

# **2011 REPORT**

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN 2010**

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**OVER THE COURSE OF 2010, FRONT LINE ISSUED 253 URGENT APPEALS ON 369 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK IN 65 COUNTRIES; IT PROVIDED 180 SECURITY GRANTS AND TRAINED MORE THAN 500 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS. OVERALL, MORE THAN 1,100 HRDS BENEFITED FROM FRONT LINE'S PROTECTION SUPPORT IN 2010.**

**THIS REPORT HIGHLIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN 2010. IT DOES NOT AIM TO BE COMPREHENSIVE, BUT RATHER IT ILLUSTRATES SOME OF THE MAIN TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS AS EMERGED FROM FRONT LINE'S WORK.**

## **I. GLOBAL TRENDS**

We cannot but start this year's overview by mentioning the historic developments taking place in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The spontaneous protests that started in Tunisia in December 2010 have spread to the entire region and beyond. The ousting of President Ben Ali in Tunisia and President Mubarak in Egypt has given courage and hope to thousands of protesters and pro-democracy activists, human rights defenders (HRDs) and ordinary citizens in neighbouring countries. While protests were far from ending at the time of writing, important results have already been achieved. In Bahrain, more than 300 political prisoners including several human rights defenders were released from prison on 23 February 2011. A day later, the state of emergency that granted the Algerian military extra-ordinary powers was finally lifted after 19 years. In Yemen, the President announced a transition to a parliamentary democracy.

These events are inspiring civil society in countries beyond the Middle East and North Africa. Authoritarian governments however have already started acting preemptively in the hope of avoiding similar mass-scale protests. In Zimbabwe, more than 40 people were put on trial on charges of treason for watching videos of the protests in Egypt and the presence of security forces patrolling the streets was reinforced. In China, anonymous online calls from an overseas website for people to participate in a so-called 'Jasmine Revolution' – to consist of peacefully gathering on Sundays for walks in major towns and cities – prompted an intense crackdown and more than 20 HRDs were arrested or disappeared.

Despite this promising end to 2010, overall it was not a good year for human rights defenders worldwide.

2010 confirmed that **elections** are often a moment of increased vulnerability for HRDs as well as journalists. To varying degrees, a deterioration of the HRD situation accompanied elections in Bahrain, Belarus, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan, and Ukraine. In Belarus, the year ended with a severe crackdown on civil society after the presidential elections of 19 December, due to mass street protests against the announced results. Virtually all human rights organisations had their offices searched, equipment seized and members arrested and detained. State media launched a campaign portraying human rights organisations as affiliated with opposition political parties and as advancing Western interests. Human rights journalists were also targeted and their work restricted, and two were detained in the context of the criminal investigation into mass riots.

**Prosecution** and the use of the judicial system has now become the most commonly used strategy to silence HRDs across all regions. Charges ranged from terrorism, membership of an extremist group, subversion, treason or endangering national security, to spreading false information, defamation, organising an illegal protest, theft, fraud or tax evasion – to name but a few. The lack of judicial independence can be seen working to grotesque effect: in Sudan, a human rights defender was summoned to appear in court in December and was informed there that he was now guilty – with no new trial – of an offence of which he had already been acquitted months earlier. In another illustrative case, one of the most prominent HRDs in India was sentenced to life imprisonment in December on charges of sedition and conspiracy. Front Line reported on cases of prosecution and fabricated charges against HRDs in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Egypt, Gambia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Western Sahara, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

In last year's report we referred to the high number of countries passing restrictive NGO laws. In 2010, Cambodia and Egypt also tightened their regulations. In Ethiopia, the system put in place by the Government in 2009 proved extremely effective and resulted in the human rights community being drastically downsized. On a positive note, Armenia dropped restrictive amendments that were under discussion at the end of 2009.

**Women human rights defenders** (WHRDs) continued to be on the front line and to suffer both on account of their human rights work, like their male counterparts, and on account of their gender, especially when they challenged cultural stereotypes. Front Line reported on cases of WHRDs targeted specifically because of their work on women's rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gambia, Iran, Mexico, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Sudan, and Yemen. In Iran, members of the One Million

Signatures Campaign for gender equality continued to be harassed and at least four WHRDs were arrested or sentenced. In Mexico, gender violence was at an alarming high, in particular in the state of Chihuahua. There, 2010 opened and closed with the killing of Josefina Reyes and Marisela Escobedo Ortiz, who worked to oppose the endemic impunity for the abuses committed by the military. In Russian North Caucasus, WHRDs who protested against the obligation to wear the traditional Islamic headscarf received threats from the Chechen authorities.

HRDs working on issues related to **economic, social and cultural rights (ESC)** were particularly exposed in 2010, especially when working on land rights, development projects, or the management of natural resources. Often at the forefront were rural and grassroots organisations, which can be less connected with national mainstream groups or internationally and therefore sometimes less protected. In Sri Lanka, two environmental HRDs and trade unionists were arrested in November and charged with conspiracy and incitement to overthrow the Government for their opposition to a development project on a lagoon that would have adverse environmental consequences and would affect local fishermen's livelihood. Front Line supported HRDs working on ESC rights in the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Gabon, Gambia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Palestine, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

The number of **killings** of human rights defenders did not decrease. In 2010, we reported on 21 such instances, more than half of which were in Latin America. Countries included Colombia, DRC, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Mexico, and Rwanda. The real figure is however much higher. In Colombia alone, the International Coalition for Colombia reported on the killing of 30 human rights defenders in a four-month period. Worldwide, countless more killings remained unreported. Hardly any progress was recorded in bringing perpetrators to justice.

A killing also marked the start of the new year. In January 2011, David Kato, a HRD working on discrimination against **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI)** people was murdered in his home in Uganda. The authorities denied that the killing was motivated by his human rights work. It is undeniable however that the climate of hatred against LGBTI people that was fostered in the country over the last two years played a significant role in encouraging violence. As a result, virtually all LGBTI rights defenders in Uganda reported instances of intimidation and attacks in the past year. LGBTI activists were also harassed in Georgia, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, the Russian Federation, and Zimbabwe.

## II. REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### 1. AFRICA

**Front Line issued 42 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk from 14 African countries, namely Burundi, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.**

2010 was a year of celebration for many African States as it marked the 50th anniversary of their independence. The official rhetoric and festive climate were in stark contrast to the morale of civil society in **DRC**, which lost one of its most prominent human rights defenders. Floribert Chebeya was murdered a few weeks before the official festivities began. He informed his family that he was at the police headquarters to meet the Police Commissioner. His body was found the following morning. The Congolese authorities refused to accept an international inquiry. Another HRD and a journalist were killed in eastern DRC and there have been instances of disappearances, assaults, arbitrary detention, death threats, break-ins and arson attacks. Front Line continued to receive a high number of requests for assistance from women human rights defenders in eastern DRC. WHRDs were targeted because of their work documenting and denouncing abuses, including an alarmingly high number of rapes committed by the armed forces. The integration of former rebel groups into the national army was amongst the contributing factors to the increased insecurity for HRDs as it exposed them to retaliation by former rebels now shielded by their status in the army. A welcome exception to the widespread impunity was the sentencing of an army commander in February 2011 for a mass rape committed on New Year's Eve.

Elections affected HRDs and journalists in **Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Sudan**. In Rwanda, Presidential elections were held in August 2010 and were preceded by a crackdown on political opponents, independent media outlets and human rights defenders. Around 30 news media outlets were closed down, one journalist was murdered, three were sentenced to prison terms, three were arrested, two had to flee, and an international group was expelled from the country. In Burundi, at least four journalists were arrested and one of them remains in detention without trial more than eight months after his arrest in July. Several members of local human rights groups were threatened and put under surveillance, and an international group had the work permit of its staff withdrawn.

The constitutional reform process was the cause of increased insecurity for HRDs in **Zimbabwe**, where harassment was again on the increase particularly in the first half of 2010. Front Line reported on seven organisations which had several of their members arrested or threatened during a four-week period in February. During the year, several other NGOs had their members harassed, intimidated, detained, prosecuted, or had their offices searched. Farai Maguwu from the Mutare Centre for Research and Development was arrested in June and put on trial due to his work in documenting the involvement of the army in illegal mining operations.

Journalists are perhaps one of the categories more consistently targeted in most countries of the region. Front Line reported on cases of retaliation for raising human rights concerns in **Burundi, Cameroon, Kenya, and Uganda**. In Cameroon, the targeting of journalists increased in 2010. Five journalists from *Le Messager*, *Le Devoir*, *Cameroon Express*, *Bebela*, and *La Nation* were arrested in February. One of them reported being subjected to water boarding, sleep deprivation, exposure to cold, and beating on the soles of the feet. Another journalist, Germain Ngota Ngota, died while in prison in circumstances which were never entirely clarified. Six more journalists faced trial for their reporting on human rights violations, unfair trials, corruption and the embezzlement of public funds.

In **Burundi, Cameroon, Gabon, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda**, HRDs working on economic, social and cultural rights, faced harassment and attacks. Trade unionists, those monitoring corruption, good governance and the management of natural resources were particularly vulnerable. In Tanzania, human rights defenders defending the rights of pastoralist communities unlawfully evicted from their ancestral land were harassed, intimidated and threatened.

Defending LGBTI rights continued to be a risky endeavour in many countries, including **DRC, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe**. In DRC, a new bill criminalising homosexuality and which would affect the work of LGBTI rights defenders was tabled before parliament in October. In Uganda, religious groups and sections of the media who were supporting the 2009 bill continued to work against LGBTI HRDs including by publishing the photos and names of LGBTI human rights defenders. Attacks have increased as a result and David Kato, a prominent HRD, was murdered in January 2011. Several LGBTI HRDs were assaulted, had their homes broken into or were evicted from their homes.

In **Kenya** the situation has improved after the wave of violence that hit HRDs in 2009. However, harassment and intimidation continued. In April a member of Release Political Prisoners (RPP) was arbitrarily arrested, subjected to severe ill-treatment and questioned about RPP work on extrajudicial killings, the Mt. Elgon military operation and whether they had passed information to the UN. The International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations into the post election violence may spark further retaliation against HRDs for their role in documenting violations, especially after the issuing of an ICC summons in December 2010.

Last year we reported on new legislation passed in **Ethiopia** restricting space for independent human rights work. The system put in place proved extremely effective. Many groups did not re-register as human rights organisations. A significant number of HRDs fled the country for fear of arrest and attack. The very few remaining human rights groups had to dramatically cut their activities and presence on the ground, which significantly affected their capacity to document and report on human rights violations.

## 2. AMERICAS

**Front Line issued 53 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 11 American countries, namely Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, and Venezuela.**

2010 saw a marked change in the global economic positioning of Latin America. Many Latin American countries reported growth in their economies and attracted huge external investment. However for human rights defenders, who were already operating in high risk environments, the improved economic fortune of a country can bring many new and additional risks. As international focus on those countries increased, so did the desire for states to downplay criticism or the highlighting of existing problems. Human rights defenders protecting economic, social and cultural rights reported increased threats and harassment from both state and non-state actors. HRDs particularly exposed to great risk included trade union leaders, indigenous and afro-descendents, campesinos and community leaders, judges and lawyers, journalists and women human rights defenders. Throughout the region, HRDs have been subjected to death threats, surveillance, acts of intimidation, raids on offices and homes, abductions and enforced disappearances, violent attacks, judicial harassment, torture, ill-treatment, and killings.

In **Argentina**, as hearings continued against former military junta officials on trial for crimes against humanity, human rights lawyers' groups reported continued incidences of intimidation and harassment. Death threats and raids on the homes and offices of those seeking truth, justice and reconciliation for the victims of the military dictatorship that governed the country until 1983 continued in 2010.

Human rights defenders operate in **Brazil** defending economic, social and cultural rights which includes the promotion of agrarian reform (with particular focus on the land rights of rural workers), indigenous rights, the rights of people of African descent or Quilombolas, the rights of LGBTI individuals and labour rights, as well as defending civil and political rights and monitoring and reporting on human rights abuses and corruption. Police violence and the lack of accountability continued to pose great problems in Brazilian society. Positively, Brazil's National Protection Programme for HRDs offers a holistic approach to the protection of human rights defenders and also includes psychological support. However, due to the size of the country and the limited resources allocated the programme faced challenges in providing adequate support to HRDs at risk and in 2010 was operative in six States.

The Americas remained the region with the highest incidence of killings of HRDs, which have been reported in **Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico**. Colombia continues to be one of the most dangerous countries in the world in which to defend human rights. Despite a strong human rights community the legacy of violence has continued in the new Presidency of Juan Manuel Santos, who assumed office in August. Assassinations, forced disappearances, death threats, raids

on offices and stigmatisation and criminalisation of HRDs continued in parallel with the impunity enjoyed by those responsible. 30 killings of HRDs were reported in one four-month period. Illustrative of everyday risks faced by HRDs is the case of David Rabelo Crespo from the Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights, who was arrested on 14 September 2010 in Barrancabermeja. He remains in detention on fabricated charges of conspiracy to commit a crime and aggravated murder, and he and his family continue to receive death threats.

The murder of human rights defenders was also a major problem in **Mexico**, where HRDs faced intimidation and harassment from both state and non-state actors. General insecurity, impunity and violence associated with organised criminal activity and narco-trafficking mean that HRDs operated in extremely dangerous conditions, particularly in Chihuahua, Guerrero and Chiapas. In April 2010, Bety Cariño was killed, together with an international observer, in a violent paramilitary attack on a peaceful solidarity caravan. Gender violence and femicides were at an alarming high in the state of Chihuahua, and represented one of the main risks faced by WHRDs in the region. 2010 opened with the killing, in January, of Josefina Reyes who was murdered because of her work opposing abuses by the military; the year closed with another WHRD, Marisela Escobedo Ortiz, murdered in December as she held a peaceful vigil against the acquittal of her daughter's killer. Following the two killings, several family members of both WHRDs were also murdered. The authorities response was consistent: 'the military presence is necessary due to ongoing drug trafficking cartels in the region.'

One piece of positive news was the decrease in attacks against HRDs in **Guatemala**, which had reached a peak in 2009. However, the environment remained extremely high-risk and HRDs operated with great fear of reprisals. Front Line reported on assassination attempts, death threats and break-ins at the homes of HRDs.

In **Ecuador**, human rights defenders reported continued repression at the hands of the State, in particular against environmental activists. In 2010 there were reports of HRDs being criminalised, discredited, imprisoned, and killed. Against this background, it is almost a paradox that the 2008 Constitution codified "the right to resist actions or omissions of public authorities, persons and organisations that threaten the constitutional rights of the peoples".

In **Honduras** human rights defenders, organisations and political parties continued to join forces and oppose the de facto Government in a movement under the banner of the National Resistance Front. 2010 was another violent year and Front Line issued urgent appeals regarding three separate cases of killings of HRDs, as well as other assassination attempts and death threats against individuals and groups. LGBTI rights defenders continued to be targeted by threats, surveillance, kidnappings, intimidation and killings, and are doubly discriminated against: because they are human rights defenders and because they defend LGBTI rights. Those working to promote sustainable development and environmental rights in Honduras, such as the Environmental Movement of Olancho, remained at particular risk.

### 3. ASIA

**Front Line issued 43 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 11 Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.**

Throughout 2010 human rights defenders in Asia faced attacks from both state and non-state actors, with reports of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, judicial harassment, death threats, break-ins and cyber-attacks. Reporting of human rights violations was virtually absent or significantly delayed in countries such as Burma, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam, where conditions were such that individuals and organisations were entirely, or almost entirely, unable to operate. Restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly resulted in large numbers of HRDs across the region facing criminal proceedings.

The release of pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, from house arrest in November 2010 brought new hope to all those defending human rights in **Burma**. However, freedom of expression, association and assembly continued to be severely curtailed and HRDs faced long-term detention without trial or recourse to independent legal counsel in their struggle against harsh military enforced policies.

In **Cambodia** human rights defenders, particularly trade union leaders, land rights activists and journalists, continued to voice their criticism of state policies, and those who spoke out against injustice faced arrest, imprisonment and intimidation. The number of HRDs facing trumped-up criminal charges increased in 2010. Of particular concern is the draft Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations, tabled in December 2010 and still pending. If approved, it would introduce compulsory registration for all NGOs before they would be allowed to "operate any activity" and would impose burdensome registration requirements. The bill includes vague provisions which may provide for arbitrary closure or denial of registration, and would impose a duty upon international organisations to collaborate with the Government in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their projects.

2010 was another difficult year for HRDs in **China**, although the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo did provide a significant boost in morale to those engaged in the defence of human rights. The State continued to harass and intimidate human rights lawyers, bloggers, writers, journalists, religious activists and health campaigners. The case of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng demonstrates the lengths to which the Chinese Government will go to silence its critics. He resurfaced briefly in March 2010 following a year's disappearance at the hands of the state security services and reported being brutally tortured.



He vanished once again on 20 April 2010 and has not been heard from since. The crackdown in the wake of the Nobel Peace Prize announcement was unprecedented. Scores of HRDs all over China were disappeared, placed under house arrest, prevented from leaving the country or heavily monitored. At the time of writing Liu Xiaobo's wife remained under strict house arrest and out of contact with the outside world.

In **India** the sheer size and diversity of the country means that HRDs faced different risks and challenges in different areas. Certain regions, such as Jammu and Kashmir and the North-East, brought additional complexities due to civil unrest. The case of Dr Binayak Sen of the People's Union for Civil Liberties regional office in Chhattisgarh was one particularly high profile case. In December 2010, he was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of sedition and conspiracy. The harshness of the sentence reflected the Government's intention to show HRDs throughout the country that their challenges will not go unpunished.

HRDs remained at risk in **Indonesia**. The criminalisation of human rights defenders on baseless prosecutions, including the use of criminal defamation laws, continued to be employed by the State as a means of silencing critical voices. No real improvement in the implementation of mechanisms to protect those at risk were recorded in 2010. Perpetrators of attacks against HRDs, both state and non-state, continued to enjoy high levels of impunity.

In **Pakistan** civil society organisations and human rights defenders operate in a very challenging environment. WHRDs, judges and lawyers, and those working on issues related to religion and blasphemy faced particularly high risks. In the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and in tribal areas, the Taliban continued to impose very harsh restrictions on the movement of women and girls and to target those working on women's rights. Lawyers working on blasphemy cases faced constant threats and harassment, and worked in a climate of fear.

The number of extrajudicial killings of HRDs decreased in the past two to three years in the **Philippines**. However, the Government continued to target those speaking out and to smear them with accusations of affiliation with armed groups. Well-founded fears remained about the existence of lists of military targets, many of whom are HRDs. As a result, many of them continued to base themselves in temporary safe-houses.

The existence of target lists of HRDs was reported in **Sri Lanka**. In March 2010 the media reported that the State Intelligence Services had devised a list of 35 people who they perceived to be supportive of the opposition and who were identified as targets. The list included J.C. Weliamuna of Transparency International Sri Lanka, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, and several other human rights defenders and journalists. Several cases of attacks, threats and restrictions on the work of HRDs were reported in 2010, particularly in the North and East.

The security of human rights defenders in **Vietnam** continued to be severely affected by the Government's use of the legal system to suppress any form of dissent. At least four HRDs were accused of spreading propaganda against the State and were labelled as terrorists for speaking out against abuses or criticising government policies.

#### **4. EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA**

**Front Line issued 47 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 11 countries, namely Albania, Belarus, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.**

The situation for human rights defenders in Eastern Europe and Central Asia deteriorated in 2010. Direct targeting of HRDs increased in a number of countries, including Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine. State authorities and state-controlled media continued to depict human rights defenders as serving western interests. In some countries, government officials openly stated that human rights are western values not compatible with the national identity. Control of the executive over the judicial system compromised the rule of law and encouraged impunity for the perpetrators of attacks against HRDs. State control over the Internet increased, and freedom of peaceful assembly was systematically restricted in all countries in the region.

In the **Russian Federation**, the rise of xenophobia and racism affected the security of HRDs working on racism and reached its peak at the end of 2010 with a large demonstration of ultra-right wing groups in central Moscow and inter-ethnic clashes in a number of Russian cities. Defenders of environmental rights and LGBTI activists faced threats and physical attacks. In September 2010, several NGOs were subjected to mass unscheduled inspections by federal authorities on an unprecedented scale. Throughout the year, peaceful meetings organised by the civic initiative 'Strategy 31' in defence of Article 31 of the Russian Constitution (which guarantees freedom of assembly) were systematically dispersed by the police and demonstrators arrested.

The absence of the rule of law in the North Caucasus region affected the work and safety of HRDs attempting to investigate instances of torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The brutality and the absence of any serious investigation into such crimes contributed to the strengthening of radical Islamist movements. Human rights work in the North Caucasus region remained very high risk and HRDs continued to receive serious threats including from state officials. In Chechnya, no progress was observed in the investigation into the killing of human rights defenders Natalia Estemirova, Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband Alik Dzhabrailov. In Dagestan, women human rights lawyers were threatened and assaulted by the police.



In **Georgia**, human rights defenders who work on the rights of political prisoners continued to receive threats and face police brutality during demonstrations. The Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 remains a particularly sensitive issue, and making public any information that did not fit the official version of events provoked reprisals against the authors who were labelled as unpatriotic.

Elections were held in **Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine**. In Belarus, the December elections were followed by a severe crackdown on civil society. Several HRDs remain in detention at the time of writing. In Ukraine, the human rights situation started to deteriorate after the presidential election of February 2010. Press freedom was restricted and several human rights defenders received threats and were assaulted. Disappointingly, Ukraine no longer maintains its previously strong leadership role in relation to the protection of human rights.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, after the departure of ousted President Bakiev, many people were the victims of inter-ethnic violence in clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups in June in the south of the country. Unfortunately there was no effective intervention of the authorities to protect civilians. The criminal investigations launched after the events were not independent nor effective, court proceedings did not meet international fair trial standards and resulted in the imposition of a sentence of life imprisonment on Azimjan Askarov, a prominent HRD. The situation in the south remained dangerous for ethnic Uzbeks and the human rights defenders protecting them. Threats, insults and physical attacks, including on lawyers in courtrooms, have become the daily routine for human rights activists.

In 2010, the Government in **Kazakhstan** further tightened control over the independent media, NGOs and civil society, and initiated politically motivated lawsuits against critical voices. HRDs working on social rights were beaten by the police and arrested. Evgeniy Zhovtis, one of the key figures in the human rights movement and director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, remains in detention despite intense international pressure for his release.

Fortunately, **Armenia** abandoned a proposed legislative amendment which was under consideration in late 2009 and which would have introduced strict government control over NGOs. Despite this positive development, the environment remains restrictive: freedom of press remains limited, human rights activists and independent journalists continue to be threatened and attacked.

**Turkmenistan** continued to hold the worst human rights record in the region. Any kind of human rights work remained banned and independent journalists are closely monitored by the authorities. The Internet remained under state control. The repression even reached Turkmen human rights activists in exile to the extent that the Turkmen delegation to the OSCE tried to prevent HRDs from participating in OSCE meetings. Front Line received reliable reports of serious threats received by Turkmen HRDs living in European countries.

Of extreme concern also was the situation for HRDs in **Uzbekistan**, where at least 16 human rights defenders continue to serve long prison sentences in harsh conditions. Human rights groups and international bodies have no access to the prisons and information about the health and conditions of detention of HRDs is very limited. Most of them continued to receive formal warnings from the prison administration for alleged violations of internal prison rules, which resulted in their exclusion from the annual presidential amnesty. Other HRDs were sentenced to prison terms during the year in complete disregard for fair trial guarantees. Peaceful human rights demonstrations remained banned and unauthorised peaceful demonstrations were forcefully dispersed.

## 5. MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

**Front Line issued 68 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 18 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, and Yemen.**

The unprecedented wave of spontaneous protests that started hitting the region in December was still spreading at the time of writing. As highlighted above, the change of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt galvanised protesters in other countries and forced governments to make concessions in an attempt to appease them: these included the lifting of the 19-year-old state of emergency in Algeria and the release of a number of political prisoners in Bahrain in February 2011.

In 2010, reports of the harassment of human rights defenders increased in some countries, including Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In addition to arbitrary arrests and detention, malicious prosecution and unfair trials, travel bans and systematic monitoring of the Internet continued to be used against HRDs in the Middle East and North Africa. There were also numerous cases of HRDs who were forced to flee their countries to escape arrest or prosecution.

The use of the judicial system against HRDs was particularly widespread across all countries in the region. HRDs and journalists were charged and tried in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Libya, Kuwait, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, and Yemen. Charges ranged from terrorism and subversion to defamation and participation in illegal protests. In **Saudi Arabia**, the number of reports of HRDs being harassed by the authorities increased in 2010. A human rights defender was charged and sentenced to a prison term and public lashes for organising a public protest in the town of Qubba. Four other HRDs were held in detention and in one especially worrisome case a HRD has been held

incommunicado since 2007 without charges. In **Syria**, there were a number of reported cases of arbitrary detention and prosecutions on the basis of fabricated charges. Two prominent HRDs were sentenced to three years in prison in June and July respectively after unfair trials. The authorities continued to detain human rights defender Ali Saleh Al-Abdallah despite the fact that the prison term to which he had been convicted in late 2007 had ended in June 2010.

The use of the legal system against HRDs is often coupled with restrictive legislation, and this holds particularly true in the region. 2010 saw Egypt tabling draft NGO legislation further tightening government control over the membership, management and funding of NGOs and banning NGOs from registering as businesses, an expedient used by several human rights groups to retain independence. In June 2010, **Tunisia** made "contacts with agents of a foreign country, foreign institution or organisation" which may affect vital interests of Tunisia or its economic security a criminal offence, in a move which it was feared could allow the prosecution of human rights defenders who cooperate with foreign and multilateral organisations including the EU and the UN.

Monitoring of the Internet and electronic communications was a common occurrence. As a result of the intense Internet surveillance, a number of bloggers and contributors to online news sites were targeted in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. In **Bahrain**, blogger Ali Abdulemam was arrested on 4 September 2010. His arrest occurred in the context of a wider crackdown on civil society that preceded the elections held in October. Approximately 400 individuals were arrested between August and September, including at least ten human rights defenders who faced terrorism related charges. The trials that ensued were considered by international observers to be unfair. Several of those detained, including some HRDs, reported being subjected to torture, and no serious investigation of those complaints was carried out. The majority of those detained were released in February 2011 following the wave of region-wide protests that also reached Bahrain.

Travel bans continued to be used extensively in a bid to limit criticism at the international level. Front Line reported on HRDs subjected to formal or de facto travel bans in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Western Sahara.

As in many other regions of the world, journalists paid a high price for their reporting on human rights abuses and the curtailment of freedoms. Front Line reported on cases of harassment of journalists from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. In **Iran**, Jila Baniyaghoub was sentenced in June 2010 to one year's detention and was banned from practicing journalism for 30 years. She was not the only target of the regime. In the context of a wider crackdown on political opponents and HRDs, many human rights lawyers were arbitrarily detained, charged and sentenced to prison terms and banned from practicing law. Several HRDs had to leave the country.

In **Palestine** HRDs protesting against the separation wall and its negative impact on the economic and social rights of Palestinians were subjected to excessive, sometimes lethal, use of force, arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and unfair trial. Human rights work is seriously impaired by severe limitations on the right to freedom of movement. In Israel, human rights groups defending the rights of Palestinians and documenting violations by the Israeli military were subjected to continued pressure and campaigns of defamation by the Israeli authorities and hard line members of the Israeli parliament.

Arbitrary detention and ill-treatment in **Western Sahara** increased in November 2010 in connection with a reported raid by the Moroccan military and security forces on a camp of displaced Sahrawi families near Laayoune. On that occasion at least five HRDs were manhandled or arrested. A number of Sahrawi HRDs were put on trial after prolonged pre-trial detention, and their lawyers and international observers were harassed at court by groups loyal to the Moroccan authorities.

## JOIN THE FRONT LINE CAMPAIGN: 10 ON THE 10TH

Some of the cases mentioned in this report are part of Front Line's new campaign 10 on the 10th, which was launched on 10 December 2010, International Human Rights Day. The campaign focuses on 10 emblematic cases of human rights defenders at risk.

For more information visit [www.frontlinedefenders.org](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org)

# 2011 REPORT

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN 2010



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