



PRESIDENTIAL  
ELECTION 2020: MIDDLE  
EAST & NORTH AFRICA



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# EGYPT

## THE ISSUE:

Following an outbreak on Sept. 20, 2019, of the largest street protests in Egypt since 2011, President Sisi's government launched the most reprisals of his tenure. Independent organizations trusted by Amnesty International have totaled the number of arrests at more than 3,000 during the last three months of 2019. Amnesty International believes the government may have been emboldened in its response following approval of constitutional amendments this spring that showed a "disregard for human rights" and embedded in the constitution the use of military courts to try civilians and other notorious judicial practices. The sweeping arrests included hundreds of peaceful protesters as well as carrying out more targeted arbitrary arrests of human rights lawyers, journalists, political activists and politicians. Those arrested included reporters for the last independent newspapers in the country. Government critics who had previously been arrested were re-arrested despite not being anywhere near the protests. More than 111 children were arrested.

Nearly all of those arrested have been charged with being "terrorists" and being members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood and/or disparaging Egypt in public forums. Among those accused of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood was a Christian Copt leader. Among those accused of disparaging Egypt on social media was one person who is illiterate.

## THE HUMAN COST

Ibrahim Ezz El-Din. Young researcher Ibrahim Ezz El-Din was forcibly disappeared for 167 days. He is currently in prison, where he is weak and frail. He says he was tortured during his detention.

26-year-old Ibrahim has been documenting forced evictions and calling for safe and affordable housing for all Egyptians.

On June 11, 2019, plain clothed police took Ibrahim from the street near his home in Cairo. His family and lawyers enquired about him at the police station, but the authorities denied that he is in their custody and denied that he was detained at all. 167 days later, on 26 November 2019, Ibrahim was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution, where he said he was tortured during his degrading time in detention.

[Ibrahim's arrest is part of a broader government crackdown in Egypt, where anyone who speaks up against the government is at risk of being locked up without a fair trial.](#) Activists, journalists, politicians, football fans, and artists have all been arrested or disappeared. They are branded as "terrorists" and "criminals" by the media, simply for peacefully expressing their opinions.

## TALKING POINTS:

- Egypt's security forces continue to kill protesters with total impunity employing the same brutal tactics used in Hosni Mubarak's last days in power.
- The Egyptian military used US-imported, banned cluster bombs in an ongoing military operation in Sinai, committing war crimes.
- Egyptian authorities have arrested over 40,000 critics, satirists, current and former human rights and labor rights activists, journalists, presidential candidates and sexual harassment survivors, turning Egypt into one large open air prison for critics.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The U.S. government should ban all arms sales to Egypt along with the transfer of tear gas, small arms, ammunition and other repressive equipment to the Egyptian military and security forces.
- The U.S. government should demand the Egyptian government end attacks on peaceful protestors, release all prisoners of conscience and ensure all courts follow international standards for fair trials.

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# ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

## THE ISSUE:

The international community has long recognized that Israeli settlements are illegal under international law. By continuing with its discriminatory settlement policy, Israel is brazenly breaching multiple UN Security Council Resolutions. In 2019, Israel continued to expand illegal settlements and related infrastructure in the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem.

Israel's policies of settling Israeli civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, wantonly destroying property, and forcibly transferring Palestinians living under occupation violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and are war crimes listed in the statute of the International Criminal Court. Since 1967, Israel has forcibly evicted and displaced entire communities and demolished more than 50,000 Palestinian homes and structures.

Building of settlements in the West Bank—including in East Jerusalem—and transferring the occupying power's civilians into the occupied territory is prohibited without exception. Settlements entirely depend on the large-scale appropriation and destruction of Palestinian private and state property. They are created with the sole purpose of permanently establishing Jewish Israelis on occupied land.

As has been well-documented for many years by the UN, Amnesty International, and other NGOs, Israel's settlement policy is one of the main driving forces behind the mass human rights violations resulting from the occupation, including, but not limited to, violations of the right to life, liberty, security of the person and equal treatment before the law.

## THE HUMAN COST:

The Palestinian community of Khan al-Ahmar is surrounded by several illegal Israeli settlements, including Kfar Adumim.

The village is now facing demolition and the forcible transfer of its residents to make way for further illegal settlements. The demolition order includes the village's school, which provides education for some 170 children. If implemented, these actions will constitute war crimes as well as violations of the human rights to adequate housing, education, and non-interference with family and home.

The Israeli authorities have offered the villagers a choice of two possible destinations: a site near the former Jerusalem municipal garbage dump near the village of Abu Dis, or a site in the vicinity of a sewage plant close to the city of Jericho.

After nearly a decade of trying to fight the injustice of this demolition, the residents of Khan al-Ahmar now approach the devastating day when they will see their home of generations torn down before their eyes. This act is not only heartless and discriminatory; it is illegal. The forcible transfer of the Khan al-Ahmar community amounts to a war crime. Israel must end its policy of destroying Palestinians' homes and livelihoods to make way for settlements.

## TALKING POINTS:

In November 2019, the U.S. government announced that it would not consider Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal

under international law. The U.S. has given Israel the green light to continue with its settlement building and expansion policy, which has been a hallmark of Israel's brutal five-decade long occupation. The United States must acknowledge the settlements as illegal and actively cooperate to bring them to an end.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Acknowledge that the settlements breach international law and should actively cooperate to bring this situation to an end.
- Take regulatory action to ban any companies domiciled or headquartered in the United States from conducting business in or with settlements or settlement actors.
- Support the work of the UN Database of Business Activities in the Israeli Settlements and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in compiling and regularly updating the UN Database, a necessary tool to promote greater transparency, accountability, and respect for international law by both states and businesses.

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# LEBANON

## THE ISSUE:

A wave of nationwide protests erupted October 17, 2019, against a ruling class accused of steering Lebanon towards its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 armed conflict. The Lawyers' Committee to Defend Protesters in Lebanon estimates that security forces have arrested as many as 100 people across the country, including five children (under the age of 18) since early 2020. The Lebanese Red Cross reported that 47 people were injured on Wednesday, January 15, 2019, 37 of whom were taken to nearby hospitals. The recent escalation took place as protesters called for a "week of rage" in reaction to the spiraling economic crisis and what they characterize as the authorities' failure to take any meaningful measures to address this crisis.

Mass protests swept across Lebanon in late 2019 and early 2020 shortly after the government announced new tax measures on October 17, 2019. Tens of thousands of peaceful protesters from different religious and class sectors of society assembled in cities across the country accusing the political leadership of corruption and calling for social and economic reforms.

Underlying frustration with the government and the political elite had been accumulating for years. Public anger has escalated in recent years over electricity and water shortages, as well as the government's failure to manage the country's waste and economic crises.

While protesters remain overwhelmingly peaceful, Amnesty International documented a range of human rights violations by the Lebanese authorities across different cities where protests have been taking place.

## TALKING POINTS:

- Failure to protect peaceful protesters who come under attack from supporters of Amal and Hizbullah, or who are mistreated at the hands of security services, is a human rights violation.
- Excessive use of force by the Lebanese army and security forces, including the use of live ammunition against protesters along with the use of tear gas and rubber bullets, has caused hundreds of injuries and one death. This response, sanctioned by the government, must end.
- Violations during arrest and unlawful detention of peaceful protestors in different areas of Lebanon must end immediately.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The U.S. government must pressure the Lebanese government to end torture, end unlawful detention, and respect the human rights of individuals, including by:
  - ◊ Ensuring that the army and security forces end the use of unnecessary or excessive force against peaceful protesters and protect peaceful protesters from intimidation or violent attacks from other groups, and
  - ◊ Ensuring that the judiciary orders an independent and impartial investigation into unlawful use of force.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:



- Amnesty International, 17 January 2020. “The Lebanon Protests Explained.” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/lebanon-protests-explained/>

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# LIBYA

## THE ISSUE:

Since the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA), under the command of General Haftar, attacked the Government of National Accord (GNA) capital of Tripoli in March 2019, there has been a consistent deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian situation in Libya. The worsening crisis and tremendous suffering of people in Libya are compounded by the military stalemate and danger of a return to full-scale civil war.

The crisis in Libya continues to involve systematic and gross human rights violations by State and non-State actors. Those include: killing and injuring civilians through indiscriminate strikes, torture and ill-treatment, rape and other acts of sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detention, forced displacement, enforced disappearances, and other unlawful killings.

Migrants and refugees also continue to face dangers from the conflict. According to Kate Gilmore, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, of the 4,900 migrants detained in inhuman conditions in Libya, 3,500 are held in conflict areas, many in or next to militia compounds or ammunition stores. One in five of these detainees is a child. The Deputy High Commissioner has reported to the Human Rights Council that migrants are being subject to “unimaginable horrors,” describing the reports of sexual violence, torture, and extortion against detained migrants as “the most harrowing accounts I have ever heard.”

## EXTERNAL FACTORS MAINTAIN ILLEGAL FLOW OF ARMS TO LIBYA

Recent fighting in Tripoli has killed and wounded over 100 civilians, including dozens of detained migrants and refugees caught in airstrikes and artillery barrages, and displaced over 100,000 civilians living near the city. Militias on both sides continue to launch indiscriminate strikes, often using inherently inaccurate weapons. Attacks have also been directed against health workers and health facilities. Both sides have shown utter disregard for the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law forbidding such attacks.

Most of the weapons used by the warring parties have been older munitions, likely obtained from pre-2011 stocks. However, both sides have also increasingly deployed new drones equipped with air-launched guided missiles against military and civilian targets. The GNA drones are provided and operated by Turkey, while the LNA uses Chinese drones operated by the United Arab Emirates. The provision, deployment, and use of these weapons constitute a violation of a UN arms embargo that has been in place since 2011.

## THE HUMAN COST:

On July 17, 2019, Libyan parliamentarian and prominent women’s rights defender Siham Sergiwa was abducted from her home in Benghazi by armed gunmen—allegedly associated with the LNA—after publicly criticizing the LNA’s military campaign led by General Haftar to seize Tripoli. There are grave fears that she is at risk of torture and may have been killed.

Dr. Sergiwa is a member of the Libyan Parliament who advocated for women’s rights and criticized General Haftar. She appears to have come under attack as punishment for peacefully expressing her opinions and criticizing the LNA’s offensive on Tripoli.

Since 2014, Libyan women’s rights defenders have routinely been targeted with assassination, attempted killings, abduction, physical assault, and sexual violence, as well as death threats, harassment, and smear campaigns on social media.

## TALKING POINTS:

- According to UN statistics, more than 284 civilians were killed and more than 140,000 displaced as a result of the armed conflict in Libya in 2019.
- Libya has become a battleground where Russia, Egypt, Turkey, the UAE, France, and Italy battle for influence at the cost of human lives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The U.S. should instruct its Permanent Representative to the United Nations work within the United Nations system to demand full compliance with the United Nations Arms Embargo against Libya and strengthen mechanisms for uncovering violations of the embargo.
- The U.S. should dedicate financial and personnel resources to assist efforts undertaken by the Libyan government, the United Nations Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL), and international institutions such as the African Court for Human Rights and the International Criminal Court to establish pathways to restoring the rule of law and an accountability mechanism in Libya and to investigate violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Additional resources should be dedicated to ensuring that the Libyan government, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are able to establish and maintain a migration management and an asylum system throughout Libya that is consistent with international standards, including those pertaining to human rights.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Oral update of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Libya pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25048&LangID=E>
- Libya's Relentless Militia War <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde19/1201/2019/en/>
- Amnesty International Siham Sergiwa Urgent Action <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1912632019ENGLISH.pdf>

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# MIDDLE EAST & COVID-19

## THE ISSUE:

In a region that has been ravaged by wars, economic malaise, and authoritarian leaders that have made it policy to lock up tens of thousands of prisoners of conscience, while displacing millions and creating the largest refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) populations in the world, Amnesty International is profoundly concerned about the spread of COVID-19 inside Middle Eastern prisons, refugee camps, and the IDP population.

Throughout the region, Amnesty International has documented the denial of adequate medical care as a punitive measure against prisoners of conscience. Many prisoners across the region have pleaded with officials to address overcrowded, unhygienic and unsanitary conditions in prisons that put them at greater risk of COVID-19 infections.

### Iran

While the Iranian authorities have released hundreds of people from prison because of COVID-19, thousands of prisoners of conscience remain jailed, including human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and others detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and/or assembly. Amnesty also learned that around 36 prisoners in Iran are feared to have been killed by security forces after the use of lethal force to control protests over COVID-19 safety fears.

### Saudi Arabia

Even after the COVID-19 crisis began worldwide, the Saudi government continued to abuse its counter-terror law by arbitrarily arresting people. The Saudi government is also putting migrants at risk through its efforts to detain and deport them. Saudi Arabia has begun deporting thousands of Ethiopian migrants suspected of having contracted COVID-19.

### Qatar

Amnesty International is concerned that labor camps of migrant workers are crowded, and lacking in adequate water and sanitation, which puts the workers at risk for contracting the virus. Qatar has [illegally expelled](#) some Nepali workers and has begun rounding up many others due to the pandemic.

### Yemen

After 5 years of war, Yemen is suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Only half of the hospitals in the country are functional. Access to clean water and soap is very limited and unavailable to many, and a blockade by the Saudi-UAE led coalition remains in place. The UN humanitarian coordinator said the effect of the virus in Yemen would be "catastrophic" if it spread.

### Syria

Prisoners and detainees, including tens of thousands of people arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared, are at risk of contracting COVID-19 as they are held in unhygienic conditions in locations across the country operated by the country's security forces. Amnesty also shares the concerns of international health officials about the COVID-19 risk among the more than 5 million Syrian refugees now living in neighboring countries, under conditions where most lack suitable access to health care, clean water, in addition to the more

than 10 million internally displaced Syrians scattered across the war torn country.

### **Lebanon**

The Lebanese government must announce a set of immediate measures to protect migrant domestic workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authorities must ensure that migrant domestic workers are protected from exploitative working conditions during lockdown, and that all domestic workers – including the undocumented – have access to healthcare during the pandemic. An estimated 250,000 migrant domestic workers remain trapped under the country's kafala system, putting their rights and lives at risk during the outbreak.

### **Iraq**

Iraq's ability to confront the COVID-19 crisis is severely constrained by a currently non-functioning national government, a health care system decimated by years of war and lack of funding, and a financial crisis caused by the fall in international oil prices. Meanwhile, residents of IDP and refugee camps face elevated risk of contracting COVID-19 unless the government takes effective action to provide healthcare services and assistance for these vulnerable groups.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The White House should:
  - ◇ Demand that governments throughout region immediately and unconditionally release all activists and human rights defenders detained solely for peacefully expressing their views.
  - ◇ Demand that governments throughout MENA cease using the pandemic as pretext for further crackdowns on civil society and the broader population.
  - ◇ Request the USG to provide adequate funding for the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- On Syria, “Vulnerable prisoners should be released to prevent spread of COVID-19” (March 2020), about how the Syrian government holds tens of thousands of people arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared who are at risk of contracting COVID-19. ([available here](#))
- On Iran “Prisoners killed by security forces during COVID-19 pandemic protests” (April 2020), about how 36 prisoners in Iran are believed to have been killed during a protest over COVID-19 safety fears ([available here](#))
- On Bahrain, “Peaceful activists must be released amid COVID-19 pandemic” (April 2020), about a joint statement with Amnesty International and 19 other groups calling for the freedom of imprisoned opposition leaders, activists, and journalists ([available here](#)).
- On Lebanon, “Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon must be protected during COVID-19 pandemic” (April 2020), about how authorities are not doing enough to protect domestic workers from exploitation ([available here](#))

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# NORTH AFRICA & COVID-19

## THE ISSUE:

In a region that gave birth to the Arab Spring and saw governments overthrown in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, the latter descending into chaos and civil war that continues to this day, all coupled with a migrant crisis that shows no signs of ending, Amnesty International is profoundly concerned about the spread of the COVID-19 inside prisons, refugee camps, and migrant detention facilities. Economic malaise, and authoritarian leaders such as President Sisi in Egypt that have made it policy to lock up tens of thousands of prisoners of conscience, have raised fears of a serious and prolonged outbreak.

Throughout the region, Amnesty International has documented the denial of adequate medical care as a punitive measure against prisoners of conscience. Many prisoners and migrants in detention facilities across the region have pleaded with officials to address overcrowded, unhygienic and unsanitary conditions in prisons that put them at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

### **Libya**

Within the context of the worsening humanitarian crisis, the dangers of a widespread COVID-19 outbreak are compounded by the ongoing civil war, which has continued since 2011 despite calls for a humanitarian truce. Recent violations have included continued attacks on medical personnel, hospitals and medical facilities treating COVID 19 patients in Tripoli. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), migrants and refugees are especially vulnerable to the threat of a growing COVID-19 outbreak. Centers for detained asylum seekers are located in areas close to fighting, they are crowded and unsanitary, and detainees already have very limited access to health assistance. The UNHCR in Libya reports that facilitation of humanitarian assistance in Libya, for both ongoing programming and COVID-19 response interventions, is critical to ensure humanitarian organizations can continue to implement life-saving activities.

### **Egypt**

Egyptian business owners have pressured the government to keep private businesses open, but many haven't addressed workers' concerns over their safety and their jobs. In addition to a sinking economy, protests have occurred outside of Egyptian prisons. Amnesty has repeatedly called Egypt the world's largest open-air prison for critics, and concerns remain that the virus outbreak in prisons is worse than the authorities are indicating, and that the country remains unprepared to provide support for Egyptians who may eventually fall ill with COVID-19.

### **Tunisia**

Since a national lockdown was announced, police have arrested at least 1,400 people for violating curfew or confinement measures. Detaining even more people, given the elevated risk of transmission, places their health in jeopardy and can only serve to further increase the current health crisis for everyone.

### **Algeria**

The Algerian authorities are investing time in accelerating prosecutions and trials against activists, journalists and supporters of the Hirak movement, a peaceful protest movement working to bring radical change to the country.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The White House should:
  - ◇ Demand that governments throughout region immediately and unconditionally release all activists, journalists, and human rights defenders detained solely for peacefully expressing their views.
  - ◇ Demand that governments throughout MENA cease using the pandemic as pretext for further crackdowns on civil society and the broader population.
  - ◇ Request the USG to provide adequate funding for the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- On Egypt, “Release prisoners of conscience and other prisoners at risk amid coronavirus outbreak” (March 2020), about how the spread of COVID-19 is putting jailed Egyptian activists and human rights defenders at risk ([available here](#))
- On Libya, “Historic discrimination threatens right to health of minorities in the south amid COVID-19” (April 2020), about how Libya authorities and the militias in control of southern population centers are not doing enough to ensure that marginalized communities are protected during the public health crisis. ([available here](#))
- On Tunisia, “Authorities in Tunisia should reduce number of detainees during COVID-19 crisis” (April 2020), about how numerous detainees remain at risk in pre-trial detention and police custody ([available here](#))
- On Morocco/Western Sahara, “Detained journalists, peaceful protesters at risk of Covid-19, must be urgently released” (April 2020), about how authorities must release those arrested for peacefully protesting or expressing their views amid the spread of COVID-19 in prisons. ([available here](#))
- On Algeria, “Quash conviction and sentence against political leader Karim Tabbou” (March 2020), about how the authorities must release a political leader imprisoned solely for his political expression ([available here](#))

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# SAUDI ARABIA

## THE ISSUE:

The U.S. must end its complicity in the Saudi-UAE led coalitions violations in Yemen, some of which amount to war crimes, by banning arms sales to the coalition.

The discovery of U.S. munitions amongst the rubble of civilian markets, homes, hospitals and hotels has been a constant throughout Yemen's devastating war. Amnesty International has repeatedly found evidence that U.S.-made munitions have been used by coalition forces to target civilians. The evidence is overwhelming; investigations by United Nations bodies, media outlets and numerous other human rights organizations have reached similar conclusions. In one example from August 2017, a U.S. manufactured bomb was dropped in a residential area, leading to 16 civilian deaths in Yemen's largest city, Sana'a. As a result of the airstrike, five-year-old Buthaina was the sole survivor in her family; the bomb killed her parents and five siblings.

Although a host of European countries have suspended arms transfers to the coalition, the U.S. government continues to provide it with military support and arms sales. U.S. manufactured arms have also been diverted into the hands of Huthi and other armed groups fighting in Yemen. U.S. military support has included:

- Mid-air refueling support that facilitated airstrikes, including on civilian infrastructure
- Logistical support and assistance identifying targets for aerial bombardment
- Sale of 30 F-15 fourth-generation fighter jets, 84 combat helicopters, 110 air-to-surface cruise missiles and nearly 20,000 guided bombs.

All warring parties have openly flaunted international law, causing massive civilian casualties. Amnesty International has documented 36 airstrikes across six different governorates by the coalition that appear to have violated international law. These airstrikes have claimed more than 500 civilian lives and appear to have deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, markets, and mosques.



## TALKING POINTS

- In 2015, Saudi Arabia and eight other states - backed by the U.S., U.K., and France - began airstrikes against a rebel group known as the Huthis in Yemen. The fighting has resulted in a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions.
- 22 million Yemenis must rely on humanitarian assistance to survive and half that number are at risk of famine.
- 400,000 children are at risk of starving to death.
- According to the World Health Organization, Yemen is struggling to contain the worst cholera outbreak in the world.
- A blockade of Yemen's ports of entry by the Saudi-U.A.E. led coalition has restricted aid from entering the country, triggering a famine which threatens the lives of 12 million people.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The United States must immediately suspend weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- The President must call on the State Department to produce a report on violations of international law by all actors in the Yemen conflict and a separate report on human rights in Saudi Arabia.

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# SYRIA

## THE ISSUE:

Parties to the armed conflict in Syria committed war crimes and other grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses with impunity. Government and allied forces, including Russia, carried out indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects using aerial and artillery bombing, including with chemical and other internationally banned weapons, killing and injuring hundreds.

Government forces maintained lengthy sieges on densely populated areas, restricting access to humanitarian and medical aid to thousands of civilians. Government forces and foreign governments negotiated local agreements which led to the forced displacement of thousands of civilians following prolonged sieges and unlawful attacks.

Security forces arrested and continued to detain tens of thousands of people, including peaceful activists, humanitarian workers, lawyers, and journalists, subjecting many to enforced disappearances, torture, or other ill-treatment and causing deaths in detention.

Armed opposition groups indiscriminately shelled civilian areas and subjected predominantly civilian areas to prolonged sieges, restricting access to humanitarian and medical aid. The armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS) unlawfully killed and shelled civilians and used them as human shields. US-led coalition forces carried out attacks on IS in which civilians were killed and injured, at times violating international humanitarian law. By the end of the year, the conflict had caused the deaths of more than 400,000 people and displaced more than 11 million people within and outside Syria.

## THE HUMAN COST:

Ali Mahmoud Othman: From the outset of the Syrian uprising in mid-March 2011, the Syrian government has struggled to prevent news of its violent crackdown on the protests from reaching the outside world. In Homs in February 2012, Ali Mahmoud Othman was part of a network of activists who ran the makeshift Homs media center, a temporary house used as a base by citizen journalists and media activists who were posting footage and information online and broadcasting news reports.

Ali Mahmoud Othman was also well-known for helping foreign journalists enter Baba Amr, and for facilitating the movement of foreign journalists in and out of Homs—including journalist Paul Conroy and French reporter Edith Bouvier after they were injured in shelling.

After he disappeared in March 2012, released detainees claimed to have seen him at a Military Intelligence branch in Aleppo and later at the Palestine Branch detention center in Damascus, but his family was never told where he was being held or why until he appeared on Syria state TV in May 2012, where the presenter explained that Ali Mahmoud Othman had been arrested for being a media worker who co-operated with “external powers plotting against Syria.” No one has heard from Ali Mahmoud Othman since the televised interview, and his family remains without any information about his fate and whether he was charged with any offenses.

## TALKING POINTS:

- The failure to renew the mechanism established by UN Resolution 2165 in 2014, which had enabled UN humanitarian agencies to deliver aid across the Turkish border to areas of northern Syria controlled by armed opposition groups, will seriously exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation, especially in Idlib and surrounding areas.

- Civilians paid a very high price for Raqqa's devastating 'liberation' by U.S.-led forces. Amnesty international has detailed the emblematic stories of four civilian families who were brutally impacted by the relentless aerial bombardment. Between them, they lost 90 relatives and neighbors – 39 from a single family – almost all of them killed by Coalition air strikes. They are part of a wider pattern and provide a strong case that many Coalition attacks that killed and injured civilians and destroyed homes and infrastructure violated international humanitarian law.
- The scope of detention of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience by the Assad government remains unchallenged. These prisoners are stripped of political and legal rights and are subject to widespread torture and ill-treatment in detention. At Saydnaya Military Prison, the Syrian authorities organized the killing of thousands of people in their custody. Amnesty International's research shows that the murder, torture, enforced disappearance, and extermination carried out at Saydnaya since 2011 has been perpetrated as part of an attack against the civilian population that has been widespread, as well as systematic, and carried out in furtherance of state policy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The United States should:
  - ◊ Work with the UN Security Council to alleviate humanitarian needs throughout Syria, currently most pressing in the Idlib region.
  - ◊ Remove policies hindering the resettlement of Syrian refugees. In line with UNHCR's recommendations about resettlement of Syrian refugees to relieve pressure on the host countries, the United States should increase the number of Syrians accepted for resettlement.
  - ◊ Publicly acknowledge the loss of civilian lives in the attacks on Raqqa made by the US-led coalition, and be transparent in providing information needed for investigations of the attacks. The government should commit to independent and impartial investigations of potential international law violations.

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