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## INSIGHTS



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**When will Pakistan attain women  
protection and empowerment?**



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# Ukraine: Russian Torture Center in Kherson

## *Unlawful Detention, Torture of Civilians During 8-Month Occupation*

Russian forces unlawfully detained and tortured residents of the city of Kherson and its vicinity during their occupation of the area between March and November 2022, Human Rights Watch said today.

Victims and their family members told Human Rights Watch about torture and other ill-treatment at a pretrial detention center on Teploenerhetykiv Street in Kherson that local residents

carried out terrifying torture and other abuses against Kherson residents in the torture center on Teploenerhetykiv Street and numerous other detention facilities,” said Yulia Gorbunova, senior Ukraine researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Those responsible for these horrific acts should not go unpunished and the victims and their families need to receive redress for their suffering and information about those still missing.”

Human Rights Watch inter-

ducted with Khersonska region residents during earlier months of the occupation, for a July 2022 report.

Russian forces in Kherson appeared to adopt a similar pattern in their treatment of civilians throughout the occupation. They would aggressively search a residence and then detain one or more people living there on a variety of accusations. Several detainees reported that the Russian forces beat and threatened them or their relatives, including older people. Russian sol-

municipal administration building. Another said that her cellmate had previously been held in a pretrial detention center on at 10 Perekopska Street, where the BBC and others reported that Russian occupation forces tortured people. Another former detainee, taken about 120 kilometers from Kherson, said he was held in a 2-by-3 meter storage room of a village school.

Human Rights Watch previously documented cases of torture of detainees, including



referred to as a “hole,” as well as a detention facility on Perekopska Street and makeshift facilities at the municipal administration building, a village school, and an airport hangar. Former detainees consistently reported similar forms of abuse, including severe beatings with sticks and rubber batons, electric shocks, threats of death or mutilation, and use of painful stress positions. No adequate medical care was provided to detainees.

“Russian occupying forces

viewed 34 people about the abusive treatment of civilians during the Russian occupation of the Khersonska region, from March 2, 2022 until the withdrawal of Russian forces from much of the area on November 11. Twelve former detainees and 10 family members described detainees being tortured or witnessing the torture of other detainees, which in three reported cases resulted in their deaths. These interviews about torture build on dozens of others about torture that Human Rights Watch con-

ductors would then cover the eyes or head of those being taken into custody with a hat or bag and force them into a vehicle. They would then be taken to one of the 20 or more detention centers in and around Kherson.

Nearly all of the torture cases documented recently in Kherson involved people held in the pretrial detention center at 3 Teploenerhetykiv Street, 3. One person was also held in makeshift detention facilities at the Kherson International Airport and in the Kherson

Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Territorial Defense Forces, at the former National Police Directorate building on 4 Liuteranska Street (formerly Kirova Street).

One former detainee held at Teploenerhetykiv Street said, “There were five men. ... They were all beaten up. There was one who had been shot in the leg; another one had a broken rib. We heard screams [of people being beaten] all day and night. People would be screaming at 3 a.m. and in the evenings. ... They didn’t give



medical help to anyone.” Russian guards also humiliated detainees by forcing them to shout pro-Russian slogans, listen to and sing the Russian national anthem and patriotic songs, and applaud the singers, under threat of beatings.

Most relatives interviewed said they were provided no information about the location of their loved ones, which is required by the international law of occupation. Many desperately searched and attempted to deliver packages of food and other essentials without knowing whether they reached the intended recipient. Detainees and families said that Russian occupying authorities took them and their loved ones into custody for engaging in actual or suspected volunteer activities, providing or expressing support for Ukrainian forces or the government, or for being a veteran of the 2014 Ukrainian security force operations in the Donbas region.

One woman said that Russian forces detained her because they could not locate her husband, and held her hostage until he gave himself up the next day.

When the Ukrainian military retook Kherson in November 2022, Russian forces retreating to the left bank of the Dnipro River took along some detained civilians without fundamental protections, and unlawfully transferred them. These

included three men whose family members Human Rights Watch interviewed. Two were released but not allowed to leave still-occupied areas. The Russians also unlawfully transferred and forcibly disappeared a detained activist from Kherson to Simferopol, in Russian-occupied Crimea. Russian authorities have not provided information on her whereabouts and have detained her incommunicado without access to a lawyer.

Ukrainian authorities have been investigating cases of unlawful detention, torture, and other mistreatment in Kherson and the surrounding region during the Russian occupation.

Eugen Tereshenko, a prosecutor with the war crimes unit for the Khersonska region, estimates that there were 4,000 to 5,000 registered cases of civilians

detained during this period, but the actual number may have been much higher.

It is a war crime to willfully mistreat, torture, or kill civilians or captured combatants in custody, to willfully cause great suffering or serious injury to body or health, or to carry out unlawful deportations or transfers.

“Five months after Russian forces retreated from Kherson and surrounding areas, we’re still only scratching the surface of their atrocities, and the treatment of all Ukrainian civilians in occupied areas is increasingly alarming,” Gorbunova said. “Russian personnel up the chain of command should be on notice that they will be accountable for every crime they commit.”

For more details on torture in Kherson and accounts from witnesses, please see below.

Torture by Russian Forces in

time, Human Rights Watch documented 42 cases in which Russian forces either forcibly disappeared civilians or otherwise held them arbitrarily, in some cases incommunicado, and tortured many of them.

Since Russian forces retreated from Kherson in November, Human Rights Watch conducted additional research into the detention facilities located in Temporary Detention Isolator No. 1, at 3 Teploenerhetykiv Street, at the municipal administration building, at a village school, and at an airport hangar. One person said that her cellmate was held at a detention facility on at 10 Perekopska Street. None of the people interviewed were given any documentation regarding their detention.

The accounts below are based on interviews Human Rights Watch conducted either by phone or in person in Kyiv

band] is 59, has cancer, and is very weak. They struck him in the chest three or four times with the butts of their automatic rifles, and in the arm. He fell.”

The man being sought returned home and was immediately detained. His wife got a taxi and followed the car holding her husband as it drove to the detention facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street.

In another case, about 10 Russian soldiers, some wearing balaclavas, entered the home of Serhiy Ihnativ, 47, in the village of Zelenivka, on the outskirts of Kherson, on April 20, searched his home, and beat and detained him. Stas, the 20-year-old boyfriend of Ihnativ’s daughter, was there at the time and said that Ihnativ’s head was severely bruised and bleeding. Then some of the soldiers beat Stas. In a telephone interview, Stas said,

“They started to beat me on the legs, on my ankle bone, and I fell. They said, ‘We’re going to rape your girlfriend in front of you, and cut your balls off.’”

The soldiers put Ihnativ, Stas, and Stas’ brother, who was also visiting, in a military vehicle and drove off. Along the way, the soldiers let the two younger men out of the car, without explanation. “The last time I saw him, in that vehicle, he sat there as if in a fog,” Stas said of Ihnativ. “It was clear that something was

wrong with his head, probably a concussion.”

The family filed appeals with the police and prosecutors’ offices. At some point the occupation authority commandant’s office told Ihnativ’s wife that he was in prison. His family has had no information about him since then.

Torture at Detention Facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street Human Rights Watch documented the following cases of torture and other ill-treatment at the Temporary Detention Facility No.1, on at 3 Teploenerhetykiv Street in Kherson. This is not an exhaustive list of mistreatments at the facility.

“Valentyn”

A young man who said he was detained with Valentyn on May 24 told Valentyn’s relative that Russian forces had beaten Valentyn, as they did all detainees in the first hours and



Ukraine

Human Rights Watch, the United Nations, other human rights organizations, and the media have widely reported on Russian military forces’ use of torture and other ill-treatment, as well as summary executions and enforced disappearances, against civilians and captured combatants in their custody, in areas under Russian occupation. Typically, the full extent of Russian abuses, which amount to war crimes, is not known until after the withdrawal of Russian forces from the area, and even then, the information is incomplete.

In July, Human Rights Watch published a report based on interviews with people from the Russia-occupied Khersonska and Zaporizska regions of Ukraine, including Kherson, Melitopol, Berdyansk, Skadovsk, and other cities and towns. At that

between November 21 and December 30 after an initial visit to Kherson in November. The names of one interviewee and their detained family member have been withheld at their request, to protect their safety. Some others are identified only by their first name for the same reason.

Abusive Detention of Civilians Several people said that Russian forces who came to search their homes or arrest them beat, kicked, and used other unnecessary force against the person taken into custody and their family members.

A woman who lives in a village near Kherson said that soldiers came looking for a relative “Valentyn” [not his real name], who was not at home: “The Russian soldiers started to beat my husband right on the street and demanded that he call [Valentyn]. [My hus-



days of their detention at the pretrial facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street. The Russian guards typically placed hats or bags on the heads of the new arrivals, tortured them with electroshock and beat them until they lost consciousness. The guards then returned the detainee to their cell and poured water on them until they regained consciousness. The young man also said that the guards had forced Valentyn to stand all night with his arms above his head and beat him when he lowered them.

After nearly four months, Russian forces transferred Valentyn to another cell, and then, when they retreated to the left bank of the Dnipro River, took him with them. His relative said that Valentyn remained in detention in occupied Chaplynka, Khersonska region, in a basement at 46 Hrushevskogo Street until late December. A family member traveled to the facility to deliver food and when she asked about Valentyn, the Russian soldiers only said, "What, you want to go join him?" At the end of December, Valentyn was released without explanation, but is not permitted to leave occupied Chaplynka.

Serhii Chornousov

Serhii Chornousov, 41, a physical education teacher at the Chornobaivka Lyceum, a secondary school, and a local council member, lived in Chornobaivka on the outskirts of Kherson with his wife, Svitlana, and their three daughters. Soon after Russia's full-scale invasion, he participated in a local "people's guard," an unarmed force of about 100 volunteers who patrolled Chornobaivka and surrounding areas to prevent looting and who provided utility and building repairs in the village. He also helped people flee Kherson, driving them to Odesa, and returning with medicine.

On June 8, three men wearing black T-shirts and jeans and introducing themselves as agents of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB, in the Russian acronym), detained Chornousov and took him to the Kherson airport, in Chornobaivka. In a telephone interview, Chornousov said that Russian soldiers beat and tortured him there:

They strip-searched me for tattoos, and had me face the

wall completely naked. They put a knife to my genitals -- held it between my legs. They stabbed me once below my buttocks. I still have scars. ... That went on for three to three-and-a-half 3½ hours. Then they put a pistol to back of my head and said, "If you are Orthodox, pray!" After that they shot twice [into the air]. After several hours, Russian soldiers took Chornousov to the Kherson municipal administration building, where they had set up a military commandant's office. They held him in a cell in the building's basement and tortured him again in the evening. "At night they took me out of the cell and handcuffed my hands behind



my back," he said. "They started to beat me. They bruised [the areas around] my kidney, ribs, and arms. They tortured me with electric shocks for about 20 minutes. One clip on my ear and one on my right little finger."

On June 10, Chornousov was transferred to Teploenerhetykiv Street, where he remained until July 12 and was repeatedly interrogated. He was not physically tortured there but shared a cell with several men who had been tortured.

Among his cellmates was another detainee named Serhii, in his 40s, from Tekstylne village. Chornousov said that Russian personnel had tortured Serhii and then brought him into the cell, beat him, and that he believes Serhii died as a result:

He just crawled into the cell. Then four or five people ran into the cell and continued to beat him. They beat him for 10 minutes, right under the bunk. ... He started making these sounds [that one makes] when there is not enough air. He was struggling to breathe. I think

his ribs had been broken.

Chornousov tried to get Serhii medical attention:

I started shouting for an ambulance. They [Russian military personnel] came in, gave me a bucket and a wet towel, said to put it on his head. After another [few] minutes, I started to shout again, "He's dying, call a doctor!" ... Then they came in with a stretcher and carried him out.

Chornousov presumed that Serhii died. The next day, Chornousov said, the deputy head of the detention center came to Chornousov's cell and said, "Do you want to live? ... We'll come in the morning. Write what we say." Chornousov's captors had pre-

any food and] made him starve."

According to Chornousov, about 120 detainees were in the facility when he was released. He said that there were two cells with women, he believed from ages 18 to 60. "I could hear the use of physical force [against them]," he said. Svitlana, Chornousov's wife, said that she had virtually no information about her husband's whereabouts during his detention. Initially she went every other day to the military commander's office, which involved three hours of driving and waiting for five hours in line, only to be told, "We will call you. Wait." Or "We don't know. Wait."

Two weeks after Chornousov's initial detention, an investigator told her that her husband was alive and in Kherson, although he did not specify where. Shortly thereafter, a former acquaintance who worked near the Teploenerhetykiv Street detention facility confirmed to her that her husband was there.

Roman Baklazhov

On July 6, 2022, Russian security forces detained Roman Baklazhov, who owned a small furniture business, at his home in Kherson and held him for 54 days in the pretrial detention facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street where they repeatedly tortured him. Baklazhov said that he believes he was detained in connection with his participation for six months in 2014 with Right Sector, an ultranationalist group. He said that six people came to detain him; judging by their clothing, he believes four were from the Russian National Guard and two from the FSB.

Baklazhov's captors questioned him four times. In the first interrogation, they used electric shocks:

They placed electrodes on my ear and between my fourth finger and my pinky. It lasted for two hours, with breaks. I sat on a stool. They demanded information about ... activists in 2014. ... In the interrogations after that they ... threatened to kill me. They'd say, for example, "We're going to take you away, shoot you, and no one will find you." ... They also said, "Now we're going to put an electrode on your dick and electrocute you."

Baklazhov said that the guards and the interrogators openly



used their call signs: "Hermes," "Yandex," "Mueller," and "Kuzmich." "Yandex" questioned him the most.

He described seeing other detained people who were severely beaten and received no medical attention.

Baklazhov said that his captors gave him and the other detainees one portion of hot cereal, water, and juice daily, and occasionally cookies, weak tea, or stale bread. They slept on bunks with no mattresses. Russian forces released him on August 29 without explanation and without any documentation of his detention. "My condition is really bad, both psychologically and physically," Baklazhov said. "I need rehabilitation."

Oleksandr

Oleksandr, 53, an electrician, had stayed in the village of Snihurivka, in Mykolaivska region, to support his 83-year-old mother who refused to evacuate, even after his family had left. Twice a day he went to visit her on his scooter. On one trip, on September 12, Russian security forces, who wore uniforms with OMON -- the Russian acronym for riot police -- stopped him at a checkpoint.

They searched his home, then accused him of being a lookout for the Ukrainian military, put a bag over his head, and detained him alone overnight in a dark basement somewhere in the village. In a telephone interview from Snihurivka, he said: "They started with questions, beatings, using the electroshock. They asked me about politics, and about what I had been doing. My ribs were beaten. My rib cage ached. None of the Russians cared how I was doing. ...[M]edicines -- they didn't give me any."

The next day they again put a hood on Oleksandr and took him to the detention facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street. They placed him in a cell designed for four people with seven other men from Kherson, three of them over 60. The day before his release, he witnessed Russian personnel beating another detainee. He said that he spent a week in the hospital after his release: "After the beating my ribs, my chest hurt. I couldn't lie down, I couldn't stand."

Olha Strohan, Oleksandr Strohan

On August 10, four armed men, two in black uniforms

and two in military camouflage, all wearing masks, came to the home of Olha and Oleksandr Strohan, both 53, in Chornobaivka, looking for Oleksandr, who was not at home. After waiting for a few hours, the Russian forces detained Olha, telling her that they were going to hold her until her husband turned himself in. They forced her to wear a wool hat that covered her face, despite very hot weather, and took her to the detention facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street. She said in a telephone interview that she sat there for 40 minutes and that someone hit her under her shoulder blades and grabbed her by the neck when she tried to look

"We saw each other only briefly," she said. "The Russians said, 'Say goodbye. You won't see him again.'"

The next day, a man identifying himself as "Dima Elbrus," of the Russian FSB, called Olha and put Oleksandr on the phone. He asked her to bring him his phone. Afraid that there might be information on the phone harmful to her husband, Olha claimed she could not find it. Then she heard punches and feared Oleksandr was being beaten. "He screamed terribly," she said. She then rushed the phone to the pretrial detention facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street.

For a month, Olha had no information about her hus-

band, but eventually learned from "Elbrus" that they had charged Oleksandr with "organizing a terrorist operation." She also learned from his former cellmates that Russian forces tortured Oleksandr and others with electroshocks by putting a wet shirt on them, placing an electrode on one nipple and another electrode on his scrotum, and then forcing another detainee sitting behind a partition to turn on the electricity. They also beat detainees with sticks.

Former detainees who shared a cell with Oleksandr told Olha that the Russian captors would interrogate Oleksandr every other day for about two hours, and that those in the cell could hear him screaming wildly. After one interrogation he was spitting blood in the cell and showed bruises from a beating on a previously injured leg, they said.

On October 18, when Olha went to deliver a package to Oleksandr, she learned that Russian troops who retreated from Kherson had taken some detainees with them, first to the town of Oleshky, which has remained under their control. For many weeks, Olha did not know where he was. She eventually heard from a former cellmate that Oleksandr was moved to Kalanchak, about 85 kilometers south of Kherson, and was being held in a small cell with 10 other men. One former detainee who was in Kalanchak said that detainees received only one bottle of cold water and a packet of dried noodles to eat each day. Oleksandr's daughter told Human Rights Watch that as the family tried to search for him, at one point a Russian investigator said that they could secure his release by paying a large sum of money, which the family does not have.

Leonid Remyga

Leonid Remyga, 68, the chief doctor at the Afansii and Olha Tropyny Kherson Municipal Clinical Hospital, said that starting in early March 2022, he had resisted pressure from Russian occupying forces to cooperate, including by demanding that the hospital cease contact with the Ukrainian Ministry of Health and the National



Health Service of Ukraine.

Armed soldiers first attempted to detain Remyga at the hospital in early July, accusing him of passing information about Russian troop locations to the Ukrainian security services. After they threatened to remove him from his position, detain, and mistreat him, he had a small stroke, was admitted to the hospital's intensive care unit, and received treatment there as he had difficulty walking. During that time, Russian security personnel demanded that hospital staff tell them when Remyga was to be released. He escaped from the hospital and lived in hiding for several weeks. After luring Remyga to a meeting, Russian forces detained him on September 20 and took him to the pretrial detention facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street, where they held him for eight days: They beat me with a stick on my legs, arms, and body. They used electroshock on me one

around. Olha began to feel sick and had difficulty breathing in the heat with her face fully covered by the hat. As personnel walked Olha through the building, she tripped and fell, and soldiers hit and kicked her several times. They placed her in a 2.5-meter by 3-meter cell with two bunks with five other women, some of whom had been there for up to 25 days. Once they placed Olha in the cell, her captors allowed her to remove the hat. Olha described seeing Russian guards take one woman, Ira, out of the cell to interrogate her, and when they returned Ira to the cell, her face and head were bruised, and she had blood coming out of her ear. They forced all of the women to shout pro-Russian slogans such as "Glory to Putin!", sing Russian songs, and applaud the singers, under threat of beatings.

Russian forces released Olha on August 11 after her husband returned home from a trip and Russian forces detained him.

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time, in my armpit. One time, they took us all out of the cells and forced us to squat for a long time. If someone moved, they got a blow to the head.

There were eight of us in a cell for four people. The conditions were inhuman. Every day we could hear torture, we could hear screams.

The worst was when we were forced to sing the Russian national anthem. We had to stand at attention and yell, "Glory to Russia!" ... When someone sang ... we had to clap for him. If we didn't applaud [loudly enough], they'd take us from our cell and beat us again.

Remyga believed that he had been detained for his refusal to collaborate with Russian forces and for his openly pro-Ukraine position. He also stated that when they detained him, officials used an electronic device to scan his photograph and photographs on his phone to determine if he had been involved in any protests, going back to 2014. Russian forces released Remyga on September 28, without providing any documentation of his detention, and told him not to leave Kherson.

Eugen Rodionov

Eugen Rodionov, 44, was the deputy head of the Chornobaivka village council. When Russian forces occupied the area, he continued to ensure the village had functioning utilities, garbage collection, humanitarian assistance, and security to prevent looting. On May 2, Russian security personnel wearing olive-green uniforms detained and questioned him in the village council office and tried to pressure him to cooperate with them. When he refused, they handcuffed him, covered his eyes with a hat, and took him to the pretrial detention facility on Teploenerhetykiv Street. He was not physically harmed, but heard the screams of others:

There was no physical pressure, but they put me under a lot of psychological pressure to cooperate. It was hell. When you don't know what is happening outside the detention center, you have no information. Only the sounds of interrogations. Mostly in the evenings and at night I heard screams. It seemed like they were using electricity.

He said he saw men ages 18 to 50 or 60 among the detainees as well as two women. Rodionov was released on

May 14 and quickly fled Chornobaivka for western Ukraine, fearing for his safety. Unlawful Transfer, Torture at Simferopol Detention Facility Iryna Horobtsova

In May, Russian soldiers detained Iryna Horobtsova, 38, at her apartment in Kherson where she lived with her parents, who are in their 70s. After aggressively searching the apartment, they took Horobtsova along with laptop computers, cellphones, and a power bank. Horobtsova's parents began searching for her immediately but received no information from local officials.

Daria, a woman who was held with Horobtsova in a pretrial detention facility in Simferopol for three weeks in September, said that Russian security forces had transferred Horobtsova there shortly after detaining her in Kherson. Daria, who is identified only by her first name for her safety, described seeing Horobtsova after she had been in solitary confinement in a cell for three months:

Her condition was bad. Her first question to me was, "Can I give you a hug?" Then I told her, "You are like an open wound that isn't healing." And that was then, more than two months ago. She was despondent ... she just sat and cried all the time.

Daria said that Horobtsova told her that her detention had been harsh. Russian security forces transferred her with a hat pulled down over her eyes. During her interrogation, two weeks after being detained, they set up an automatic rifle in front of her and threatened to burn her with a clothes iron if she didn't "tell them everything." The facility guards never allowed Horobtsova or Daria out of the 6-by-2 meter cell for walks. There was a camera monitoring the cell at all times. "We heard them [the male detainees] screaming horribly at night and during the day," Daria said.

Horobtsova's family hired a lawyer in Simferopol in August. The lawyer sent numerous requests to several Russian ministries and agencies and received contradictory answers about her whereabouts. Ultimately, he learned that she was being held for "resisting" Russia's "special military operation." He went to the pretrial detention facility twice to try to meet with

Horobtsova as her legal representative, but was refused entry.

Her sister said that during the Russian occupation of Kherson, Horobtsova had participated in protests against the Russian occupation, volunteered to support others in the community with food and rides, and posted pro-Ukrainian content on social media.

Torture at School in Biliaivka Serhiy Urodlivichenko

On March 11, 2022, Russian soldiers detained Serhiy Urodlivichenko, 47, while he was working in a greenhouse in the town of Liubimovka because he did not have his identity documents with him. They first held him at a corn farm and after approximately three weeks, took him and others to a school in Biliaivka, a city about 120 kilometers northeast of Kherson. Urodlivichenko was eventually held with 10 other men, ages 23 to 69, in a small, dark, small, 2-by-3 meter storage room. The detainees made a hole in an old sewer pipe to use as a toilet. Their captors gave them very little food and did not allow them to contact relatives. Urodlivichenko heard other detainees being beaten and witnessed the deaths of two of them:

We heard screams, as if someone was being beaten. Then he was thrown into the cell with us with his hands tied. ... He screamed loudly to be untied. He was beaten and said something about electroshock. We realized he was the farmer Oleh Kovalyuk from Miroliubovka. He died after 20 minutes. We called the guards and said that he had died. .... They took the body away the next day. That is, his body lay in the cell for a day.

Another detainee was taken away for three days and returned. After another three days he died. He said he was [held] in some blue [airline] hangar and was well fed. He said that he was injected with something. After that he died. Urodlivichenko said that other men brought to the cell had been beaten with rifle butts, punched, and kicked and had their heads covered in bags. Detainees received little to no medical treatment and were not told about the reasons for their detention, he said.

International Legal Obligations

All parties to the armed con-

flict in Ukraine are obligated to abide by international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, and customary international law. International human rights law, including notably both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, is also applicable.

The Fourth Geneva Convention, which addresses the responsibilities of an occupying power, permits the internment or assigned residence of civilians only for "imperative reasons of security." This must be carried out in accordance with a regular procedure permissible under international humanitarian law. Protections include the right to contest the basis for detention, access to counsel and family members, and humane treatment at all times.

The ban against torture and other ill-treatment is one of the most fundamental prohibitions in international humanitarian and human rights law. No exceptional circumstances can justify torture. Anyone deprived of liberty must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, and medical attention. The Geneva Conventions specifically require parties to a conflict to permit access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to detained civilians and prisoners-of-war.

It is a war crime to willfully mistreat, torture, or kill civilians or captured combatants in custody, to willfully cause great suffering or serious injury to body or health, or to carry out unlawful deportations or transfers. Commanders of forces who knew or had reason to know about such crimes but did not attempt to stop them or punish those responsible are criminally liable for war crimes as a matter of command responsibility.

Russia and Ukraine have obligations under the Geneva Conventions to investigate alleged war crimes committed by their forces or on their territory and appropriately prosecute those responsible. Victims of abuse and their families should receive prompt and adequate redress.



# Saudi Arabia: Microsoft Should Hold Off On Data Center

## Regional Cloud Expansion Risks Furthering Privacy Rights Abuses

Microsoft should suspend its investment in a new cloud data center region in Saudi Arabia until it can clearly demonstrate how it will mitigate the risk of facilitating serious human rights violations, Human Rights Watch said today.

In February 2023, Microsoft announced its intention to invest in a cloud data center in Saudi Arabia to offer enterprise cloud services, despite the government's well-established record of infiltrating technology platforms and ongoing domestic repression. Saudi Arabia's anti-cybercrime and data protection laws severely undermine the right to privacy, enable unchecked state surveillance, and allow Saudi state agencies to access data using overly broad and ill-defined "security reasons," raising serious concerns about Microsoft's ability to uphold its human rights responsibilities while operating in the country.

"Saudi authorities have grievously violated their own citizens' right to privacy by hacking phones, infiltrating major tech companies, and passing laws granting sweeping surveillance powers to government entities," said Arvind Ganesan, economic justice and human rights director at Human Rights Watch. "Microsoft should not shut its eyes to Saudi Arabia's abuses and should halt its investment until the company can meaningfully explain how it will mitigate human rights risks." Establishing a cloud data center in Saudi Arabia poses unique and direct risks to human rights because the government may get access to that user data. The Saudi government has already shown it will violate privacy, freedom of expression, association, nondiscrimination, and due process rights. Human Rights Watch wrote to Microsoft in

February 2023 highlighting these concerns. Microsoft responded to questions from Human Rights Watch and noted Microsoft's commitment to the Trusted Cloud Principles and its approach for operating datacenters in countries or regions with human rights

data by the Saudi government in the country's courts.

The country's new data protection law and executive regulations grant sweeping powers to government agencies to access personal data. The entities that control data are permitted to disclose data to state agencies

Principles, an initiative by global tech giants expressing a commitment to protect the rights of customers, states that cloud service providers "support laws that allow governments to request data through a transparent process that abides by international recognized



challenges, but requested its responses remain off-the-record.

Saudi Arabia authorities' egregious record on human rights, including their infiltration of Twitter to spy on dissidents and targeting of human rights activists and political dissidents with sophisticated digital surveillance technology poses problems for companies committing to protect users' privacy rights, Human Rights Watch said.

Systemic abuses in the Saudi justice system, lack of due process, and wholesale repression of political dissidents and independent civil society raises serious concerns about Microsoft's ability to adhere to its stated human rights commitments or to effectively contest problematic requests for

based on vague and overbroad "security reasons," which are not defined in the law. The law does not appear to provide for any independent oversight of these government powers.

Saudi Arabia's 2007 anti-cybercrime law criminalizes the "production, preparation, transmission, or storage of material impinging on public order, religious values, public morals, or privacy," which could be used by Saudi authorities to force Microsoft to hand over user data on people accused of such broad, ill-defined, and abusive charges. Microsoft has publicly committed to ensuring that the laws and policies are substantially in line with the Trusted Cloud Principles in the countries where the company operates. The Trusted Cloud

rule of law and human rights standards."

Saudi Arabia's laws and practices fall far below international human rights standards and the standards outlined in Microsoft's own Trusted Cloud Principles, Human Rights Watch said.

Prime Minister and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, has sharply escalated domestic repression, overseeing an intense crackdown on dissent coupled with a significant deterioration in due process rights in a country where the rule of law was already lacking.

In 2017, the country's prosecution service and security apparatus were placed directly under the oversight of the royal court, putting the pri-



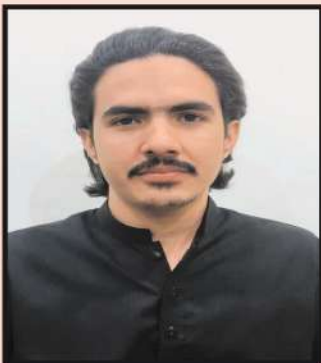
mary tools of Saudi repression in the sole hands of the king and crown prince. In August 2022, Saudi authorities sentenced Salma al-Shehab, a Saudi doctoral student, to decades in prison based solely on her Twitter activity. Saudi Arabia has allegedly infiltrated Twitter and unlawfully accessed personal information of Saudi citizens within that company, the US Department of Justice reported. In 2019, two Twitter employees were charged with spying for Saudi Arabia. Both were accused of accessing the private information of Saudi dissidents who utilized the platform to discuss current issues. This enabled the Saudi authorities to uncover information that is not available else-

where and to unmask the identities of anonymous critics. Saudi authorities also spied on their own citizens through targeted digital attacks. Citizen Lab, a Canadian academic research center, concluded with "high confidence" that in 2018, the mobile phone of a prominent Saudi activist based in Canada was infected with spyware, which allowed full access to the victim's personal files, such as chats, emails, and photos, as well as the ability to surreptitiously use the phone's microphones and cameras to view and eavesdrop. In July 2021, the Pegasus Project also found that Saudi Arabia was a client of the NSO Group's Pegasus spyware. NSO group has categorically denied that their technology was used to

spy on Jamal Khashoggi, a dissident who was killed in a Saudi consulate in Turkey. Given this reality, Microsoft's intention to invest raises serious concerns about how it can uphold its human rights responsibilities under the United Nations Guiding Principles to prevent or mitigate the potential adverse human rights impacts associated with locating a cloud data center in Saudi Arabia. Microsoft has a responsibility to respect human rights that exists independent of a country's willingness to fulfil its human rights obligations. The company's own statement on human rights asserts its commitment to "[o]perationalize human rights in our business and technologies." Microsoft's

global human rights statement says that the company "commits to respecting the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). We work every day to implement the UNGPs throughout Microsoft, both at headquarters and offices in approximately 200 countries and territories, and throughout our global supply chains." Human Rights Watch previously urged Google to reverse its decision to establish a cloud data center in Saudi Arabia because of the risk of serious adverse human rights impacts. "Microsoft should put rights first and not become a tool for Saudi authorities to further spy on people whose data is in Saudi Arabia," Ganesan said.

# FIFA Reverses Saudi Sponsorship of Women's World Cup



**Arbaz Khan**

**E**mir and President of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, FIFA President Gianni Infantino, and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud at the 2022 Qatar World Cup, on November 20, 2022, in Al Bayt Stadium in Doha, Qatar. © 2022 ddp images / star-images (Photo by ddp images/Sipa USA)(Sipa via AP Images)  
In an off-field victory for human rights, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has reversed its sponsorship plans with Visit Saudi, Saudi Arabia's state tourism authority, for the 2023 Women's World Cup. The Women's

World Cup is the flagship global women's football event and has long been a moment to celebrate women's rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights and inclusion.

FIFA's decision to award Visit Saudi sponsorship of the Women's World Cup showed shocking disregard for the repression and suffering of Saudi Arabia's courageous women's rights defenders, which top female players rightly condemned as an "own goal."

Saudi Arabia is a global outlier on women's rights and also violates the rights of LGBT people. As recently as 2018, women and girls were barred from sport in schools – or even watching sporting events in stadiums. On International Women's Day in 2022, Saudi authorities passed Saudi Arabia's first Personal Status Law, which codifies repressive male guardianship rules and includes discriminatory provisions against women concerning marriage, divorce, and decisions about their children. In August 2022, Saudi Arabia sentenced Salma Al-Shehab, a Saudi doctoral student who had been studying in the United Kingdom, to 34 years in prison for her use of Twitter.

Human Rights Watch has documented Saudi Arabia's long-standing practice of "sports-washing," which involves spending billions of dollars hosting major sporting, entertainment, and cultural events as a deliberate strategy to

before signing off on the sponsorship deal. FIFA has not replied to the letter.

FIFA has incorporated human rights since 2016 and adopted a human rights policy stating that "human rights commitments are binding on all FIFA



deflect criticism from the country's pervasive and systemic violations of human rights.

Human Rights Watch wrote to FIFA on February 3 to underscore the contradiction between Saudi Arabia's Tourism Authority sponsorship of the Women's World Cup and the football body's claims that human rights are a key part of its values. We also asked FIFA what consultation with players, host nations, and other stakeholders it undertook

bodies and officials." In practice, it has not always lived up to these pledges.

Women football players are right to protest that their game was being monetized by FIFA, without safety, access, equal pay for equal work, consultation, or permission.

FIFA's decision to reverse the Visit Saudi sponsorship of the Women's World Cup should be a first step toward consistent due diligence and remedy on human rights across all of its operations.



# Stampede for Food Aid Kills 11 in Pakistan



Ayaz Gul

**W**omen at a morgue in Karachi, Pakistan, mourn the loss of a family member who was killed in a stampede at a Ramadan food distribution center. Authorities in Pakistan said Friday that a stampede at a free-food distribution center in the southern port city of Karachi had killed at least 11 people and injured five others. Local police and rescue workers in the impoverished country's largest city said the victims were mainly women and children.

The stampede occurred outside a Karachi factory where a distribution center for employees had been set up in connection with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Hundreds of people in the crowd, made up mostly of women, panicked and started pushing each other to collect food, with some falling into a nearby drain, witnesses and police said.

Friday's incident brought the death toll from stampedes at private- and government-funded food aid centers to at least

22 in recent days as Pakistanis struggle with soaring costs of basic staples and food items. The South Asian nation of about 232 million people is suffering through one of its worse economic crises in decades.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government rolled out a free-flour distribution project at the start of Ramadan to help millions of low-income families offset the impact of record-breaking inflation. Official estimates suggest inflation is running above 40%, a five-decade high, with the price of flour skyrocketing more than 45% in the past year.

The government initiative has resulted in thousands of people crowding distribution centers. Families say a lack of proper arrangements to accommodate large crowds in some districts has triggered deadly stampedes over fears of not being able to get the free flour.

Authorities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces collectively reported 11 deaths as of Thursday. Thousands of bags of flour have also been looted from



trucks and distribution points, according to officials.

People mourn next to the body of a relative who was killed in a stampede at a Ramadan food distribution center in Karachi, Pakistan, March 31, 2023. People mourn next to the body of a relative who was killed in

a stampede at a Ramadan food distribution center in Karachi, Pakistan, March 31, 2023.

The deadly rush underscored the desperation in the face of soaring costs, exacerbated by the falling rupee exchange rate and the removal of fuel subsidies. Government cuts were required for the International Monetary Fund to unlock the latest tranche of its financial support package.

Critics have slammed the government for launching the project without putting in place proper arrangements to ensure the safety of people.

The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan blamed what it said was the mismanagement of the flour distribution center for the deadly stampedes.

In a statement Friday, the watchdog described the Karachi incident as particularly alarming and demanded the government immediately

improve the distribution system across the country.

"This situation is adding insult to injury for marginalized people of Pakistan who are braving the economic injustice perpetrated by the elites who dominate the state," the HRCP said.



# Palestinian Authority Blocks Registration of Rights Group

*Lawyers Representing Palestinian Authority Critics Obstructed*

Omar Shakir  
In August 2022, when Israeli authorities raided the offices of Palestinian civil society organizations that they had previously outlawed and ordered them closed, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas con-

demned the moves as "a crime and a brazen assault." PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh made a solidarity visit to one of the group's offices and encouraged them to continue their work.

The PA, though, refused to renew the registration of another respected Palestinian legal organization in March: Lawyers for Justice, which has represented Palestinians detained by the PA in the West Bank. A PA official told the group's head, Mohannad Karaje, that the PA General Intelligence Services are blocking the registration, Karaje said.

The Intelligence Services claim Lawyers for Justice engaged in "nonprofit activities" and accepted foreign funding, in violation of their status as a "civil corporation" under PA law. But Karaje told Human Rights Watch they registered as a civil corporation to comply with Palestinian law, which forbids lawyers from engaging in any work outside of legal representation, including holding a position with a

nonprofit. Palestinian law also does not forbid accepting foreign funding, according to Karaje. The PA has not raised this objection before, even though Lawyers for Justice has been registered as a civil corporation for more than three years.

The PA's move to muzzle Lawyers for Justice reflects a larger trend of the PA "shrinking the space for civil society organizations and further empowering its security services," says Karaje. Human Rights Watch has documented how the PA, through its Intelligence Services and other agencies, systematically arrest critics and opponents and tortures those in detention. Lawyers for Justice has represented many of those detainees and has been one of Human Rights Watch's closest partners in this work. In July 2022, we submitted a parallel report together to the United Nations Committee Against Torture ahead of its review of Palestine.

Karaje said that, without valid registration, Lawyers for

Justice will not be able to access its bank accounts and could have its offices shuttered and staff arrested. Lawyers for Justice has appealed to the Administrative Court of the Palestinian High Court of Justice.

So long as the PA blocks groups from carrying out work focused on their abuses, their calls to safeguard Palestinian civil society and protect Palestinian rights will continue to ring hollow.

## ***Human Rights and other Civil Society Groups Urge United Nations to Respect Human Rights in the Fight Against Antisemitism***

Dear UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Under Secretary-General Miguel Ángel Moratinos:

Our coalition of 60 civil society organizations is writing to you to voice our strong support

for the United Nations' commitment to combatting antisemitism in line with international human rights standards. Antisemitism is a pernicious ideology that poses real harm to Jewish communities around the world and requires meaningful action to combat it. Our organizations call on world leaders to condemn antisemitism and to take steps to protect Jewish communities, including holding perpetrators of hate crimes accountable.

As the UN develops its own action plan towards a coordinated and enhanced response to antisemitism rooted in human rights, we are aware that a number of Member State governments and organizations aligned with some of those governments, as well as the former Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed, have been advocating that the UN adopt and use the "working definition of antisemitism" of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). We urge the UN not to do so.

The IHRA definition was originally developed to guide research and law enforcement data validation before being used by the IHRA in its work, which includes education about the Holocaust and antisemitism. Adoption of the definition by governments and institutions is often framed as an essential step in efforts to combat antisemitism. In practice, however, the IHRA definition has often been used to wrongly label criticism of Israel as antisemitic, and thus chill and sometimes suppress, non-violent protest, activism and speech critical of Israel and/or Zionism, including in the US and Europe. Such misuse has also been criticized by the former Special Rapporteur on Racism E. Tendayi Achiume.





Ken Stern, the main drafter of the IHRA definition, recently reiterated his concerns about the institutional adoption of the definition in light of its proposed inclusion in an American Bar Association (ABA) draft resolution on antisemitism. Stern's concern stems from the IHRA definition's repeated use as "a blunt instrument to label anyone an antisemite." In the end, ABA members adopted a resolution on antisemitism that did not reference the IHRA definition. Stern's message to ABA applies equally to the UN.

Those who use the IHRA definition in this way tend to rely on a set of eleven "contemporary examples of antisemitism" attached to the definition by the IHRA in 2016. Seven of those examples refer to the state of Israel. These examples, which are presented as possible illustrations and indicators to "guide the IHRA in its work", include:

"denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination; e.g. by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour" and "applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation."

The wording of the first example above on "racist endeavour" opens the door to labeling as antisemitic criticisms that Israeli government policies and practices violate the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the findings of major Israeli, Palestinian and global human rights organizations that Israeli authorities are committing the crime against humanity of apartheid against Palestinians. This example could also be used to label as antisemitic documentation showing that Israel's founding involved dispossessing many Palestinians; or arguments, also made by some Members of the Israeli Knesset, to transform Israel from a Jewish state into a multi-ethnic state that equally belongs to all of its citizens – that is, a state based on civic identity, rather than ethnic identity.

The example on "applying double standards" opens the door to labeling as antisemitic anyone who focuses on Israeli

abuses as long as worse abuses are deemed to be occurring elsewhere. By that logic, a person dedicated to defending the rights of Tibetans could be accused of anti-Chinese racism, or a group dedicated to promoting democracy and minority rights in Saudi Arabia could be accused of Islamophobia. This example suggests also that it is antisemitic to evaluate Israel as anything but a democracy, also when assessing its actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where it has for more than half a century governed millions of Palestinians who have no say on the most consequential issues affecting their lives and who are deprived of their basic civil rights.

The IHRA qualifies the examples by noting that "criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic"



and that any finding of antisemitism must "[take] into account the overall context." However, in practice, these disclaimers have failed to prevent the politically motivated instrumentalization of the IHRA definition in efforts to muzzle legitimate speech and activism by critics of Israel's human rights record and advocates for Palestinian rights.

The targets of accusations of antisemitism based on the IHRA definition have included university students and professors, grassroots organizers, human rights and civil rights organizations, humanitarian groups and members of the US Congress, who either document or criticize Israeli policies and who speak in favor of Palestinian human rights. If the UN endorses the IHRA definition in any shape or

form, UN officials working on issues related to Israel and Palestine may find themselves unjustly accused of antisemitism based on the IHRA definition. The same goes for numerous UN agencies, departments, committees, panels and/or conferences, whose work touches on issues related to Israel and Palestine, as well as for civil society actors and human rights defenders engaging with the UN system.

After the United Kingdom's government adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism at the national level, at least two UK universities in 2017 banned certain activities planned for "Israel Apartheid Week." One of them, the University of Central Lancashire, banned a panel planned by Friends of Palestine on boycotts of Israel. A university spokesperson stated, "We believe the pro-

posed talk contravenes the [IHRA] definition" of antisemitism "formally adopted" by the government.

In February 2020, Israel advocacy groups in the US challenged Pitzer and Pomona College's support for a film screening about Palestinian protests in Gaza against Israeli repression and a panel on "Perspectives on Colleges and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," featuring the prominent Jewish commentator Peter Beinart and Palestinian-American Yousef Munayyer, hosted by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). The Israel advocacy groups claimed that SJP's positions, such as its support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, are "clear indicators of anti-Semitism under the examples listed by

the IHRA." In January 2020, Israel advocacy groups called for the University of Michigan to review the agenda for a "Youth for Palestine" conference focused on student activism and community organizing on Palestine, and to "compare it to the IHRA definition," and consider canceling it over concerns that it will feed antisemitism.

Some advocates of the IHRA working definition have presented it as a non-controversial "consensus definition". However, many leading antisemitism experts, scholars of Jewish studies and the Holocaust, as well as free speech and anti-racism experts, have challenged the definition, arguing that it restricts legitimate criticism of Israel and harms the fight against antisemitism.

Since 2021, at least two alternative definitions have been put forward: the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism by hundreds of scholars of antisemitism, Holocaust studies, Jewish studies and Middle East studies, as well as the Nexus Document by a task force affiliated with Bard College and the University of Southern California. While acknowledging that criticism of Israel can be antisemitic, these alternative definitions set out more clearly what constitutes antisemitism and provide guidance surrounding the contours of legitimate speech and action around Israel and Palestine.

As an international organization committed to the universal promotion of the rule of law and human rights, the UN should ensure that its vital efforts to combat antisemitism do not inadvertently embolden or endorse policies and laws that undermine fundamental human rights, including the right to speak and organize in support of Palestinian rights and to criticize Israeli government policies.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the UN not to endorse the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

We look forward to assisting the UN's efforts to combat antisemitism in a way that respects, protects and promotes human rights.



# Texas dairy farm explosion kills 18,000 cows



Approximately 18,000 cows were killed in a blast at a Texas dairy farm earlier this week, according to local authorities. The explosion, at South Fork Dairy near the town of Dimmitt, also left one person in critical condition.

Authorities believe that machinery in the facility may have ignited methane gas.

Nearly three million farm animals died in fires across the US between 2018 and 2021.

Castro County Sheriff's Office said they had received a report of a fire at the farm at about 19:21 on Monday (00:21 GMT Tuesday).

Photos posted by the Sheriff's Office show a huge plume of black smoke rising from the ground.

When police and emergency personnel arrived at the scene, they found one person trapped who had to be rescued and flown to hospital in critical condition.

While the exact figure of cows

that were killed by fire and smoke remains unknown, the Sheriff's Office told the BBC that an "estimated 18,000 head of cattle" had been lost.

'Farms are going to need different kinds of robots'

Speaking to local news outlet KFDA, Sheriff Sal Rivera said

"There's some that are probably injured to the point where they'll have to be destroyed."

Mr Rivera told KFDA that investigators believed the fire might have started with a machine referred to as a "honey badger", which he described as "vacuum that

the Washington DC-based Animal Welfare Institute said that - if confirmed - a death toll of 18,000 cows would be "by far" the deadliest barn fire involving cattle since it began keeping statistics in 2013.

"We hope the industry will remain focused on this issue and strongly encourage farms to adopt common sense fire safety measures," said Allie Granger, policy associate for AWI's farm animal program. "It is hard to imagine anything worse than being burned alive."

According to the AWI, nearly 6.5m farm animals have been killed in barn fires since 2013, of which about 6m were chickens and about 7,300 were cows.

Between 2018 and 2021, nearly 3 million farm animals died in fire, with 1.76m chickens dying in the six largest fires over that time period.



that most of the cattle had been lost after the blaze spread to an area in which cows were held before being taken to a milking area and then into a holding pen.

"There's some that survived," he was quoted as saying.

sucks the manure and water out".

"Possibly [it] got overheated and probably the methane and things like that ignited and spread out and exploded," he said.

In a statement sent to the BBC,



# Yellow dust: Sandstorms bring misery from China to South Korea

Yuna Ku, Joel Guinto and Fan Wang in Seoul and Singapore  
From his high rise office window, Erling Thompson watches the Seoul skyline fade into a yellow-grey cloud as fine dust from sandstorms in China blankets South Korea. On the streets below, people wear face masks and hooded jackets to ride out another dust-covered day that is no less miserable and unhealthy, even if it is expected at this time of the year.

Yellow dust is a seasonal ordeal for millions in North Asia, as sandstorms from the Gobi desert that borders China and Mongolia ride springtime winds to reach the Korean peninsula and this year, farther east to Japan. It aggravates air pollution and puts people at greater risk of respiratory disease as the particles are small enough to be inhaled into the lungs.

"You don't feel happy. It's like a very bad weather day. You naturally want to be outside on a sunny day. But when the weather is very dirty, you feel depressed and want to stay inside," said the 34-year-old Thompson, who moved from the US to South Korea in 2011 for work.

Eom Hyeojung said there appears to be "no realistic way to avoid yellow dust", so she sent her daughter to school anyway despite the health risks.

"As it happens so often, like every year, I just let her go. It's sad, but I think it became just a part of our life," said the 40-year-old teacher from Seoul. Han Junhee, a 63-year-old telemarketer, said the sky appeared to be getting murkier by the day so she has been avoiding exercise outdoors. Forbidden City in Beijing is shrouded in yellow dust.

The expanse of Beijing's

Forbidden City fades into a dust cloud in early April. Cars caught in gridlock in the middle of a sandstorm in Beijing, China. Motorists drive through an evening sandstorm in Beijing this week. Sandstorms in the region have been increasing in frequency



since the 1960s due to rising temperatures and lower precipitation in the Gobi wilderness, Chinese authorities said.

This year, sandstorms started bearing down on parts of China in March, causing the skies to turn yellow. In the first two weeks of April alone, there have been four sandstorm and the most recent one left cars, bikes and houses coated in dust.

On Chinese social media platform Weibo, a video of a woman sweeping three kilos of dust inside her apartment in Inner Mongolia has gotten three million views. She accidentally left a window open during the sandstorm.

A 31-year-old woman in Beijing who doesn't want to be named said she was covered in dust "like a terra cotta warrior" after a brief run outside her house.

"Even my bedroom smells like

dirt when I go to sleep. We've been quite used to sandstorm weather here in Beijing because it happens every spring. But the wind is too strong this time. I was the unlucky one," she said. Outline of Shanghai World Financial Centre and Jin Mao Tower in Pudong district dur-

ing a sandstorm.

Image caption, Shanghai's Jin Mao Tower and World Financial Centre are barely visible due to a sandstorm on 11 April

Yellow dust from sandstorms blanket container vans in Inner Mongolia.

The sandstorms originate from the Gobi desert that borders China and Mongolia

A sandstorm on 11 April reduced the towering buildings in Shanghai's Pudong district to mere outlines in the night sky. Twelve provinces were placed under a sandstorm warning the following day.

A Shanghai resident said the morning after a sandstorm meant the additional chore of washing down her bike before she could use it. The 30-year-old woman said she wondered how the time bought by more than two years of COVID restrictions failed to produce

measures to mitigate the effects of the seasonal sand storms.

At the height of the most recent sandstorm, the concentration of fine dust or PM 10 in the Chinese capital was 46.2 times the World Health Organization's guideline value. In Seoul, PM 10 levels were

double the government threshold to qualify as very bad for health. In the city of Ulsan, southeast of the capital, it was even higher.

The health risk from PM 10 particles is immediate as they are easily inhaled. One particle is smaller in diameter than human hair.

People wearing face masks walk in front of a health warning on yellow dust in Seoul.

I M A G E SOURCE,NEWS1

Image caption, South Koreans have been advised to mask

up as yellow dust blankets the country

Yellow dust from the deserts of China and Mongolia blanket a lake in Seoul, South Korea

Dust from sandstorms is a seasonal problem for South Korea, as shown in this photo taken in Seoul in 2021

As China and South Korea grapple with yellow dust from sandstorms, Thailand, south of the continent, is dealing with its own pollution problem as wildfires and the burning of sugarcane fields blanket the country's northern region in smog.

Among the hardest hit is tourist favourite Chiang Mai, where golden temples and lush greenery has been shrouded in thick smoke for weeks.

On the week yellow dust blanketed large parts of northeast Asia, Chiang Mai took the dubious distinction of being the world's most polluted city.



# Indonesia: Activists on Trial for Criminal Defamation

**Drop Charges Against Rights Defenders Who Criticized Military Role in Papua**

Indonesian authorities should drop the criminal defamation charges against two prominent human rights defenders in Jakarta, Human Rights Watch said today. On April 3, 2023, the East Jakarta district court began the trial of Haris Azhar and Fatia Maulidiyanti based on a complaint filed by Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, a coordinating minister in President Joko Widodo's cabinet, in August 2021.

The complaint concerns the activists' discussion on YouTube about a report that alleged that the Indonesian government had conducted "illegal military operations" in Papua's Central Highlands to access lucrative gold deposits. Prosecutors charged the two with defamation under the Criminal Code, slander under the Internet Law, and "spreading false news" under the 1946 False News Law, which carry maximum prison terms of 9 months, 4 years, and 10 years respectively.

"Prosecuting human rights activists for commenting on important rights issues sets back civil rights progress in Indonesia by years, if not decades," said Andreas Harsono, senior Indonesia researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The authorities should immediately drop the criminal charges against Azhar and Maulidiyanti and turn greater attention to addressing the government's abusive policies in Papua."

Azhar, 47, served as the coordinator of Indonesia's Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS) between 2010 and 2016. Azhar is also a founder of the Jakarta-based Lokataru human rights group and operates his own YouTube channel on which he has a regular talk show for his 220,000

subscribers.

Maulidiyanti, 30, has been the coordinator of KontraS, since 2020. She is also a vice president of the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).

On August 20, 2021, Maulidiyanti participated in an interview on Azhar's YouTube channel during which they discussed a newly released report, "Ekonomi Politik Penempatan Militer di Papua" ("The

reduce the Indigenous population in the area, thus making it easier to move forward with mining operations. A 1999 survey estimated that about 117 million tons of gold ore in the Wabu Block.

In her appearance on Azhar's talk show, Maulidiyanti discussed the involvement of Luhut Pandjaitan in obtaining access to mining concessions for companies operating in Intan Jaya. Azhar himself had

Indonesian government should revoke criminal defamation provisions of various laws, including the Internet Law as well as the Criminal Code. The Human Rights Watch 2010 report on Indonesia found that the laws allows powerful people, including public officials, to bring criminal charges against activists, journalists, and others who criticize them in violation of the right to freedom of expression. Human Rights Watch considers civil defamation sufficient for the purpose of protecting people's reputations, although they also can be abused.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee, the independent expert body that monitors compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states in its General Comment on freedom of expression that "imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty" for defamation. In addition, "all public figures ... are legitimately subject to criticism."

However, instead of reforming laws to eliminate criminal defamation provisions, the Indonesian parliament passed a new criminal code on December 6, 2022, that contains provisions that seriously violate international human rights law and standards. Some of the problematic articles in the new code include criminal defamation provisions that undermine rights to freedom of speech.

"Scrutiny of the Indonesian government's deployment of security forces in Papua and subsequent human rights abuses is part and parcel of a functioning democracy," Harsono said. "The Indonesian authorities should not be responding to such criticism with criminal defamation cases, which undermine freedom of expression for all Indonesians."



Political Economy of the Military Deployment in Papua"), on human rights abuses in Indonesia's Papua provinces. The report was jointly published by 10 nongovernmental organizations, including KontraS, #BersihkanIndonesia, Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, Indonesian Forum for Environment (Walhi), Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, Walhi Papua, Papua Legal Aid Institute, Jatam (Mining Advocacy Network), Greenpeace Indonesia, and Trend Asia.

The 17-page report concludes that the Indonesian government conducted "illegal military operations" in Papua's Central Highlands, and that the military sought to control huge gold deposits on the northern side of Mt. Grasberg, an area known as the "Wabu Block" in Intan Jaya regency. The report alleged that the military deployment was intended to

visited Intan Jaya to investigate the concessions in 2020. Azhar's video "Lord Luhut is behind the military-economic interest in troops deployment in Intan Jaya! Also, BIN general!" and the nongovernmental organization report referenced alleged links also between a former intelligence agency (Badan Intelijen Negara, or BIN) general and companies operating in Intan Jaya.

On August 26, 2021, Pandjaitan filed a civil complaint against the two activists, denying that he had any improper role in companies operating in the Central Highlands. He sought an apology from the two activists and damages of IDR100 billion (US\$6.7 million). On September 22, 2021, Pandjaitan filed a complaint for criminal defamation against the two activists at the Jakarta police headquarters.

Human Rights Watch has repeatedly said that the



# When will Pakistan attain women protection and empowerment?

**I**nternational Women's Day is celebrated on March 8th every year. It's a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. It is also a day to recognise the ongoing struggles that women face in achieving gender equality and to call for action to address these challenges.

The origins of International Women's Day can be traced back to the early 20th century when women's movements began to gain momentum around the world. The first National Women's Day was observed in the United States on February 28, 1909, to commemorate garment workers' strike in New York City. The following year, Socialist International established International Women's Day to promote women's suffrage and to recognise the contributions of women in all spheres.

In 1917, women in Russia organised a strike for "Bread and Peace" during World War I, demanding an end to the war and better living conditions. This strike, which began on



United Nations officially recognised International Women's Day, and it has since become a day to highlight gender inequalities and advocate for women's rights and empowerment.

In Pakistan, the celebration takes place with various events, activities and cam-

pagues to raise awareness about women's rights and gender equality. The day is demand greater gender equality in Pakistani society. Aurat March is organised in different

cities across Pakistan and is attended by women and men from all walks of life.

In recent years, there have been some controversies and backlash against Women's Day celebrations in Pakistan, particularly regarding the Aurat March. Some conservative groups have criticised the movement for promoting "western values" and have accused it of being "anti-Islam". However, the organisers of Aurat March and other Women's Day events continue to push for greater gender equality and to challenge patriarchal norms and attitudes in Pakistani society.

It's also true that women in Pakistan face various forms of violence, including domestic violence, honour killings, acid attacks, sexual harassment, and forced marriages. Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent forms of violence against women in Pakistan. A survey conducted by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics found that 32 per cent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence at the hands of their husbands. This violence includes beatings, burning, and even murder. Honour killings and



March 8th, was a catalyst for the Russian Revolution and helped establish women's rights in Russia. In 1975, the

pagues to raise awareness about women's rights and gender equality. The day is

demand greater gender equality in Pakistani society. Aurat March is organised in different





acid attacks have also been increasingly high.

Sexual harassment is another issue that women in Pakistan face. A survey conducted by the Aurat Foundation found that 97 per cent of women in Pakistan have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public places.

The Pakistani government has taken steps to address violence against women, including passing laws to protect women's rights and establishing crisis centres and hotlines for women in distress. However, a lot more must be done to address the root causes of violence against women and change the mindset perpetuating this violence in Pakistani society. Some of the major laws in Pakistan relating to violence against women include:

**The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006:** This law amended the Pakistan Penal Code to include harsher penalties for offences against women, such as rape, acid attacks and honour killings.

**The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011:** This law criminalises several harmful practices against women, including forced marriages, giving women in marriage as part of a dispute settlement, and depriving women of their inheritance.

**The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013:** This law provides legal protection to women against domestic violence and abuse, and it allows women to obtain restraining orders against their abusers.

**The Acid Control and Acid**

**Crime Prevention Act, 2011:** This law criminalises acid attacks and provides harsh penalties for those who commit this offence.

**The Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act, 2016:** This law was passed by the Punjab government and provided comprehensive protection to women against all forms of violence, including

mentation and enforcement of these laws remains a challenge. The government needs to take steps to ensure that the legal framework is implemented effectively and that perpetrators of violence against women are held accountable for their actions.

**Increasing awareness and education:**

Raising awareness about

medical care, counselling and legal assistance. The government should establish more crisis centres and shelters for women, and these services should be adequately resourced and staffed by trained professionals.

**Empowering women economically:**

Economic empowerment is key to reducing women's vulnerability to violence and abuse. The government should provide support to women entrepreneurs and promote women's participation in the formal economy.

**Strengthening community-based initiatives:**

Community-based initiatives can be effective in preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality. These initiatives could include women's groups, community dialogues, and awareness-raising campaigns at the grass-roots level.

**Addressing cultural and religious practices that discriminate against women:**

Many cultural and religious practices in Pakistan discriminate against women and reinforce patriarchal attitudes.



physical, psychological, and economic abuse.

Protecting women in Pakistan from violence and promoting gender equality requires a multi-faceted approach involving individuals, communities and civil society organisations. The government may require the following major steps:

**Strengthening the legal framework:**

While there are several laws in place in Pakistan to protect women from violence, imple-

menting women's rights and gender equality is crucial to changing attitudes and behaviour towards women in Pakistani society. Education about gender equality should be incorporated into school curricula, and awareness-raising campaigns should be launched to promote women's rights and challenge patriarchal norms.

**Providing support services:**

Women who experience violence need access to a range of support services, including

Efforts should be made to challenge these practices and to promote more progressive interpretations of religion and culture that support gender equality.

These steps require a sustained and coordinated effort from all stakeholders, including the government, civil society organisations, and communities. It'll take time to achieve meaningful change, but protecting the rights and dignity of women in Pakistan is essential.



# The 'P' in patriarchy stands for poor education

Pakistani woman is born free but is everywhere in chains designed by men due to a poorly educated patriarchal

their lives, are the primary role models who inculcate their habits into their offspring and are the first teachers.

who tend to justify this heinous act in the name of Islam while forgetting that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) forbade

woman is right and he is wrong' as he believed she was justified in her argument. This reflects the importance of morality (the power to distinguish between right and wrong) to pious leaders.

In today's patriarchal Pakistani society, women are advised to keep silent over sexual harassment, survive brutal domestic violence from their husbands and in-laws, tolerate discriminatory behaviour at work, and sew their lips over their justified rights in inheritance. Majority of women in Pakistan are not even allowed to choose a partner and career of their choice. Most of them get married off even before their legal age of 18 years. Unfortunately, the imposers of all these restrictions are the poorly educated and



mindset

Singer Kaifi Khalil was mesmerising the whole crowd with his magical voice at the recently held Karachi Eat festival when suddenly some vile men bashed the doors in, entered the festival premises, interrupted the musical performance and started harassing women. As a result, the joyous event ended up in complete chaos.

This is just another adjunct to the thousands of stories revealing the patriarchal mindset, owing to Pakistan's poor ethical and moral education, which has been prevailing for decades. Academic education only yields fruitful results if supplemented with moral education. Ethical and moral values can be taught at schools, but these values can only be adopted through pragmatic experiences. Parents, with whom the kids spend most of

When it comes to the personality development of the growing child, the role of the mother is tantamount to the university of the house, whereas the father acquires the position of the supportive pillars upon which the university keeps on relying to provide. Taking this analogy, when a husband mistreats his wife or restricts her from progressing, the university falls, and this destruction negatively impacts the growing child under the rubble of moral education. Mostly, the men who mistreat women, reprimand them and relegate them must have witnessed the same immoral behaviour either in their own households or in their surroundings.

In a patriarchal society, a woman should be killed if she fails to "guard her honour". The setters of such self-tailored criteria for gauging women's dignity are the men

killing women and children even in legitimate wars. His generous behaviour towards his wives elucidates his sympathy and respect towards women. Taking an excerpt from his last sermon, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) advised men to 'take care of their women as they are their responsibility and Allah (SWT) holds you accountable for taking care and fulfilling your responsibilities'. He had always shown immense love and care for all his children, especially his daughters. He used to call his youngest daughter Hazrat Fatima (RA) "the joy of his heart".

During his time, women used to enjoy more freedom than they do today. In the era of the second caliphate, Hazrat Umer (RA), a woman dared to criticise his ruling on the matter of 'mahar' and his response was exemplary, saying that 'this

immoral men whose evil restrictions are commensurate to guarding their self-made honour placed on women's shoulders.

Previously, the words "taleem and tarbiyat" (education and training) went hand in hand, but now, education without ethical and moral training remains helpless to contribute towards the personality development of individuals. Education doesn't merely mean an academic education; had it been a prerequisite, we wouldn't have heard about the cases of Noor Muqaddam, Sarah Inam and Aliza Khan, all tortured to death by so-called educated men, lacking the canons of ethics and morality. When it comes to undoing these ignoble behaviours, owing to the patriarchal mindset, the right kind of moral and ethical training begins at home.



# Thailand: Myanmar

## Activists Forcibly Returned

### *Thai Government Aids Junta's Persecution of Opposition*

**T**hai immigration officials forcibly returned three Myanmar opposition activists to Myanmar, putting them at grave risk of persecution and other abuses, Human Rights Watch said today. Myanmar junta authori-

fully returning these three opposition activists, whose lives and freedom are threatened," said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Thai authorities disregarded the grave dangers the men face in Myanmar." Myanmar media reported that the Border Guard Force troops

Since the coup, the Myanmar junta has carried out a nationwide campaign of mass killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, and indiscriminate attacks that amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. Given the junta's widespread human rights violations, forcible returns of asy-

Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Thailand has incorporated the provisions of both treaties into its newly enacted Act on Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance. The law prohibits actions to deport or extradite a person to another



ties should immediately reveal the whereabouts of the activists – Thiha, 38, Htet Nay Win, 31, and Saw Phyo Lay, 26 – and any charges against them. On April 1, 2023, Thai authorities arrested the three members of the opposition group Lion Battalion Commando Column in the border town of Mae Sot in Tak province on illegal entry charges. On April 4, Thai immigration officials handed them over to a junta-aligned Border Guard Force in Myawaddy township in Karen State, Myanmar. "Thai officials colluded with the Myanmar junta by unlaw-

shot and wounded the men when they tried to escape. Informed sources said the men were later handed over to junta security forces. The Thai government has increasingly collaborated with Myanmar's junta and aligned forces to harass, arrest, and forcibly return asylum seekers, including members of opposition groups who have fled to Thailand since the February 2021 military coup. On March 22, 2023, Thai authorities raided 40 buildings in Mae Sot used by members of the anti-junta People's Defense Forces and asylum seekers from Myanmar.

lum seekers and refugees to Myanmar violate the international legal principle of nonrefoulement, which prohibits countries from returning anyone to a country where they face a real risk of persecution, torture, or other serious harm. Even though Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is bound to the principle of nonrefoulement under customary international law. In addition, Thailand has ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and signed the International

er country where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would be in danger of being tortured or forcibly disappeared. "Thai and Myanmar authorities appear to have cut a deal that puts asylum seekers at grave risk," Pearson said. "The United Nations and concerned governments should publicly press Thailand to end these serious violations of international law and demand that Myanmar immediately account for the three deported opposition activists."



# The Mother Of All Crises In Pakistan



**E**ver since Imran Khan's removal from office back in April last year, Pakistan's economy is sinking deep in the quagmire of debt crisis. As IMF talks continue, a cry for help can be heard. Political instability is one big problem related to economic crisis of Pakistan throughout the years, but a more significant one is its rapidly growing population.

Pakistan is ranked fifth most populous country in the world; this one factor has led to multiple unpleasant happenings. Overpopulation has far-reaching economic, social and political ramifications; putting a strain on economic resources. Health and education sectors suffer when it comes to allocation of budget, and in order to overcome food insecurity, the government has to compromise on the afore-

mentioned sectors.

Overpopulation leads to multifaceted problems – water crisis, housing problem, malnutrition and illiteracy, burden on economic resources, and disruption of budget allocation. In order to understand the whole notion of overpopulation the first step is to acknowledge it as an issue. Another big factor in Pakistan's population problem is poverty as many families belonging to lower strata believe that having more children will increase their family income leading to a better lifestyle.

In 2010, the National Population Policy was launched to mitigate the growth rate from 1.95% to 1.3% by the government of Pakistan, but population growth remains constantly high which further takes a toll on resources including water,

food and energy. Owing to water scarcity, many areas across the country are suffering from acute shortage of water and same is the case with energy crisis. Power outage has been a big issue in Pakistan which affects the industrial sector of the country's economy.

According to statistics by UNFPA, 21pc of the married women in Pakistan have no access to contraception. Pakistan's total fertility rate is estimated to be around 3.6 children per woman which is much higher than the global average of 2.4 children per woman (Population Council, 2018).

Another concern more than a blessing for Pakistan's unbridled population is the fact that 60% of the population consists of people under the age of 30 (UNFPA). Pakistan can experi-

ence a rapid increase in its population if correct measures are not taken in time.

This just shows how important family planning and sex education are to reduce the explosive population growth. Emphasis on sex education to teach people about consent, family planning and contraception should be made mandatory in our schools. Grass root level measure is the only solution to this catastrophe. It is the responsibility of both government and civil society to inculcate knowledge about family planning, contraception and scarcity of resources in the minds of people to raise awareness about population control.

Tackling poverty, providing access to better healthcare and education is of utmost importance and failure to do so will lead to unimaginable consequences.