



DO NOT STAND IDLY BY

**Human Rights in Crises:
A Summary for Jewish World Watch
December 17, 2007**

The purpose of this report is provide a quarterly update for Jewish World Watch of the most serious human rights crises in the world at this time. This supplements the report of September, 2007. *New material appears in italics.* These descriptions are taken primarily from Enough, Human Rights Watch (www.humanrightswatch.org), the New York Times and The Economist. This report does not describe the situation in Sudan/Darfur/Chad since other JWW reports deal with that crisis. This report makes no attempt to rank the following crises in order of seriousness. Instead, they are listed in alphabetical order.

Maps included in this report were taken from Wikipedia. To orient you to some of the maps that follow, it might help to refer to the following map, which locates Darfur, Sudan, and Chad.



Burma (Myanmar)



The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Burma’s authoritarian military government, remains of major international concern given its intensely restrictive police state that denies most basic rights and freedoms. Continued military action against separatist ethnic rebellions have displaced hundreds of thousands of people,

mostly ethnic minorities, while nearly 2 million more have taken refuge in neighboring countries such as Thailand. In August 2007 authorities raised fuel prices by as much as 500 percent, leading to street protests; in response, the Burmese government cracked down on protesters, using tear gas and firing warning shots to disperse a crowd of 1,000 Buddhist monks and civilians protesting in the northwestern coastal city of Sittwe. *In November, Burma responded to mounting criticism by the international community by allowing the UN Special Investigator on Human Rights in Burma into the country for the first time in four years. His analysis, based on a 5-day visit and condemned by the Burmese government, reported many more deaths from the crackdown than the government has admitted, and also claimed that 1000 of the 4000 civilians and monks detained were still in prison (the Burmese government claims only 80 people are still being detained). The report was presented at the UN Human Rights Commission in December. Since the protests began in September, the SPDC has kept a tight lid on any journalists, preventing any photographs, news or other footage from leaving the country.*

Central African Republic



Government troops have carried out hundreds of unlawful killings and burned thousands of civilian homes since mid-2005 in their counterinsurgency campaign in northern Central African Republic (CAR), a new report by Human Rights Watch charged. Since the beginning of the conflict in mid-2005, the CAR security forces have been responsible for the most serious violations in the conflict, including multiple summary executions and unlawful killings, widespread burning of civilian homes, and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians. CAR army forces have also attacked and burned down hundreds of civilian villages in northern CAR, destroying an estimated 10,000 homes and creating a far-ranging humanitarian disaster. *Though much has been reported in recent months about the roots of crisis in CAR being in part “spill-over” the conflict in Darfur, HRW research shows that little if any foreign support exists for CAR rebel groups and as such this spill-over factor is likely exaggerated. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported over 300,000 refugees from this crisis, many in neighboring Cameroon. Some recent accounts from western CAR have reported a possible ethnic dimension to the attacks, with members of the Mbororo ethnic group, mostly nomadic pastoralists, targeted specifically because they are believed to be wealthy. Many refugees report unwillingness to ever return to CAR.*

Democratic Republic of Congo



The eastern region of the DRC has regressed into some of the worst violence in years. In January the government agreed on a deal with the dissident commander Laurent Nkunda to bring an end to fighting since 2004. After a brief reprieve these troops attacked the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the Rwandan militia with elements that committed atrocities in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Over a 100,000 people have been displaced and dozens killed. Nkunda’s troops are members of the Tutsi community and the FDLR are mainly Hutu. This has led to its own tensions. ENOUGH reports that the root cause of most of the violence is due to the weak state institutions that tax and abuse the local population but provide no security or social services in return. Rape is rampant and used as a weapon. FDLR rebels continue to attack the local populations. The Ugandan Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels remain safe in Congo’s Garamba National Park. *In early December 2007 renewed*

fighting in North Kivu forced the World Food Programme (WFP) to suspend delivery of food aid to as many as 300,000 vulnerable people in that region. Fighting exacerbated road conditions already deteriorating from DRC's rainy season. The UN also reports that incidents of sexual violence and recruitment of children into armed groups have risen sharply since the conflict began.

Ethiopia



The United Nations released a report on September 19 that painted a bleak picture of Ethiopia's war-torn Ogaden region, detailing an acute medicine shortage, depleted food stocks, rising prices and an increased number of beatings and shootings. The Ogaden is a desolate corner of eastern Ethiopia where nomads are waging a separatist war against the Ethiopian military. It is populated mostly by ethnic Somalis. The report confirms that the Ethiopian military has largely sealed off parts of the area in an effort to stamp out a rebel movement and that civilians are suffering. After the rebels killed more than 60 Ethiopian guards and Chinese workers in April, government troops blockaded much of the area, according to Western diplomats and aid workers. Many Ogaden residents have described longstanding abuses, with Ethiopian soldiers gang-raping women, burning huts and killing civilians, accusations the Ethiopian government denies. *In November 2007, UN agencies began to deploy staff in Ethiopia's Somali region in an effort to step up humanitarian aid delivery to the area. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) intends to complete a needs assessment in the Ogaden in the next couple weeks.*

Iran



The government of Iran uses claims of foreign threats to justify both the denial of human rights and the development of what many believe to be a nuclear weapons program. The government routinely tortures and mistreats detained dissidents, including through prolonged solitary confinement. The Judiciary, which is accountable to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, is responsible for many serious human rights violations. Iranian authorities systematically suppress freedom of expression and opinion by closing newspapers and imprisoning journalists and editors. Recent months have seen the largest crackdown on civil liberties since the 1980s. Purges of suspected liberals have decimated university faculties, and repeated closures have all but silenced the once-vociferous opposition press. Four Iranian-American scholars were incarcerated earlier this year for alleged ties to American intelligence. Since the spring a wave of arrests has targeted everyone from women's-rights advocates to student leaders, trade unionists and critical journalists, packing the country's prisons so tight that police are commandeering other buildings as makeshift lock-ups. Despite prison crowding, punitive use of solitary confinement appears to have grown more common. The number of executions nearly doubled last year, to 177, bringing Iran the distinction of being the world's heaviest user of capital punishment per head of population. This year has seen not only a further jump in the number of judicial killings but a return of mass public hangings, which are sometimes broadcast on state television. *The BBC reports that a recent US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran, which shows that Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003, has acted like a safety valve,*

letting off the steam that had been building up over a possible American military attack. It is also likely to make it more difficult to significantly increase international sanctions.

Kosovo



Kosovar Albanians and Serbia have struggled to reach agreement on the future status of Kosovo, despite frequent negotiations and consistent diplomatic efforts by regional and international players. Ethnic Albanians make up more than 90% of the 1.8m population, while ethnic Serbs comprise the last 10%. A UN plan, currently under discussion, would give the territory a form of internationally supervised independence. Kosovo would be able to join the UN, have its own flag and its national anthem. The newly independent Kosovo would be prevented from merging with Albania, and Serbian pockets would be prevented from splitting off and joining Serbia. Despite built-in measures protecting the Serbian minority population, Serbia has widely rejected this proposal, and violence has flared since the plan was unveiled. On September 4, a senior Serbian official warned Serbia is ready to use force to prevent Western states from recognizing Kosovo as an independent state. *The deadline for passing final-status agreements on Kosovo now stands to pass without an official treaty. Kosovo is likely leaning towards declaring independence unilaterally once the deadline passes, a move to which the Serbian government is vehemently opposed. Other Western governments – including the US and most of the EU – have hinted they would recognize Kosovar independence. Nato - fearing a violent Serb reaction - has said it will keep 16,000 troops in Kosovo to deter any clashes.*

Nepal



A brutal civil war has been fought in Nepal for several years between rebels of the Communist Party of Nepal and government security forces. The rural population of this, one of the poorest countries in Asia, has suffered terribly. Both sides in the civil war have engaged in serious violations of international humanitarian law. In November, 2006, Nepal's coalition government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) signed a comprehensive peace agreement to end the fighting, rewrite the country's constitution (including whether it will remain a monarchy), and establish an interim government. The Nepali Army and Maoists have agreed to an arms management pact, under which each side would put away most of its weapons and restrict most troops to a few barracks, under the supervision of monitors from the United Nations. This fragile peace agreement was shaken in mid-September when Maoists left the interim coalition government, saying no progress was being made on their key demand of abolishing the monarchy and declaring a republic. The Maoists, who had agreed to a cease-fire last year, warned of widespread protests and a nationwide strike in October. *Elections for the Constituent Assembly (CA) tasked with deciding the final status of the monarchy were in October postponed for the third time. Many analysts doubt the polls will be held at all, and if held it is believed they would likely benefit the monarchy. As of yet the Maoists have*

held to their declared commitment to the ceasefire, though many fear the stalemate may result in Nepal entering an era of either ultra-rightist (military or military-backed) or ultra-leftist (Maoist) dictatorship.

Pakistan



In office since a 1999 coup d'etat, President Pervez Musharraf's military-backed government has had a poor human rights record. Ongoing concerns include arbitrary detention, lack of due process, and the mistreatment, torture, and "disappearance" of terrorism suspects and political opponents; harassment and intimidation of the media; and legal discrimination against and mistreatment of women and religious minorities. President Musharraf has announced his intention to run for reelection and recently indicated he is willing to resign as army chief. General Musharraf holds both jobs at present thanks to a constitutional amendment passed in 2003 with the help of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of religious parties. The MMA has now turned against General Musharraf for supporting the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda at America's behest. General Musharraf's original plan was to neuter the Supreme Court by sacking its chief justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry, last March. Three months of pro-Chaudhry protests succeeded in persuading other judges to reinstate their chief in June. Thwarted, General Musharraf began seriously to flirt with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Benazir Bhutto, a former prime minister who is currently in exile. He hoped to win her support for a constitutional amendment enabling his election as president while still in uniform. In the end General Musharraf yielded to pressure from the ruling Muslim League (Q) party, which sees the PPP as its nemesis, to abandon the deal with Miss Bhutto. *In October 2007 Musharraf won the support of most parliamentarians in controversial presidential elections, though the Supreme Court ruled that the winner could not be formally announced before it had decided whether General Musharraf was eligible to stand. Ms. Bhutto's October return from exile was marked by a suicide bombing targeting her homecoming parade, killing dozens. Musharraf declared emergency rule in November, dismissing judges opposed to his candidacy. The new Supreme Court confirmed his right to stand – Musharraf quit his arm post soon after. Pakistan's Chief Election Commissioner recently announced that general elections will be held on 8 January 2008, leaving many to question whether such elections can be free and fair if emergency rule has not been lifted.*

Somalia



Since the overthrow of Siad Barre's 21-year government in January 1991, civil conflict has torn Somalia apart, leading to the collapse of the state and the economy. According to the International Crisis Group, the UN's chief humanitarian officer, John Holmes, called Somali humanitarian and refugee crisis worst in world. Up to 400,000 have been displaced by fighting between ousted Islamists and clan militias against Ethiopian troops and Transitional Federal Government forces. Human Rights Watch states that abuses have been being perpetrated by all sides in this complex conflict: Ethiopian forces, Ethiopia's Somali allies in the transitional federal government (TFG), and those resisting the Ethiopian intervention, including militias loyal to the Hawiye clan and groups aligned to the ICU. But it is the Ethiopians with their superior weapons who are doing much of the harm in Mogadishu. A National Reconciliation Congress began in Mogadishu in June. The six-week conference, intended to settle

longstanding disputes among clans, ended in August. It produced upbeat resolutions but had no visible impact on a raging insurgency in Mogadishu. *According to Human Rights Watch, since November, renewed clashes in Mogadishu have been marked by increasing brutality toward civilians, including further summary executions and enforced disappearances of individuals by Ethiopian and TFG forces conducting counterinsurgency operations. There have been multiple reports that such abuses by Ethiopian and TFG forces have increased in the aftermath of the fighting on November 8, when Ethiopian troops and insurgents clashed near the Livestock Market and crowds dragged an Ethiopian soldier's body through the streets. The armed conflict in Mogadishu has fueled regional instability and has contributed to fighting in Ethiopia's own eastern Somali Regional State, where a longstanding rebel movement, the Ogaden National Liberation Front, has seized the opportunity of the military being stretched next door to increase attacks (see Ethiopia, above).*

Zimbabwe



In the elections of April 1980, Robert Mugabe, whose ZANU-PF (Patriotic Front) party won 1980 elections, has been prime minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe since its independence from Britain on April 18, 1980. Human rights violations in Zimbabwe have continued unabated throughout his rule. Mugabe's government has assaulted the media, the political opposition, civil society activists, and human rights defenders. Police and state agents arbitrarily arrest and detain peaceful activists, and engage in torture and ill-treatment of government critics while in detention. The early months of 2006 were marked by food shortages, which led to hyperinflation throughout the year; in August 2006 the inflation forced the government to replace its existing currency with a revalued one. Continuing economic problems led to a series of strikes in Zimbabwe in early 2007. In March a number of opposition leaders, including MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, were severely beaten and arrested by the police. These acts provoked widespread international condemnation. Mugabe's party chose him as its candidate for the 2008 presidential election. *In June 2007, the ruling ZANU-PF party and opposition MDC held preliminary talks in South Africa.*