criminal Code stands as a significant limitation and violation to these fundamental freedoms. Despite [recommendations by UN experts](#) to repeal this disposition that institutes a crime of "lèse-majesté", the authorities still have to revise their criminal law.

Furthermore, individuals expressing critical or dissenting opinions online, just like those working in the media sector, are particularly concerned by restrictions on free speech. In this regard, the Cybercrime Law of 2014 remains applicable to online expression in the country despite [calls](#) by UN experts and [UN member states](#) for its reform. Not only, the law contains vaguely worded incriminations, it also gives to the executive a pervasive power of interpretation as to what can

constitute online criminal speech. As such, it allows for the banning of any website considered as posing "a threat to the country's security", without having to explain or prove that such a threat is indeed created by the website, creating a real potential of arbitrariness. UN experts raised similar concerns concerning notions such as Qatari "social values" to limit and punish with imprisonment and excessively high amounts in fines.



A group picture of ACPRA founding members before one of their trial sessions, with Abdullah al-Hamid, who died in inhumane conditions of detention on 04/23/2020.

SAUDI ARABIA

Our concerns

Systematic practice of torture and arbitrary detention, including prolonged detention devoid of any legal basis;

Abusive counter-terrorism measures and unfair trials before the Specialised Criminal Court, often resulting in the death penalty;

Severe repression of freedom of expression through arrests and arbitrary detention of peaceful dissidents, including human rights defenders.

Since the rise to power, in 2017, of crown prince Mohamed bin Salman (MBS), Saudi security forces and intelligence services increasingly operate under the control of the royal Cabinet and the crown prince himself. Under his authoritarian rule, hundreds of [human rights defenders](#), [scholars](#), [religious figures](#), [journalists](#), [political opponents](#) and [peaceful dissenting voices](#) were persecuted and arbitrarily deprived of their liberty. The situation has worsened to such to an extent that today, all those who have contacted foreign organisations to report on the situation in the country are detained.

Since last year, significant action was taken by various UN and regional organisation calling, inter alia, for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism concerning the human

rights situation in Saudi Arabia, and for effective steps to be taken by the authorities to put an end to the violations documented by Alkarama. The continuing crackdown has been condemned by Human Right Council member States, in [March 2019](#), [September 2019](#), and then again in [September 2020](#). As a result, Saudi Arabia's candidacy to the Human Rights Council has been rejected by UN member states during the [October 2020 elections](#).

Widespread and systematic use of arbitrary detention

Since its establishment in 2004, Alkarama has submitted numerous cases of persons subjected to long periods of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment to the UN Special Procedures and, mainly, to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD). The violations documented bear the same patterns: the victim is arrested without warrant and deprived of liberty often solely as a result of the exercise of his/her right to freedom of expression, often held incommunicado and in solitary confinement, without access to a lawyer and without being informed of the charges held against him/her, the victims are not presented to a judicial authority and cannot challenge the legality of their detention, during which they are exposed to ill-treatment or torture. While some of the victims are later released without charges and without any judicial

procedure, others are subjected to unfair trials and sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

In this regard, the [WGAD stated \(Opinion No. 33/2020\)](#) that Saudi Arabia has violated international human rights obligations in at least 60 of the cases examined. Furthermore, it recalled that the widespread and systematic nature of imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty may constitute crimes against humanity.

The gravity of the situation, along with the fact that the Saudi government has never implemented the views of the Working Group, impelled Alkarama to submit, on 8 February 2016, a communication to the Human Rights Council Complaint Procedure. Alkarama's submission presented numerous cases illustrating the pattern of systematic and widespread human rights violations including arbitrary detention against peaceful dissenters. The complaint has already been examined and validated by the secretariat and the [Working Group on Communications](#) which is in charge of assessing the admissibility of complaints. It then transmitted it to the [Working Group on Situations](#) on 22 February 2017, which is in charge of establishing a report in the violations after several rounds of questions and replies between the State concerned by the complaint, the experts of the working group and the organization which submitted the complaint.

While the Working Groups experts are expected to submit their recommendations on actions to be taken by the Human Rights Council, no longer than two years after its submission, the complaint remains under consideration after more than four years of procedure. During this whole period, several follow-ups were submitted by Alkarama to inform the Working Group about the human rights situation in the country, the latest one having been sent in October 2020.

In its latest follow-up submission Alkarama recalled that since [2019](#), member States of the Human Rights Council have expressed their concern at the pattern described in our initial complaint and called for action.

Given the alarming human rights situation in the country and the Saudi government's clear unwillingness to respect its international obligations, Alkarama requested the Working Group on Situations to urgently call the Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution establishing a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Saudi Arabia.

Persistence of gross human rights violations including enforced disappearance, torture and summary executions

[October 2 2020](#), marked the second year of impunity after the brutal murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at

his country's consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018.

Since then, and although the Saudi Kingdom has acknowledged the crime, it continues to deny the involvement of Crown Prince MBS in the murder and maintains that the perpetrators acted without the approval of the Crown Prince. However, [the report](#) on the investigation led by Agnès Callamard mentions a direct involvement of Crown Prince MBS in the case.

This impunity of the Saudi authorities constitutes a breeding ground for recurrent severe violations to the most fundamental rights including torture and enforced disappearances. As an example, on 14 May 2020 [Alkarama sent an urgent appeal](#) to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) regarding 34 years old Mr. Abdul Karim Thuail, a Yemeni government official and former human rights defender. He was forcibly disappeared by the authorities in Saudi Arabia after his arrest at the Jeddah International Airport on 12 March 2020. According to some sources, his enforced disappearance was likely a retaliatory act following statements he made criticising the Saudi-led coalition air strikes against civilians in Yemen. Thankfully, he was [released](#) by the Saudi authorities on 28 May 2020, after more than two months of disappearance. The Thuail family thanked Alkarama and other

organizations, who raised his case and expressed solidarity with them, reporting that during this time he had been secretly held at the al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh.

Furthermore, the multiplication of complaints submitted to its attention have led the WGEID to trigger in May 2020 a [general allegation](#) on the occurrence of enforced disappearance in Saudi Arabia. This procedure is launched when the violation is found by experts to be committed in widespread and/or systematic manner, giving potentially rise to a crime against humanity. In its [document](#) to the Human Rights Council, detailing the allegation, the WGIED affirmed that “according to the information received, the existing legal framework in Saudi Arabia does not offer sufficient protection against enforced disappearance. Enforced disappearances have also been the result of a repressive environment against manifestations of free speech and peaceful assembly.

Focus: Disabling dissent and the slow death in detention of dissenting religious scholars

On 12 October 2020, Alkarama submitted a complaint to the [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) on behalf of 70-years-old religious scholar Safar bin Abdulrahman Al Hawali. This prominent scholar is arbitrarily detained since 12

July 2018 after publishing a book in which he criticised Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s international policy choices and issued recommendations to his attention. His four sons, and his brother, were arrested by State Security forces as a form of reprisal and further intimidation. Since his arrest, he has been denied appropriate care in spite of his speech impairment and extremely fragile health state and denied access to the outside world.

Mr Al Hawali is a prominent figure of the Saudi al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (which can be translated as “Islamic Awakening”), or Sahwa movement. The Sahwa movement has been targeted by the [crackdown on freedom of expression](#) imposed by the Crown Prince and other scholars from the Sahwa movement have been arrested including reformist [Salman Al Awdah](#).

Since his arrest, Mr Hawali has had very few opportunities to be in contact with his family. Due to his severe speech impairment, he cannot communicate through telephone calls. The authorities have taken no measures whatsoever to facilitate the communication of Mr Al Hawali with his family and a legal counsel.

As a form of punishment for his criticism of the Crown Prince, Safar Al Hawali is practically being left to die in detention, cut from the outside world and his loved ones, and living in fear of

harassment and threats to his sons and brother. In response to this request, on 6 November 2020, the CRPD [requested multiple measures](#) to be taken by the Saudi authorities in order to avoid any irreparable harm to Safar Al Hawali, including his immediate release.

This would not be the first time that a political opponent passes away due to his conditions of detention and denial of medical care: on 23 April 2020, [human rights defender Abdullah Al Hamid died in custody](#) in similar inhumane circumstances. On 24 April 2020, Alkarama informed the United Nations about the death of the prominent Saudi human rights defender, calling on it to take a position regarding the fate of this exceptional figure who vowed his life to peacefully advocate for freedoms, justice, political reform and human rights in Saudi Arabia.

Al-Hamid, together with fellow Saudi human rights defenders, established the [Association for Civil and Political Rights \(ACPRA\)](#) in 2009, and was arrested six times, most recently in March 2013, where [he was sentenced to 11 years in prison](#) for engaging in human rights work. ACPRA was never recognized by the Saudi authorities and was ultimately banned with all its members sentenced to long prison terms.

Al-Hamid has been known for his strong adherence to the peaceful approach to change, his deep reform vision and enlightened thought.

Throughout the years, Alkarama had submitted [several communications to the United Nations human rights mechanisms](#), asking them to intervene with the Saudi authorities and [demand the immediate release](#) of Dr. Abdullah Al-Hamid and his companions and stop the harassment of human rights activists. UN mechanisms [issued many opinions and calls](#) confirming the arbitrary detention of al-Hamid and his companions, demanding their release.

Lastly, on 9 December 2020, Alkarama brought to the urgent attention of the [WGAD](#) the continued arbitrary detention of religious [scholar Khaled Al-Rashed](#), since his arrest which occurred on 19 March 2006.

Mr al-Rashed was arrested on 19 March 2006 in Mecca, while he was completing the Omra religious pilgrimage with his wife. His arrest was carried out by Mabath agents in civilian clothes, who did not present any mandate, nor explained the reasons of his arrest. However, given that his arrest happened briefly after he publicly criticised the Saudi royalty and its international policies, Alkarama believes that his detention was in reprisals for his opinions.

The WGAD concluded in its [Opinion No. 4/2007](#) that the detention of Mr al-Rashed was arbitrary. However, not only have the Saudi authorities completely ignored the opinion, they later [sentenced Mr al-Rashed](#) to 15

years imprisonment after a procedure that did not even resemble a trial.

He remains today in detention in spite of having served the totality of his unlawful and arbitrary sentence. Alkarama highlighted in its urgent appeal that Mr al-Rashed is subjected to an indefinite detention and practically left to die in detention, which is not only an arbitrary detention but also torture, cruel and inhumane treatment of al-Rashed and his relatives.



A youth gathering in El Fasher, North Darfur, on International Youth Day (Source: United Nations).

SUDAN

Our concerns

Persistent restrictions of fundamental freedoms despite positive reforms;

Persistence of violence against civilians and IDPs, particularly in Darfur;

Lack of accountability for abuses in the use of force and violence against peaceful demonstrators, including live ammunition and sexual violence;

Lack of investigation and mechanisms to ensure the criminal accountability of perpetrators of severe violations of the right to life, resulting in a persistent climate of impunity..

Since the fall of Omar al-Bashir's government following major protests in 2019, the need for profound reforms in Sudan remains crucial to ensure a genuine transition to a democratic system of governance. On 25 June 2020, the "Sudan Partnership Conference" gathered many actors and led to the pledging of 1.8 billion USD. Before the conference, the High Commissioner publicly [called upon](#) donors to mobilise all the necessary resources "to help Sudan navigate through this complex transition, and to be freed from the impediment of sanctions imposed previously".

In June 2020, the UN Security Council [created](#) a UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) for an initial period of 12 months. It is mandated to assist the Transitional

Government and cooperate with the OHCHR Country Office in Sudan to “support the implementation of the human rights, equality, accountability and rule of law provisions of the Constitutional Document, in particular those provisions that guarantee women’s rights, and future peace agreements”.

In July 2020, a mediation between the civilian and military parties successfully led to the signing of a [Constitutional Declaration](#), which included a Rights and Freedoms Charter. Furthermore, the process led to establishing the “Sovereign Council” and forming a Civilian-Led Government of Transition. However, these improvements were shadowed by continued attacks against civilians and displaced persons, notably in Darfur.

On 16 July 2020, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights [announced](#) that a fully mandated OHCHR office with field presences in Darfur, Blue Nile, Southern Kordofan and East Sudan was operational. This office results from a Host Country Agreement [signed](#) between the High commissioner and the Government of Sudan on 25 September 2019. However, the financial situation of the UN due to by the liquidity crisis, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to significant [delays](#) in the opening of the field offices.

A persistent lack of protection for fundamental rights and freedoms

This year has seen improvement with the repeal of several laws restricting individual liberties and the creation of a “Legal Reform Commission” in charge of reviewing domestic laws to ensure their compatibility with the country’s human rights obligations.

However, new laws were adopted that restrict fundamental freedoms. For example, the new Cybercrime law, passed in 2020, increased prison sentences for acts of free speech online, notably under the pretext of “national security”. This new law is all the more concerning that online platforms for expression and criticism were key in expressing grievances during the revolution.

On 31 May 2020, the Joint Council approved a new Law for “Protecting Doctors, Medical Personnel and Health Facilities” presented as a tool to protect health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, however, the law [provides](#) for harsh and disproportionate sentences that can restrict free speech by stating that the publication of “misleading or incorrect information” that could affect medical workers was punishable with up to 10 years imprisonment. Ironically, this new law was used by military intelligence to harass medical staff who

publicly reported the dire conditions in which they were forced to work.

Furthermore, as reforms slowed down and the government failed to mitigate the impact of the economic crisis coupled with the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable, protests erupted in the country in 2020. As a result, security forces have resumed past practices dispersing gatherings with violence, including with the use of lethal force.

A need for effective measures to end impunity of security forces

The Host Country Agreement [signed](#) between the High commissioner and the Government of Sudan on 25 September 2019 provides the office with a mandate focused on six critical areas that the transitional government approved. These keys areas include “sustainable development through human rights », the « strengthening » of the rule of law and accountability, the enhancement of public participation and protection of civic space, enhancing equality and countering discrimination, preventing violations and strengthening protection of human rights and finally increasing the implementation of international human rights mechanism’s outcomes.

The multiples cases of arrests and enforced disappearances committed by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) against journalists,

human rights defenders and political activists documented by Alkarama and other civil society actors remain unpunished to date. Alkarama highlighted the need to repeal laws, including the National Security Act (NSA), enabling NISS to take complete charge of law enforcement operation without being subjected to effective judicial oversight. In a [previous report](#), the UN expert on human rights in Sudan stated that from the start of the protests in December 2018, a large number of arrests and detentions had been carried out by the NISS. After adopting the new constitution, articles 50, 51 and 52 of the NSA, which set up an immunity system for security agents, was repealed, allowing for the prosecution of agents for abuses committed during their work.

Significant improvements still need to be carried out today in those critical areas to fulfil popular demands for freedom, peace and justice. This need is particularly stringent for the country’s security sector marked by a long-established regime of impunity and abuses. Therefore, a significant concern expressed by Alkarama is the absolute need for a meaningful security sector reform process. One question raised by such a process is one of the disarmaments, accountability and potential integration of RSF forces and other militia into regular military and security forces. To date, only three out of the five leaders of those charged by the International Criminal have been

detained and are under investigation, including the former president.

Focus: Waiting for accountability for the Khartoum massacre victims of June 2019

Much remains to be achieved to ensure accountability for the June 2019 massacre of peaceful protesters carried on by security forces, especially by the “Rapid Support Forces (RSF)”. Between 3 and 11 June 2019, members of the RSF [dispersed](#) a peaceful sit-in held near the army headquarters in Khartoum. On 3 June, the forces started attacking demonstrators and firing live ammunition into the crowd, causing at least 120 deaths. In addition, they committed gang rape and other sexual violence and humiliating treatment against women demonstrators. Besides, numerous demonstrators were subjected to [enforced disappearance](#) during the repression. Lifeless bodies of demonstrators were found in the Nile in the days following 3 June, after they were thrown there by security forces.

Accountability for crimes committed by this paramilitary force is crucial given the amount and severity of their crimes, which amount to crimes against humanity. From mass executions to torture, the troops under the Command of General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, generally referred to as Hemetti, abuses were committed against both civilians in Darfur and demonstrators throughout the revolution.

A national independent investigation committee was established with the mandate to investigate the abuses committed on 3 June 2019 and other crimes committed during the revolution. However, to date, no trial has started yet to prosecute members of the RSF and other militias who have engaged in these forms of brutal violence, including General Hemetti.

One year after the massacre, on 3 June 2020, several [UN experts called](#) for a genuine process of accountability and justice for the peaceful protesters killed in Khartoum, considering such a process as “essential for the country to progress to a peaceful democracy”. Furthermore, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association called the investigation a “test case for Sudan” and its transition to a peaceful and democratic society.

Lastly, as highlighted by UN experts, particular attention needs to be paid to women who were at the frontline of the peaceful protests and the first and foremost victims of abuses, including sexual violence. [According](#) to a local civil society group, at least 5000 women vendors had been victims of sexual violence and other abuses by members of the RSF, security forces and the army.



Since the beginning of the war to date, about five million children were born in Syria and one million were born as refugees in neighboring countries.

SYRIA

Our concerns

Serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and devastating effects of the armed conflict on the civilian population, particularly children;

Systematic and widespread practice of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions in detention;

Impunity of perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity;

Arbitrary detention in inhuman conditions of tens of thousands of civilians in camps, including families of ISIL members.

As the conflict in Syria reaches a decade, the Syrian population keeps facing increasing suffering and abuses from the warring parties. However, the complete impunity and the indifference of the international community, [denounced](#) by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, still marks this conflict.

The conflict has worsened with the greater active [involvement](#) of foreign States on all sides, through direct use of force on the ground and the provision of material and financial support to non-State armed groups. In addition, to the habitual violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed by governmental and non-governmental forces, civilians are increasingly subjected to violations by foreign troops.

Furthermore, amidst the humanitarian crisis induced by the war, parties to the conflict continue to use denial of protection and access to humanitarian assistance to punish and retaliate against civilians.

In June 2020, the United States government passed the “Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act”, which set up unprecedentedly wide-ranging sanctions against Syria. Sanctions are applicable against any foreigner, employees of foreign companies and humanitarian operators helping in the country’s reconstruction. In December 2020, Alena Douhan, [UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures](#), called on the United States to remove these sanctions highlighting their deterrent effect on the rebuilding of Syria’s civilian infrastructure.

Severe violations of humanitarian law and the devastating effects of the armed conflict on the civilian population

Despite repeated [calls](#) from UN High Commissioner and Secretary-General to « give peace a chance », the situation has seen no improvement, with dire consequences on the future of a whole population. This year, the documentation of the condition of Syrian children has shed light on the disaster faced and lived by an entire generation. According to [UN figures](#), as per January 2020, about five million

children needed humanitarian assistance while half a million of them did not have access to aid due to obstacles posed by the parties to the conflict.

Civilians are continuously [denied](#) protection and unhindered humanitarian assistance from all parties to the conflict either through attacks against civilian facilities and humanitarian actors or through their attempt to control the deliverance of services to the population as a war strategy.

Aerial bombardments that fail to distinguish between civilian and military targets created a dire humanitarian situation, particularly in the southern region of Idlib. During the winter of 2020, almost the entire population of Idlib had to flee in extremely harsh weather conditions. In this context, this massive displacement of civilians turned into a [humanitarian catastrophe](#) with stranded populations left without shelter, leading to the death of children by freezing.

Attacks on civilians kept increasing this year, particularly in the northwestern part of the country. On 4 February 2020, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [said](#) it was alarmed by the situation and called all parties to de-escalate hostilities. The aerial bombing of health facilities in the context of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#)

worsened an already catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Just in the first weeks of January 2020, at least two attacks have destroyed schools, markets, and medical facilities, causing casualties among the most vulnerable populations.

Just for the first two months of 2020, the UN Human Rights Office had [recorded](#) the deaths of 298 civilians in Idlib and Aleppo during strikes that targeted medical and educational facilities. The Syrian Government and its allies were found responsible for most of those deaths.

Systematic and widespread violations of the rights to life, security and liberty by all parties to the conflict

The absence of any progress in respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms have significantly impacted internally displaced people, at risk of punishment and reprisals from the authorities. Thus, in addition to the continuing bombings against civilian targets and the humanitarian crisis coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, the population still faces ever-increasing insecurity throughout the country.

Conditions of detention throughout the country have put detainees at an exceptionally high risk of infections and complications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the health crisis,

many deaths resulting from torture were [reported](#) by NGOs, including Alkarama in the Sednaya prison.

On 18 September 2020, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet [warned](#) that regions under the control of Turkish forces and Turkish-affiliated armed groups in the north of the country were plagued by violence and criminality. In its [report](#) covering the first half of 2020, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria concluded that “enforced disappearance and deprivation of liberty continue to be instrumentalised by almost all parties to instil fear and suppress dissent among the civilian population or simply as extortion for financial gain ». Violations against the right to liberty and security were [committed](#) by Government forces, the Syrian National Army (SNA), the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), [Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham](#) and other parties to the conflict. Furthermore, the Commission [concluded](#) that violations committed by Government forces, including enforced disappearance, torture, sexual violence and deaths in custody, to such an extent that it amounted to crimes against humanity. In addition to detentions, killings, beatings and abductions, a variety of armed groups consistently committed looting and seizure of civilian homes in a widespread fashion.

Civilian populations living in zones recently reconquered by government

forces are particularly vulnerable to arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances and detentions. Government forces routinely use arbitrary arrests and detention against family members of perceived or actual political opponents as a mean of suppressing dissent.

In the last remaining areas taken back from ISIL, individuals perceived or suspected to be linked to the group were [arrested](#) and taken to displacement camps or transferred to detention centres controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDS). UN figures suggest that at least 11,000 men, including 1,000 foreigners from 50 different countries, are still detained under the control of the SDS. Among them, boys as young as nine years old are held incommunicado, in inhumane conditions and denied adequate access to food or water.

In the meantime, families of foreign ISIL fighters, including their children, remain stuck in indefinite detention across different camps. For example, in the Hawl camp, close to the Syria-Iraq border, interned women and children are subjected to multiple restrictions on their movements as they remain at the complete mercy of the (SDS). Using their unconstrained control over these families, SDS members have repeatedly denied them access to medical care and forbid parents to accompany their children to hospitals.

**Focus: “Robbed of their childhood”
- the disastrous impact of a
decade-long conflict on an entire
generation of Syrian children**

On 16 January 2020, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria published a significant [report](#) on children’s rights since the beginning of the war. Based on research and interviews with children and parents affected by the violence, the report concludes that through forced enrollment and repeated human rights abuses committed against them by all parties to the conflict, Syrian children “have been robbed of their childhood”.

From the early days of the uprising, children have been victimised by government forces and other parties to the conflict. Girls have been particularly affected by sexual violence, leading to their confinement and removal from schools. Boys, especially those aged 12 and above, were routinely subjected to arbitrary detention by government forces on the one hand and forcibly recruited as combatants by non-state armed groups on the other hand. In addition, forced conscription and recruitment into the army and other warring parties have caused an unprecedentedly high illiteracy rate among young boys.

Hostilities have put millions of children in situations of prolonged

displacement, isolated from their families and denied adequate access to health care and education. It is estimated that at least two million six hundred thousand girls and boys have been displaced by the conflict, impacting their mental and physical well-being.

As a result, Syrian children have been “killed, maimed, injured and orphaned, bearing the brunt of violence perpetrated by warring parties”. Moreover, the brutality and scale of the violations committed against them have led to post-traumatic stress disorders in generations to come.



The head of the Truth and Dignity Commission, Siham Bensedrine, during her meeting with the Speaker of Parliament, Rashid Ghannouchi, after the release of the commission's final report on 24/06/2020.

TUNISIA

Our concerns

A permanent state of emergency facilitating violations of the fundamental rights and guarantees of individuals;

Inadequate protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in domestic legislation and persistence of past practices;

Impunity of perpetrators of past violations documented by the Truth and Dignity Commission and absence of follow-up measures on its recommendations.

In March 2020, Tunisia was [reviewed](#) by the Human Rights Committee on progress made since its [last review](#) in 2009. In their statement made on 4 mars 2020, the UN human rights experts have highlighted that while Tunisia had made progress in the creation of institutions for the promotion of human rights and in the training of their magistrates, yet concerns remain on the lack of independence of the judiciary and the prolonged state of emergency in the fight against terrorism.

Among the main points [raised](#) by the Human Rights Committee members while examining the sixth report submitted by Tunisia were the points raised by Alkarama concerning the restriction of rights and freedoms under the state of emergency and the deplorable conditions of detention in

the country. Furthermore, experts asked why the Truth and Dignity Commission's mandate was not renewed in March 2018, despite the large amount of work in transitional justice that it still had to carry out.

Lack of protection for fundamental rights and freedom in the context of a perpetual state of emergency

The state of emergency, which came into force on 24 November 2015, has been extended several times and remains applicable today. Under the state of emergency, the Ministry of the Interior has broad powers, including the right to restrict fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of assembly and movement, by imposing a general ban on gatherings if the executive finds them to pose a "disturbance of public security".

Furthermore, the executive can decide to place an individual under house arrest for mere suspicions of a "threat to public security and order" without effective judicial control. This possibility, which was inherited from the former legal regime, has been highlighted by Alkarama in its [reports](#) for its blatant disregard for proportionality and necessity criteria. Last but not least, the imposition of the state of emergency [leaves little room](#) for the legislative power to control executive decisions to renew it. Coupled with a large and vague

definition of what constitutes an "emergency", the current law on the state of emergency adopted back in [2019](#) does not offer any significant improvement on the former legal framework.

During the adoption of its observations on Tunisia in March 2020, the Human Rights Committee also raised the issue of the independence of the judiciary, in particular the appointment, career management and dismissal of judges of the Constitutional Court as well as judges and prosecutors. This issue is even more crucial with the systematic renewal of the state of emergency, raising fundamental questions about protecting the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. In fact, according to the Tunisian representation, "all the objectives of the Covenant have not yet been achieved", and « torture, although prohibited, is still practised in prisons ». These shortcomings also stem from a return of past practices within the country's security apparatus, resulting in a multiplication of arbitrary arrests, torture and police violence, particularly in the context of the fight against terrorism and in the management of the state of emergency.

Currently, there are [21,634 prisoners](#) in the country, more than half of whom are awaiting trial. This tendency to almost systematically impose lengthy periods of pre-trial detention contributes significantly to prison

overcrowding. In fact, the country's prisons are often filled to twice their initial capacity, thus leading to inhuman and cruel detention conditions. The statistics [quoted](#) by the United Nations show an average of 34 deaths per year in Tunisian prisons.

Lack of effective prosecution and reparation measures for past violations

In its [conclusions](#) of April 2020, the Human Rights Committee welcomed the transitional justice mechanisms put in place after the revolution, including the [Truth and Dignity Commission](#) (TDC). However, this institution, responsible for hearing cases of severe human rights violations committed between 1955 and 2013, has had its limitations, which Alkarama had previously [raised](#) with the UN mechanisms.

Last year, the [TDC published](#) the outcome of its work consisting of an eight volumes long report including information received by victims of abuses, their analysis and recommendations concerning accountability measures. The report was issued after four years during which the TDC had to compose with a narrow mandate and insufficient time to cover about 60 years of violations. Moreover, the limited resources available to it have not allowed it to fulfil its mandate in the fight against corruption.

To date, the final report of the Forum has yet to be published in the Tunisian Official Gazette, and the proposed action plan to implement the recommendations made therein remains to be adopted. In addition, the parliamentary commission expected to follow up on the work of this body was not established, thereby stalling the transitional justice process. As a result, the number and nature of reparation measures granted to victims of serious human rights violations covered by the Transitional Justice Act 2013 remain unknown.

As an indication of the failure to ensure effective remedies for victims, a negligible number of cases have been transferred by the Instance to the specialised criminal chambers. Moreover, the few trials initiated yielded no results. Significant delays hampered them due to judges' turnover and the refusal of defendants and witnesses to appear in court. Moreover, justice was obstructed by a continued lack of cooperation from the police who refused to carry out court orders against defendants, further reflecting the necessary steps that the country must take concerning the democratic governance of its security services.



The United Arab Emirates and Israel sign a “peace agreement” sponsored by the United States, establishing the process of normalisation with Israel on 13/08/2020.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Our concerns

Repression of freedom of opinion and expression and reprisals against human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents;

Continued and systematic practice of torture to extract confessions during investigations and as a form of punishment;

Exportation of the systematic practice of enforced disappearance and torture to UAE-controlled theatres of operation in Yemen.

Despite announcing the withdrawal of most of its ground troops from Yemen in 2019, the UAE **remained part of the Saudi-led military operations**, and continued to maintain a presence in Aden and southern governorates. Mercenaries and militias supported by the UAE have repeatedly **committed grave abuses** over the past years.

On 13 August 2020, the UAE and Israel announced that they had agreed to a full normalisation of their relations. Among other things, the agreement paved the way for an **enhanced cooperation** on cybersecurity and surveillance technology and sparking **concerns** it could lead to increased repression domestically and regionally.

The situation regarding fundamental rights and civil liberties in the UAE has

deteriorated further. Lawyers, teachers, human rights defenders, and anyone who criticizes the authorities are systematically prosecuted for "undermining national security". All peaceful activists who had been arrested and sentenced in recent years by special courts remain imprisoned, with no prospect of release, despite numerous calls to this effect from various UN bodies.

Critics of the government and human rights defenders in the UAE have always been subject to threats and reprisals. In recent years, Alkarama has documented the cases of numerous activists who have been abducted, tortured and arbitrarily arrested by the UAE security services.

Repression of civil society and violations of fundamental freedoms

The UAE keeps ranking amongst the worst countries in the world in terms of freedom of expression according to the [Reporters Without Borders](#) press freedom index, which highlights that the country has become particularly proficient in online surveillance and punishment.

The crackdown on online criticism targets all segments of civil society from political activists of all leanings to human rights activists. Systematic arrests and prosecution under the anti-terrorism law and/or other laws criminalising free expression, coupled

with the lack of respect for fundamental legal safeguards in detention, have created a breeding ground for the practice of enforced disappearance and torture. The climate of complete impunity in which these violations are committed shows that such practices cannot but be approved by the State's highest levels.

Prisoners of conscience face serious violations of their fundamental rights in detention including torture, wilful medical negligence and denial of communication with the outside world. As a striking example, Alkarama conveyed in June 2020 the [plea](#) of Abdul-Razzaq Al-Siddiq's daughter who denounced the fact that she had not heard her father's voice for more than eight years. Al-Siddiq is one of 94 detained political opponents whose case has been [followed by Alkarama](#) for years. He is arbitrarily detained since April 2012 after an unfair trial before the State Security Court which imposed a [15-year long sentence](#) on him as a punishment for his dissenting opinions.

The "UAE 94" refers to 94 individuals sentenced to up to 15 years imprisonment for allegations of violations of Article 180 of the Penal Code that prohibits the "creation, organization or management of an organisation aimed at overthrowing the state's system of government". Among the detainees are prominent human rights lawyers Muhammad al-Roken, [recipient of the 2012 Alkarama Award](#)

for Human Rights Defenders, and Muhammad al-Mansoori, Judge Muhammad Sa'id al-Abdouli and university professor Hadeef al-Owais.

On 2 July 2020, [Alkarama recalled](#) that seven years have passed since their unfair trial highlighting the fabricated charges against them, such as having “links to a secret organisation” or “attempting to overthrow the regime”, while in reality they had simply exercised their right to express their opinion and formulated demands for democratic reforms. Following the submission of a complaint by Alkarama, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) concluded in its [Opinion No. 60/2013](#) that the “lack of legal justification for the arrest and detention of the above-mentioned persons, together with the vagueness of the charges subsequently laid against them, renders the deprivation of liberty in the present case arbitrary”.

In the same vein, the situation of Ahmed Mansoor, remains emblematic of the ruthless repression against human rights defenders and peaceful activists by the Emirati authorities. [Alkarama submitted an urgent appeal](#) highlighting the moral and criminal responsibility of the UAE authorities for his life and his physical and moral integrity. Alkarama has been following the case of human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor, [and on 22 March 2017, filed a complaint](#) with the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#) at the United

Nations, requesting his intervention on this issue. On October 4, 2018, the [European Parliament adopted a resolution](#) calling for the [immediate release of Mr. Ahmed Mansoor](#), who was sentenced in March 2018 to 10 years in prison on charges directly related to his right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Torture and denial of fundamental rights in detention

On March 17, [United Nations human rights experts called on UAE authorities](#) to urgently reform “degrading conditions of detention” in UAE prisons. Despite international calls to do so, the UAE refused to allow independent international monitors to enter the country and visit prison and detention facilities.

The urgent call followed allegations regarding the attempted suicide of Ms Maryam Suliman Al-Balushi, due to inhumane conditions of detention in the infamous Al-Wathba prison of Abu Dhabi. Ms Al-Balushi, who was accused of “financing terrorism” because of her donation to a Syrian family, was tried and convicted using evidence obtained under torture in 2016 and has since been serving her arbitrary sentence. These allegations of severe suffering of detainees were even more alarming in light of the death Ms. Alia Abdunour who was detained under similar charges. The humanitarian activist died in detention in [May 2019](#) due to a deliberate denial of medical care.

Focus: Disabling dissent and the slow death in detention of dissenting religious scholars

Despite having announced their disengagement from the Yemeni conflict in 2019, Alkarama as well as independent UN experts have documented gross violations to human rights and humanitarian law by the UAE and its affiliated forces in 2020.

Violations were committed both against Yemenis in the UAE or against civilians in Yemen. For example, in October 2020, several [United Nations human rights](#) experts condemned the United Arab Emirates for the arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of Yemeni detainees returning from Guantanamo Bay, expressing concern about the risk of forced return to their country, Yemen, in light of the continuing armed conflict and humanitarian crisis.

For years, the issue of [Guantanamo detainees](#) has remained Alkarama's main concern through various support and [advocacy mechanisms](#).

On 18 November 2020, [Alkarama wrote](#) to the [Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances](#), asking it to intervene on behalf of Yemeni politician, Abdul Qadir Al-Badiji (Al-Shaibani), who has been missing since his arrest on 30 October 2020 in the southern Yemeni city of Aden, by members of the UAE-backed Security Belt forces.

In 2020, the UAE announced it would continue its air operations in Yemen and keep the 90,000 UAE-backed Yemeni fighters on the ground. As in its previous reports, [the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen](#) stated that torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment were still widespread in places of detention, including detention facilities under UAE control. Sexual Violence committed by UAE-backed Security Belt Forces against Yemeni civilian Ethiopian migrants persisted in complete impunity. Importantly, the Group declared having identified that these acts of sexual violence bared similar patterns and were committed repeatedly by the UAE-backed Security Belt forces. These elements give to these crimes the gravity of war crimes and crimes against humanity engaging the individual criminal responsibility of both militiamen and UAE official controlling them.



A picture of a mother and her child displaced by the war in Yemen in a camp for internally displaced people in Al Dhale'e (Source: OCHA).

YEMEN

Our concerns

Gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties to the conflict, including foreign actors;

Unprecedented humanitarian crisis, aggravated by the blockade imposed by the Saudi coalition and by the restrictions and diversion of humanitarian aid by the Houthi forces;

Continued, systematic and widespread practice of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture by all parties;

Impunity of perpetrators of human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The country's humanitarian and human rights situation has continued to deteriorate significantly this year due to severe and systematic violations committed by all parties to the conflict. Since 2015, the war has left at least 9,821 civilians injured and 8,759 dead, with 22,879 coalition strikes counted to date, according to the [Yemeni Data Project](#). Moreover, amid a situation considered the largest humanitarian crisis globally, US drone operations kept ongoing, along with US-UAE joint raids against suspected Al-Qaeda members.

On 3 December 2020, the UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen (GEE) presented its [third report](#) to the UN Security Council, highlighting that the situation in the country has [reached](#) a "surreal and absurd dimension".

Furthermore, the experts underlined the complete absence of respect for international law and human life displayed by parties to the conflict, leaving no safe place for civilians.

Violations committed by all parties occur both in and outside conflict zones, particularly in detention centres under the command of the different parties to the conflict. As [highlighted](#) by experts in September 2020, documented violations include extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, unfair trials, and gender-based violence, including sexual violence, torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. All parties to the conflict are responsible for such violations, including the Yemeni government, the Houthis, the Southern Transitional Council, and members of the coalition – led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Violations of the right to liberty and enforced disappearances committed by all parties to the conflict

In 2020, Alkarama continued to submit urgent appeals on behalf of individuals subjected to arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance committed by all sides of the conflict. Activists, human rights defenders and journalist are particularly at risk of violations from all parties to the war. Often, violations of the right to liberty take the form of

long periods of enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention in dire conditions.

According to recent UN figures, just against journalists alone, at least 357 human rights violations and abuses, including 28 killings, two enforced disappearances, one abduction, 45 assaults, as well as 184 arbitrary arrests and detentions, have been [documented](#) since the beginning of the conflict. In August 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, [said](#) that those who report « on the atrocities committed during the armed conflict and the accompanying pain and suffering endured by civilians are themselves being targeted ».

On 11 April 2020, ten journalists were prosecuted by the de facto Houthi-controlled Specialised Criminal Court in Sana'a on [charges](#) of “publishing and writing news, statements, false and malicious rumours and propaganda with the intent to weaken the defence of the homeland, weaken the morale of the Yemeni people, sabotage public security, spread terror among people and harm the country’s interest”. The court sentenced four of them to the death penalty and six others to lengthy prison sentences, which triggered a public [condemnation](#) from the OHCHR.

The journalists’ trial took place after five years of arbitrary detention during which they were denied family visits,

access to their lawyer and healthcare. At the time of their arrest by Houthi forces in September 2015, [Alkarama had sent an urgent appeal](#) to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. They were kidnapped by Houthi gunmen from Sana'a's Dream Castle Hotel on 9 June 2015 and taken to an unknown destination. The victims later reappeared in a Houthi controlled prison, and Alkarama had expressed its concern that their kidnapping resulted from the journalists' activities in documenting human rights violations.

Later, on 3 September 2015, Alkarama notified the [United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#), as evidence showed that the journalists were transferred between different detention sites and bore visible traces of torture. Finally, on 14 April 2020, Alkarama denounced the sentencing of the journalists, recalling the conditions of their arrests and the suffering they were subjected to during these years of incommunicado detention. Very few journalists were released after their unlawful detention. On 27 April 2020, Alkarama announced the [release](#) by Houthi forces of Yemeni journalist Salah al-Qaidi after years of arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment by the Political Security in their Sana'a prison. The journalist was abducted by armed men from Ali Saleh and the Houthi coalition forces in August 2015, who took him to an unknown location and subjected him to torture and ill-treatment.

On 29 October 2015, [Alkarama sent an urgent appeal](#) to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances regarding his abduction.

On 16 October 2020, [Alkarama welcomed](#) the release of five journalists detained in the prisons of the Houthi group, Ansar Allah, on 15 October 2020. They were released in Sanaa as part of an agreement to exchange prisoners and kidnappers concluded under the auspices of the [United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross](#) between the Houthi group and the recognised Yemeni government and Saudi Arabia. The agreement concerned 1081 prisoners while many journalists and other political activists remain in detention.

On 18 November 2020, Alkarama wrote to the [Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances](#), asking it to intervene on behalf of 65 years old Yemeni preacher and humanitarian actor Abdul Qadir Al-Badiji (Al-Shaibani), abducted on 30 October in the southern Yemeni city of Aden. He was kidnapped as a form of reprisals by members of the UAE-backed Security Belt forces that controlled the town. According to his family, on 30 October, masked shooters, arrived in two cars and kidnapped Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Shaibani after firing into the air to terrorise his family.

Violations of humanitarian law in the context of the armed conflict and impunity of perpetrators

In 2020, violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) continued to be perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, causing a large number of civilian casualties. These gross violations of international humanitarian law may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

On 6 April 2020, the UN High Commissioner [condemned](#) the shelling of the Central Prison in Taiz by Houthi forces hitting the women's section of the prison. The attack resulted in the death of at least five women and a child and caused severe injuries to at least 11 other victims. The attack was not justified by any security reasons and did not host any military personnel, which constitutes a war crime.

On 29 September 2020, the [UN Panel of Eminent International Experts on Yemen](#) reported having gathered enough [reasonable evidence](#) proving that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the Houthis, the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council have committed war crimes and other international violations in Yemen.

Violations reported included the illegal airstrikes and indiscriminate attacks against civilians using mortar shelling, the recruitment and use of child

soldiers, and the unlawful killings at checkpoints. According to [UN figures](#), at least 112000 people were killed in the Yemen war, including 12000 civilians. In addition, since the beginning of the conflict, a whole generation of Yemeni children has been exposed to immeasurable harm through recruitment, abuse, and deprivation of education. The experts confirmed that at least 259 children were recruited and used in hostilities by several parties from July 2019 to June 2020.

The report [highlighted](#) the complete impunity in which these violations were being committed, urging the UN Security Council to ensure accountability before the International Criminal Court.

