

## **Introduction to the 2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices**

On January 14, Tunisian president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali boarded a plane in Tunis with his family and departed for Saudi Arabia. Twenty-seven days later, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak resigned. After eight months of brutal attacks on Libyans seeking peaceful change, Moammar Qadhafi was overthrown. For the first time in history, the Yemeni President transferred power through the ballot box. Forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Asad have committed heinous and widespread human rights abuses against their own people since March 2011, and yet the protesters have not been cowed.

These still unfolding citizen uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa have sent aftershocks rumbling around the world. Millions of citizens in many other countries have also expressed their dissatisfaction with governments that fail to deliver results to their people. Whether in grand movements or small acts, people in countries around the world are standing up and demanding their universal rights, dignity, greater economic opportunity, and participation in their countries' political future.

The yearning for change we have witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria is inspirational, and yet change often creates instability before it leads to greater respect for democracy and human rights. After decades of repression, during which open political participation was not allowed, it will take time to create diverse political parties, a robust civil society, a climate conducive to freedom of expression, and a transparent political culture. Transitions are times of uncertainty. They can be chaotic, unstable, and at times violent. And even when they succeed, they are rarely linear, quick, or easy. The challenge during these transitions is to keep societies open to political debate. Protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms ensures that negotiations over a country's future can take place without fear or intimidation, and that anti-democratic forces do not snuff out genuine political participation. As Secretary Clinton said, "All political parties, religious and secular alike, have to abide by basic ground rules: reject violence; uphold the rule of law; respect the freedoms of speech, religion, association, and assembly; protect the rights of women and minorities; give up power if you are defeated at the polls; and especially in a region with deep divisions within and between religions, avoid inciting sectarian conflicts that pull societies apart." If these fundamental rules are violated, she warned, "The victors of revolutions can become their victims."

In the turmoil of 2011, thousands of citizens were killed across Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria. Many others were abused by security forces that used excessive force. But the images of demonstrators who had seemingly lost all fear, risking their lives to oppose governments they deemed illegitimate, inspired people around the world. Even in the most isolated places, the desire for greater freedom and political and economic opportunity began to flicker.

The year 2011 brought remarkable changes in Burma, long isolated because of the government's poor treatment of its own people. In dramatic fashion, the Burmese government took a number of bold steps to begin the long and difficult process of political reform and reconciliation with those who have struggled peacefully for freedom for decades. In last year's report, we wrote about the dire situation of hundreds of political prisoners who remained in jail in Burma, some of whom had been imprisoned for decades for taking part in protests or simply for reading "subversive" poetry. In October 2011, the government released more than 200 of these prisoners. As next year's country report will cover, in January 2012 the Burmese government released 300 more, including some who had been detained for many years, and allowed the National League for Democracy to register and field candidates for parliamentary elections, including party leader Aung Sun Syu Kyi.

Burma offers an example of a government moving towards a model of greater openness, democracy, and liberty, attributes that can lead to greater innovation, prosperity, and inclusion. Much remains to be done to implement reforms and especially to address the legacy of decades of violence against ethnic minorities. But the size of the task ahead does not diminish the excitement of these first steps, or the sense of possibility they may inspire in other closed societies, such as Iran, North Korea, Uzbekistan, Eritrea, or Sudan.

Several other countries also took important steps in 2011 toward improving their human rights records, although more work remains to be done. In Colombia, the government worked to address the climate of impunity with respect to harassment, intimidation, and killings of human rights workers, journalists, teachers, and trade unionists. Extrajudicial killings declined in large measure due to efforts by the government to stop such crimes. In Zambia, presidential, parliamentary, and local elections held in September were free, credible, and orderly. The incumbent president relinquished power and accepted the will of the Zambian people. In Tunisia, citizens held transparent and credible elections for a Constituent Assembly, which in turn elected a former political prisoner as the country's interim president. The country is now rewriting its constitution.

Along with such hopeful developments, this report documents a range of negative developments in 2011. A number of countries became less free as a result of flawed elections; the imposition by powerful leaders of less democratic constitutional provisions; restrictions on the universal rights to freedom of expression, assembly, or association, including on the Internet; moves to censor or intimidate the media; or attempts to control or curtail the activities of nongovernmental groups. In Nicaragua, extensive irregularities in the electoral process marked a setback to democracy and undermined the ability of Nicaraguans to hold their government accountable.

Other disturbing trends in 2011 include continued persecution of religious minorities, including, but not limited to, Ahmadis, Bahais, Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and others. In many countries there was an uptick in discrimination against members of racial and ethnic minorities; people with disabilities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) people, all of whom were frequent targets of abuse, discrimination, and violence. In some countries medical personnel were harassed, intimidated, and arrested. Both governments and opposition forces tried to prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching civilians in dire circumstances.

Egypt and Kyrgyzstan held historic elections that were deemed to be generally free and fair. Yet the elections in these countries, as well as the standoff following the 2010 presidential election in Cote d'Ivoire, provided a poignant reminder that elections are a critical but insufficient element in genuine transitions to democracy and the rule of law. Committed citizens in each of these countries continued to work toward building the habits and institutions of democratic governance, including a political culture in which electoral losers understand they must cede power, and elected representatives wield power fairly.

Overall human rights conditions remained extremely poor in many of the countries that were spotlighted in our 2010 country reports, including, but not limited to, Iran, North Korea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, Belarus, and China.

Several broader trends were prominent in 2011. New connective technologies spread news of citizen activism, and political change, around the world. People continued to find innovative ways to use technology to break down the walls of fear and isolation that undemocratic governments erected to try to keep their populations quiescent. They used these technologies to speak out against societal discrimination, corruption, and restrictions on civil and political liberties that are

keeping them from enjoying equal rights, dignity, or respect. Yet repressive regimes also used those same technologies to spy on their own citizens for the purposes of silencing dissent.

As we consider the implications of connective technologies on human rights and democracy, we realize that technology itself does not usher in progress on human rights. People do. Technology can help people exercise their universal human rights, connect with others across borders, and transcend time zones and even language barriers. But technology is a platform, not a substitute for political organizing, advocacy, or persuasion. The Internet does not bring people into the street. Grievances do. The Internet did not spark the Arab Spring. Injustice did.

Because the story of how people express themselves, associate with one another, and share ideas and opinions is increasingly unfolding online, protecting and promoting Internet freedom is a core priority of the United States. We report on its status in the pages that follow.

We also report on the status of media freedom, which remained poor in many countries and declined in others. The year 2011 brought an increase in the number of journalists and bloggers silenced to death or jail as they attempted to bring news to the public. These reports also chronicle the many ways in which some governments attempted to censor the media through regulations or laws that are contrary to the universal right to freedom of expression and opinion, and through harassment, intimidation, or violence. In Ecuador and Venezuela, government actions against independent media outlets had a chilling effect on media freedom.

This year's reports highlight the treatment of marginalized people, including LGBT people and people with disabilities. Too many countries still criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, and LGBT people face discrimination and violence in many more countries. We continue to focus on other vulnerable populations, including women and children. Domestic and societal violence and discrimination against women continue to be serious problems in many countries. Women and children are often the first to suffer during conflicts.

In addition, we continue to monitor challenges to civil society organizations promoting respect for human rights and democratic transitions in their own countries. In last year's Human Rights Reports, we noted a surge in efforts by repressive governments to control and stifle independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Over the last several years, more than 90 governments have sought to pass laws that hampered the ability of NGOs to register, operate

freely, or receive foreign funding. In a number of countries, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Malaysia, Algeria, Cambodia, and Russia, governments have imposed or threatened greater restrictions on foreign funding of these organizations, taken other measures that severely hamper their operations, or sought to intimidate them or shut them down completely. In many other places, the work of these organizations is misunderstood, or actively misrepresented by insecure governments that fear independent scrutiny of their actions. These trends intensified in 2011, when we saw a sharp escalation of official restrictions on the work of human rights and democracy advocates.

As President Obama has said, societies change from within. Civil society organizations lead that change by engaging citizens in conversations about how people want to be governed. These organizations spotlight human rights abuses, fight discrimination, and monitor whether authorities are upholding the rule of law. They speak out against the exclusion, persecution, or hatred of vulnerable minorities, and document where their societies fall short. By holding up a mirror to society, they ask their governments and their citizens to do better and to be better. In all of these ways, civil society groups are the lifeblood of free and open societies, and they are most vital in countries where democratic traditions and institutions are just beginning to take root.

The events of 2011, as documented in these pages, remind us once again that human rights and global security are inextricably linked. From Tunis to Tehran, from Cairo to California, from Moscow to Rangoon, citizens were ever more interconnected and so were the interrelationships between their freedoms, economic opportunity, and the security and prosperity of their societies.

Around the world, we see that where human rights are consistently abused or threatened, by authorities or by criminal, sectarian, or other undemocratic groups that enjoy impunity, the result is frequently political strife, economic contraction, and destabilization that too often spills across borders. In contrast, where human rights are respected, the rule of law is enforced, and government actions are transparent, societies are more stable and secure. People who feel empowered to engage in the political process and who see their rights respected are less likely to join extremist groups that threaten domestic tranquility and international stability. They gradually develop a greater trust of their government and feel a greater stake in the success of the system. In this way, respect for human rights builds political stability and lays the foundations for democratization, economic growth, shared prosperity, and enhanced global security.

This critical connection between human rights and national security plays out repeatedly in the pages that follow. It will continue to play out in the transitions to democracy occurring in the Arab world and beyond. The people who took to the streets to demonstrate in Tunis, Cairo, Tripoli, and Sanaa have proven that change can come without turning to extremism. In 2011 we saw too many governments crack down in the name of restoring order when their citizens demanded universal human rights and a voice in how they were governed. These acts of repression triggered more confrontation, more chaos, and ultimately greater instability. The events of the year showed that the real choice is not between stability and security; it is between reform and unrest.

I want to add a word about the production of these reports. Each year, they are prepared by human rights officers at U.S. embassies and other posts around the world, working with their counterparts in Washington, D.C. Each country team collects, analyzes, and synthesizes information from a variety of sources, including domestic and international human rights organizations, other governments, multilateral organizations, and members of civil society. Once the reports are drafted, they are rigorously edited, reviewed, and fact-checked to ensure accuracy and objectivity.

This year, we made the human rights reports easier to read online. Readers can jump directly to topics of interest with a new table of contents, share reports on social media, and research topics across countries with the *Build a Report* tool. Our goal is to allow readers to gather information quickly across regions on the issues that most interest them.

We have also attempted to make the reports more accessible to a broader spectrum of readers. Over the past 35 years, the length of the human rights reports had expanded, even as Congress mandated separate annual reports on the status of international religious freedom and human trafficking. This year, we have developed a streamlined format for each country report. As a result, we do not attempt to catalog every incidence, however egregious, of a particular type of human rights abuse in a country. Rather, we spotlight examples that typify and illuminate the types of problems frequently reported in 2011 in that country. The mention of fewer cases in a particular report should not be interpreted as a lessening of concern for the overall human rights situation in any particular country. Rather, our goal is to shed light on the nature, scope, and severity of the reported human rights abuses. For the first time, we have also added an executive summary at the top of each report. We hope readers will find these changes useful.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael H. Posner

Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

## 2011 Country Highlights

### Africa

Internal conflicts in the East, particularly in the North and South Kivu and Orientale provinces, continued to plague the **Democratic Republic of Congo**. Human rights abuses were committed by all parties to the conflict. Reported human rights abuses included killings, disappearances, and torture. Rebel and militia groups and some army units engaged in the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources in the east. Foreign rebel and militia groups and some local militias formed coalitions, battled government forces, and attacked civilian populations. State security forces arrested, illegally detained, raped, tortured, or summarily executed civilians and looted villages during military actions against rebels. Fighting in the East impeded humanitarian aid in some areas, exacerbating an already severe humanitarian crisis that affects some 1.7 million displaced persons. Impunity remained a significant problem. The deeply flawed election in November was accompanied by disappearances and restrictions on freedoms of assembly, expression and movement.

Widespread human rights violations continued in **Eritrea**, where the government is under the control of authoritarian President Isaias Afwerki. The government forced men and women to participate in the national service program from which there were no clear criteria for demobilization, and persons worked indefinitely in any location or capacity chosen by the government. Security forces tortured and beat army deserters, draft evaders, persons attempting to flee the country, and members of certain religious groups. Harsh prison and detention center conditions, which included unventilated and underground cells with extreme temperatures, led to multiple deaths. The government controlled all media. It reportedly continued to detain more than 30 journalists, providing no information about their places of detention.

In **Ethiopia**, the government continued to repress civil society, including the media. The government arrested more than 100 opposition figures, activists, journalists, and bloggers, charging several of those arrested with terrorist or seditious activity. However, observers found the evidence presented at trials to be either open to interpretation or indicative of acts of a political nature rather than linked to terrorism. The Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO law) continued to impose severe restrictions on civil society and NGO activities. As a result of the law, civil society activities have been severely curtailed. The

government also restricted access to the Internet and blocked the websites of news organizations, opposition sites, and blogs.

In **Nigeria**, a campaign of attacks by the radical Islamist sect known as Boko Haram intensified during the year and violence spread to more areas of the country. The group committed bombings and drive-by shootings, assassinated religious leaders, security personnel and politicians, attacked police stations and banks, and conducted suicide bombings. In Maiduguri, Borno State, shootings and bombings were a weekly and sometimes daily occurrence, with violence also occurring in neighboring states. In August, Boko Haram targeted an international organization for the first time, bombing the UN House headquarters in Abuja and killing 24 persons. The government deployed the Joint Task Force, which committed extrajudicial killings during attempts to apprehend Boko Haram members. The April 2011 general elections were Nigeria's most successful since its return to multiparty democracy in 1999. However, postelection violence erupted in the north and in the Middle Belt States, resulting in loss of lives, property damage, and restrictions of movement.

The Government of **Sudan** continued to conduct aerial bombardment of civilian areas. In Darfur, fighting involved government forces, government-aligned militias, rebel groups, and ethnic groups. These groups killed, injured, and raped civilians, and used child soldiers. During the year violence broke-out in the disputed border area of Abyei, as well as in the Sudanese states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. The violence in these areas resulted in widespread civilian displacement and human rights abuses. Human rights abuses in Sudan went unpunished and impunity remained a serious problem. Parties to the conflicts obstructed the work of humanitarian organizations and the United Nations. In addition, the government also continued to crack down on journalists and restrict freedoms of speech, assembly, association, religion, and movement, and security forces continued to kill, torture, beat, and harass suspected political opponents and others.

In **Zimbabwe**, the chronically bad human rights situation did not improve.

Despite a fledgling Government of National Unity, the government remains mostly under the control of President Mugabe's political party, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which retains authority over the military, police and intelligence services. These security services continued to arrest, abuse, and torture non-ZANU-PF party members and civil society activists with impunity. The government infringed on citizens' freedoms of speech, assembly, association, and movement. Executive influence and interference in the

judiciary remained a serious problem, and NGOs reported that magistrates were promised farms and homes for providing rulings favorable to ZANU-PF. In rural areas ZANU-PF sympathizers used threats and intimidation against local magistrates to gain favorable rulings.

## **East Asia and Pacific**

**Burma** took important steps to improve human rights conditions in 2011, including the release of hundreds of political prisoners and the adoption of a labor law that, when implemented, can provide workers the right to organize and strike. In November, following the adoption of a revised political party registration law, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and other opposition parties were allowed to re-register as legal political parties. However, significant human rights problems persisted, including military harassment and abuse of activists promoting human rights and democracy, and denial of the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, religion, and movement. The government detained activists indefinitely and without charges and regime-sponsored mass-member organizations harassed and abused them. Authorities arrested, detained, convicted, and imprisoned citizens for expressing political opinions critical of the government. The government took initial steps in 2011 toward lifting some of the longtime restrictions on the media. If implemented, these measures would lay the groundwork for meaningful freedom of expression in the country.

In **China**, the human rights situation deteriorated, particularly the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. The government exercised tight control over Internet access and content. Members of civil society, including human rights activists, journalists, writers, and dissidents, were harassed and detained. Public interest lawyers who took cases deemed sensitive by the government faced disbarment and the closure of their firms, and in some cases were subject to arrest and detention. Activists, dissidents, and members of religious minorities were denied the freedoms to assemble, practice their religions, or travel. The government stepped up efforts to silence political activists and resorted to extralegal measures, including enforced disappearance, "soft detention," and strict house arrest, including house arrest of family members, to prevent the public voicing of independent opinions. Abuses peaked around high-profile events, such as visits of foreign officials, sensitive anniversaries, and in response to calls for "Jasmine revolution," protests. In Tibet, at least 12 monks and nuns immolated themselves to protest political restrictions and lack of religious freedom.

**Vietnam**'s May elections were neither free nor fair, since all candidates were required to pass vetting by the authorities. The government severely restricted political rights, including the freedoms of expression, assembly, movement, and association. It also restricted access to Internet content, and monitored bloggers. There were confirmed reports of attacks against websites critical of the Vietnamese government. Peaceful political activists were arbitrarily arrested, detained, and sentenced to prison; those alleged to have ties to foreign-based pro-democracy groups were particular targets. And 19 people reportedly died in police custody, including a man beaten while in detention for a traffic violation. At year's end, the government reportedly held more than 100 political detainees, although some international observers claimed there were more. Independent nongovernmental organizations were not permitted, and corruption was a problem in the judiciary as well as at various levels in the police. Prosecution of officials who committed abuses was inconsistent.

## **Europe**

Conditions in **Belarus** remained poor following the flawed presidential election of December 2010. Security forces beat protestors and detainees, and there were credible reports of torture. Trials were conducted behind closed doors or in absentia with verdicts predetermined. Five of the nine candidates who opposed incumbent Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the presidential election were tried and convicted. Individuals were detained for civic activism. For example, during the June-September "silent" demonstrations organized via Internet, police detained more than 2,000 people and sentenced many of them to large fines or up to 15 days of administrative detention. The government targeted for harassment representatives of nongovernmental organizations, journalists, and political activists following the presidential elections and further restricted freedom of association.

In **Russia**, domestic and international monitors reported significant irregularities and fraud in many regions during the December elections to the State Duma, but also highlighted unprecedented civic involvement by Russians committed to trying to improve the process. There were large demonstrations in major cities protesting the conduct of the elections. While freedom of expression on the Internet and in some print media continued, self-censorship and the government's ownership of and pressure on some print and most broadcast media outlets limited political discourse. Attacks on and killings of journalists and activists continued. Individuals who challenged the government or well-connected business interests sometimes faced physical attack, harassment, increased scrutiny from government

regulatory agencies, politically-motivated prosecutions, harsh detention conditions, and other forms of pressure. In the North Caucasus, the conflict among the government and insurgents, Islamist militants, and criminal elements led to numerous human rights abuses by security forces and insurgents.

In **Ukraine**, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and 12 other senior members of her government were charged with abuse of power and misuse of state funds during their tenure. Three have been convicted, including Tymoshenko and former interior minister Yuriy Lutsenko. Two others remain in custody, and the former minister of the economy, Bohdan Danylyshyn, fled the country and was granted political asylum in the Czech Republic. Many domestic and foreign observers considered the prosecutions to be politically motivated.

### **Near East**

In **Bahrain**, mass protests began in February calling for political reform and expanded civil rights for members the Shia majority. The government imposed a state of emergency, or “State of National Safety,” from March 15 to June 1, during which time military and civilian security forces committed a number of human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detentions, limitations on freedoms of speech and association, and lack of due process. Public employees were dismissed from their jobs for participating in protests, and individuals were prosecuted in both state security courts and civilian courts. In July, the king established the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which determined that 13 Bahraini civilians died at the hands of security forces and an additional five as a result of torture. Individuals who expressed critical opinions, including through music and social media, faced arrest, were subjected to extended detention, or prosecution. In its November 23 report, the BICI described a “culture of impunity” created by a lack of accountability of security officials during the unrest. Over the course of 2011, some political prisoners were released and some dismissed employees were reinstated, but other prosecutions of journalists, activists, and opposition figures for their alleged anti-government activities continued. After the release of the report, the government began to take steps to implement the recommendations of the BICI, such as allowing access to prisons by the International Committee of the Red Cross, establishing a process to address worker reinstatements in collaboration with the trade union and employers, and restructuring oversight mechanisms in the Ministry of Interior and Bahrain National Security Agency.

In **Egypt**, massive street demonstrations culminated in the February 11 resignation of President Hosni Mubarak and the transfer of executive authority to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. A March 2011 referendum for a new constitution, and voting in parliamentary elections conducted from November 2011 through February 2012, were considered the freest in decades. However, human rights abuses were rampant during the uprising and continued after Mubarak's resignation. Attacks on demonstrators by security forces and clashes among demonstrators killed more than 900 people; female protesters were subjected to harassment and so-called "virginity tests," and journalists and bloggers were detained for criticizing the military. Sectarian violence escalated over the course of the year, with more than 90 people, primarily Coptic Christians, killed in religious clashes. Few perpetrators of abuses were held accountable.

The government of **Iran** continued to deny its citizens human rights, including the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, movement, and religion. It sentenced hundreds of people to death and carried out hundreds of executions without due process. It cracked down on all forms of dissent, arresting and detaining activists, opposition leaders, lawyers, journalists, artists, and academics. It executed juveniles, tortured political prisoners, and detained more journalists than nearly any country in the world. It limited the rights of citizens to peacefully change their government through free and fair elections, and also placed under house arrest for most of the year the two leaders of the main opposition movement, arbitrarily arrested their supporters, closed their websites and newspapers, and harassed their families. The Iranian government arrested, tortured, and prosecuted many for dissent, including demonstrators who rallied in solidarity with protesters in Tunisia and Egypt. It continued to mistreat women, LGBT people, and members of ethnic and religious minorities. Government officials made anti-Semitic statements, and disproportionately targeted members of minority groups, including Kurds, Arabs, Azeris, and Baluchis, for arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention, and physical abuse. The government also isolated its citizens by imposing severe restrictions on the Internet.

**Iraq's** most significant human rights abuses included reports of unlawful killings and violence, torture, impunity, disappearances, and widespread corruption. Abuses were committed by sectarian and ethnic armed groups and government-affiliated forces. Both terrorist groups, principally Sunni, such as al-Qaida in Iraq, and militant organizations, largely Shia, committed attacks against members of other sects or ethnic groups, security forces, places of worship, religious pilgrims, economic infrastructure, and government officials. Through suicide bombings, attacks with improvised explosive devices, drive-by shootings, and other acts of

violence, the groups aimed to weaken the government and deepen sectarian divisions.

In **Libya**, a revolution ended the Qadhafi regime, which perpetrated systematic human rights abuses throughout its four-decade rule and was also responsible for the majority of civilian deaths and abuses during the seven-month conflict in 2011. Abuses were committed by various actors in 2011, including after the conflict, and often with impunity. These included disappearances, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, abuse and lack of review in detention, and violence and widespread discrimination against migrants and members of some ethnic minorities. Following Qadhafi's death on October 20 and the takeover of his last stronghold in Sirte, the Transitional National Council declared the country's "liberation" on October 23 and remained an arm of the interim government engaged in transition planning. The interim Government of Libya expressed support for the protection of human rights for all people in Libya, but due to weak institutions, limited capacity, and a lack of control over the security environment, its ability to enforce the rule of law was limited. Continuing violence, organizational dysfunction, and corruption led to ongoing human rights abuses, particularly in the areas outside government control.

In **Syria**, nonviolent antigovernment demonstrations began in mid-March and continued throughout 2011. The government of President al-Asad used indiscriminate and deadly force to quell peaceful protests throughout the country and launched military assaults on several of its own cities. Government forces deprived cities of electricity, water, and medical services, and restricted entry and exit for approximately 20 days while using military weaponry on buildings, mosques, and other civilian targets. Despite the regime's November 2 agreement to an Arab League plan to engage in reforms and cease killing civilians, it continued to use deadly force against peaceful protesters. At the year's end, activists reported ongoing arrests, torture, intimidation, rape, extra-judicial killings and the use of military force against civilians. The government attempted to stop the flow of information about state violence, including by banning smart phones that had been used to document state violence against civilians, including children. Nonetheless, images of protesters allegedly being beaten, arrested, and killed continued to be smuggled out of the country and to appear on social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook. As next year's Human Rights Reports will cover, the situation deteriorated sharply early this year, with the government waging massive military operations against cities and towns, and laying siege to Homs and other cities. As of March, the United Nations estimated that more than 9,000 civilians had been killed since the beginning of the demonstrations. Efforts by the

International Committee of the Red Cross to provide humanitarian assistance and medical care to besieged civilians were frequently thwarted by state forces.

The Arab Spring began in **Tunisia** in December 2010, when a young vendor named Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the headquarters of the provincial government to protest the confiscation of his goods by the police and the refusal of local officials to hear his complaint. That action, and the weeks of protests it sparked, ultimately toppled the Ben Ali regime. On October 23, a Constituent Assembly, the body that will draft a new constitution and appoint a new interim government, was elected. The proceedings were considered free and fair and marked the first open, inclusive, and truly democratic election in Tunisia's history. Overall, the January Revolution created an extraordinary opening for the protection of human rights in Tunisia. Under Ben Ali's 23-year dictatorship, human rights were systematically ignored. After the Revolution, restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association diminished significantly. Exiled activists returned, political prisoners were released, and civil society and human rights activists pursued their work without disruption or intimidation by the state.

### **South and Central Asia**

**Afghanistan** experienced continuing human rights challenges in 2011, including armed insurgent groups' killings of persons affiliated with the government and indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Corruption was pervasive. International organizations documented cases of alleged torture and abuse of detainees by the National Directorate for Security and Afghan National Police. Violence and discrimination against Afghan women and girls remained widespread, and in many cases, the police did not respond to such abuses. Women active in public life faced threats and violence and were attacked by the Taliban and other insurgents. A political dispute continued during the year over President Karzai's appointment of a special tribunal, not envisioned in the constitution, to adjudicate the disputed 2010 election results, until it was resolved in accordance with Afghan law in August.

In October, **Kyrgyzstan** experienced its first peaceful transfer of power in the republic's 20-year history. The elections, in which Almazbek Atambayev, the sitting prime minister, became president, were deemed generally transparent and competitive by independent observers. Ethnic tensions that had erupted in clashes in the south of Kyrgyzstan in 2010 continued in 2011, as did pervasive discrimination against ethnic Uzbeks and members of other minority groups. Law enforcement officers in the south reportedly committed such violations as arbitrary

arrest, mistreatment, torture, and extortion against all demographic groups, but particularly against ethnic Uzbeks. The central government's inability to hold human rights violators accountable allowed security forces to act arbitrarily, emboldening law enforcement to prey on vulnerable citizens. Further, the weakness of central authority empowered mobs to disrupt dozens of trials by attacking defendants, attorneys, witnesses, and judges.

**Pakistan** continued to struggle with extrajudicial killings, torture, and forced disappearances committed by security forces and by extremist or separatist groups. These affected thousands of citizens in nearly all areas of the country. Both militant, terrorist, or extremist groups and security forces committed human rights abuses. Religious tensions remained high. On January 4, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was assassinated by his bodyguard because of his opposition to the blasphemy law, which was used to clamp down on freedoms of expression and religion. On March 2, Federal Minister for Minorities Shabbaz Bhatti, the only Christian in the Pakistani Cabinet, was shot to death. Bhatti also was an outspoken critic of the blasphemy law. The political, sectarian, and ethnic violence that has long plagued Karachi worsened during the year due in part to a large influx of Sindhi, Baloch, and Pashtun migrants following the 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods. Political parties and their affiliated gangs vied for political and economic control over these new populations. It was estimated that between 925 and 1,400 persons were killed due to sectarian and political violence in Karachi between January and August.

In **Sri Lanka**, disappearances and killings pro-government paramilitary groups continued, predominantly in Tamil areas. There were persistent reports of close, ground-level ties between paramilitary groups and government security forces. Civil society activists, persons viewed as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam sympathizers, and journalists were attacked, intimidated or harassed by persons allegedly tied to the government. Torture and abuse of detainees and poor prison conditions remained a problem, and authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens. A number of suspects died in detention under questionable circumstances. There was official impunity for a wide range of such human rights abuses. The president used his authority under the 18th Amendment, which passed in September 2010, to take greater control of appointments to previously independent public institutions that oversee compliance by the judiciary and the police, and with Sri Lanka's human rights obligations. A disproportionate number of victims of human rights abuses were Tamils.

In **Uzbekistan**, the centralized executive branch dominated political life and exercised nearly complete control over the other branches of government. Security forces reportedly tortured and abused detainees. Criminal suspects were denied due process and fair trial. Religious freedom was restricted, and religious minority group members were harassed and imprisoned. Other continuing human rights problems included: incommunicado and prolonged detention; harsh and sometimes life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; restrictions on freedoms of speech, assembly, and association; governmental restrictions on civil society activity; restrictions on freedom of movement; restrictions on the media; violence against women; and government-organized forced labor in cotton harvesting. Authorities subjected human rights activists, journalists, and others who criticized the government to harassment, arbitrary arrest, and politically motivated prosecution and detention. Government officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

### **Western Hemisphere**

In **Cuba**, the government continued its systemic repression of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of speech, assembly, and association, and imposed severe restrictions on the media. The government strictly controlled all access to information. Human rights advocates were detained arbitrarily with increasing frequency; the number of short-term detentions doubled from 2010 to 2011. The government continued to organize mobs intended to intimidate opposition groups, particularly the Damas de Blanco (“Ladies in White”). These acts of repudiation (“actos de repudio”) were particularly aggressive in July and August, and in October the government belied its claim that the mobs were spontaneous by announcing that it would deploy them to prevent the Damas de Blanco from marching peacefully. Government officials and government-organized mobs detained, harassed, and assaulted dozens of peaceful human rights activists, journalists, and others to prevent them from marking Human Rights Day on December 10. Almost 800 detentions were recorded in December, a 30-year high.

**Honduras** had an extremely high murder rate, and crime and human rights abuses continued at very high levels. As in much of Central America, violence was perpetrated by gangs and drug trafficking organizations, and was a significant problem. The Honduran police force had deep-seated and unaddressed corruption problems, and police officers targeted vulnerable persons, including LGBT people. Four journalists were murdered. On December 7, unknown gunmen on a motorcycle shot and killed former senior government advisor on security Alfredo

Landaverde. In the weeks preceding his death, Landaverde alleged that the National Police leadership was linked to organized crime and called for a clean-up. Police, vigilantes, and former members of the security forces carried out arbitrary and summary killings. The Honduran government established an independent internal affairs office and an outside police reform commission to address corruption in the National Police. In the Bajo Aguan region, there continued to be reports of killings of private security guards, agricultural workers, and security forces related to a land dispute.

In **Mexico**, the most serious human rights challenges in 2011 emanated from the country's fight against organized crime, which involved frequent clashes between security forces and drug cartels, which function as transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). Both TCOs and the gangs linked to them battled for control of drug trafficking routes and markets. TCOs remained the most significant perpetrator of violent crimes in Mexico. They engaged in human trafficking and used brutal tactics against citizens, including inhumane treatment, murder, and widespread intimidation. TCOs had a chilling effect on the media, executing bloggers who reported on their activities and threatening journalists who criticized them. In Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, TCOs killed two bloggers in September and posted messages on their bodies warning of retaliation against anyone commenting about their activities on social media. A third Nuevo Laredo blogger was allegedly beaten and then killed in November, again in retaliation for posting comments on the Internet about local drug cartels. In the context of the fight against TCOs, but also at times unrelated to it, security forces reportedly engaged in unlawful killings, forced disappearances, and instances of physical abuse and torture.

In **Venezuela**, there was an accelerating concentration of power in the executive branch. President Chavez used a December 2010 law granting him broad authority to decree laws for a period of 18 months without consultation or approval by the elected National Assembly, to decree restrictions to fundamental economic and property rights. The government also took actions to impede freedom of expression and criminalize dissent. It harassed and intimidated privately owned television stations, other media outlets, and journalists throughout the year, using threats, fines, property seizures, targeted regulations, and criminal investigations and prosecutions. Anti-Semitism colored official media attacks on opponents. The government used the judiciary to intimidate and prosecute political, union, business, and civil society leaders who were critical of government policies or actions.