

Jewish World Watch
Quarterly Update on Global Crises
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The purpose of this report is provide a quarterly update for Jewish World Watch of the most egregious human rights crises existing at this time. This supplements my summary of June, 2006. These descriptions are taken primarily from Human Rights Watch (www.humanrightswatch.org) and the New York Times. Other websites consulted were www.oxfam.org, and www.amnesty.org (Amnesty International).

As was the case last summer, there are so many incidents and outrages being perpetrated, it seems arbitrary and almost heartless to leave any out. But if forced to choose, the following seem to be the most serious, both in terms of the nature of the human rights violations and the numbers of people affected. With the exception of Sudan/Darfur, there is no effort to rank these in order of most serious. I have, however, added Chad as an adjunct to the Sudan/Darfur crisis since the human rights abuses now taking place in Chad seem to be a spillover from the events in Darfur.

1. Sudan/Darfur. Since February 2003, at least 200,000 Darfurians have died as the result of the armed conflict between the government of Sudan and armed rebel groups in Darfur. The government's counter-insurgency operations have been characterized by war crimes, crimes against humanity, and "ethnic cleansing." Four million people—more than half of Darfur's population—now depend on some form of international food relief. Widespread killings, rapes, and attacks by Sudanese government forces and "Janjaweed" militias have forced two million people into camps. Even these camps are not safe, and the killings and rapes continue unabated.

Civilian access to humanitarian assistance is at its lowest point since 2003-04. With at least 13 humanitarian aid workers killed in Darfur since May of 2006, and much of the region too dangerous for overland travel due to continuing attacks on humanitarian staff and convoys, humanitarian agencies are unable to reach hundreds of thousands of people in need across Darfur.

1a. Chad. Eastern Chad is suffering from the Darfur crisis across the porous border, and the border zone is now home to numerous armed groups. Both the Sudanese and Chadian governments continue to support insurgencies aimed at their opponents in N'djamena and Khartoum, to the detriment of civilians in the region and in violation of the Tripoli agreement signed on February 8, 2006, and the UN arms embargo established under UN Security Council

resolution 1591.

Political and military incursions into eastern Chad by both Darfur rebels and Sudanese government-backed militias from Darfur are also exacerbating latent ethnic tensions among Chadian communities. Most recently, Chadian communities of Arab nomads and various non-Arab ethnic groups such as the Dajo and Muro, in southeastern Chad, have become caught up in an ever-increasing spiral of inter-communal violence. Many of the perpetrators on both sides have described mutual hostility and suspicion reminiscent of ethnic groups in Darfur, and attacks have been accompanied by accusations of links to either the Darfur rebels or the Arab “Janjaweed” militias respectively.

2. **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.

The peace agreement contains several references to the parties’ respect for human rights, including a commitment by all parties to address issues such as the problems of people whose property has been expropriated, the tens of thousands of internally displaced persons, and compensation for those killed during the conflict. The parties also agreed to provide information about the more than one thousand Nepalis still “disappeared” after being detained by the army or the Maoists.

The army has still not provided information about more than 600 cases of Nepalis who were taken into custody by troops and have not been seen since. The army also engaged in torture and mistreatment of detainees as a matter of practice. Dozens of cases investigated by human rights groups demonstrated that detainees were routinely tortured and mistreated by the army.

In a related development, Chinese People’s Armed Police (PAP) shot dead a 17-year-old girl named Kelsang Namtso from Nagchu on September 30, 2006. At least one other Tibetan, 23-year-old Kunsang Namgyal from Kardze, was shot twice and arrested, and is feared dead. The two were part of a group of 73 Tibetans who were attempting to cross the border into Nepal through the 6,000-meter-high Nangpa Pass.

3. **Congo/Uganda.** Conflicts raging across Africa's Great Lakes Region, particularly in northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have led to millions of deaths and caused almost five million people to flee across borders or become displaced inside their countries. In 2005, combatants from armed groups as well as government soldiers deliberately killed, raped, and abducted civilians and destroyed or looted their property in repeated attacks, particularly in eastern Congo. In hundreds of cases throughout the country, police and other agents of security services arbitrarily detained and tortured citizens with the intent of extorting payment from them. Authorities arrested and closed the operations of journalists who criticized those in power. In March, 2006, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued its first arrest warrant in its investigation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, in the ICC's custody since March 16, is the former leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), an armed group responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Ituri region of northeastern DRC. The ICC has charged him with enlisting and conscripting children as soldiers and using them to participate actively in the conflict in Ituri. Many of the child soldiers were themselves killed in fighting that claimed more than 60,000 lives. Prosecutors said that at the height of the conflict, in 2003, as many as 30,000 children, both boys and girls, were part of Mr. Lubanga's militia. They served as fighters, cooks, carriers and sex slaves, some as young as 10 years old. His prosecution began in November, 2006 and is proceeding.

4. **North Korea.** The regime of leader Kim Jong Il, the subject of an intense personality cult, is still among the most repressive in the world. It uses the supposed threat of attack from the west as justification for diverting resources to the military and its nuclear program and away from feeding its people. The regime has made little progress in human rights, continuing its practice of arbitrary arrests, pervasive use of torture, and lack of due process and fair trials. There is no organized political opposition, labor activism, or independent civil society. There is no freedom of information or freedom of religion. Basic services, such as access to health care, education and even food are provided according to a classification scheme based on the governments' assessment of an individual's and his/her family's political loyalty. No legal counsel is provided or allowed to criminal suspects, and many of them are tortured or mistreated during the interrogation process. All prisoners are subjected to forced labor and face cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment; many die in prison because of mistreatment, malnutrition, and lack of medical care. Torture appears to be endemic. North Korea holds as many as 200,000 people in its political prisons. Not only are real or imagined dissenters imprisoned, but so are their relatives, including the elderly and children, under a guilt-by-association system instituted by North Korea's founder, Kim Il-sung. Prisoners in the gulag are provided starvation-level rations, forced to work

long days under brutal conditions, and many face torture or execution for trivial offenses. It is estimated that more than 400,000 have died in the North Korean gulag over 30 years. Recent decisions by the North Korean government to suspend the operation of the World Food Programme, ban the private sale of grain, and fully reinstate the discredited Public Distribution System could lead to renewed hunger for North Korea's already poor and destitute people.

5. Saudi Arabia. Human rights violations are pervasive in Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy. Despite international and domestic pressure to implement reforms, improvements have been halting and inadequate. Saudi law does not protect many basic rights. The government does not allow political parties, and places strict limits on freedom of expression. Arbitrary detention, mistreatment and torture of detainees, restrictions on freedom of movement, and lack of official accountability remain serious concerns. Saudi women continue to face serious obstacles to their participation in the economy, politics, media, and society. Many foreign workers face exploitative working conditions; migrant women working as domestics often are subjected to round-the-clock confinement by their employers, making them vulnerable to sexual abuse and other mistreatment. During the last two years, an estimated 100,000 Chadian workers residing in Saudi Arabia have had their residence permits revoked. Most were born in Saudi Arabia and have never lived in Chad or indeed anywhere other than Saudi Arabia. Lacking a valid residence permit, these workers are denied rights to healthcare and education.

The government continued to harass independent Saudi Arabian human rights defenders and stifle their efforts to establish independent rights monitoring groups. Saudi Arabia's secret police, known as the *mabahith*, detained al-Huwaider in Khobar on September 20 and interrogated her for six hours about a women's rights protest she was organizing before coercing her to sign a statement agreeing to desist from all human rights activities. The police had previously detained al-Huwaider on August 4 as she stood on a street in Khobar holding a placard advocating for women's rights. Al-Huwaider is a member of the group Human Rights First in Saudi Arabia, the country's only independent human rights group, which the government has refused to license.

6. Burma. Burma's authoritarian military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), continues to operate a strict police state and drastically restricts basic rights and freedoms. Hundreds of thousands of people, most of them from ethnic minority groups, continue to live precariously as internally displaced people. More than two million have fled to neighboring countries, in particular Thailand, where they face difficult circumstances as asylum seekers or illegal immigrants. In November of 2006, thousands of Burmese civilians were forced

to flee from army attacks in Karen state. There is clear, reliable evidence that civilians are being punished as a military strategy. Since the start of 2006 alone, 232 villages have been destroyed in Burma as part of the army's campaign against ethnic insurgents, and 82,000 people have been forced to flee as a direct result of armed conflict. Since the start of the harvest season in November, Burmese army soldiers have been laying increasing numbers of antipersonnel landmines in front of houses, around rice fields, and along trails leading to fields in order to deter civilians from harvesting their crops.

7. Zimbabwe. In reaction to a recent wave of protests against deteriorating social and economic conditions in the country, the Zimbabwean government has intensified its campaign to suppress peaceful dissent. Political, social and economic conditions in Zimbabwe have deteriorated considerably in recent years. Civil society organizations have increasingly expressed concerns at the worsening conditions by engaging in peaceful protests and demonstrations. The government's response has been heavy-handed and brutal. Police have violently disrupted peaceful protests by beating demonstrators with batons and in some cases rifle butts.

On September 25, for example, police violently disrupted a peaceful march by some 500 activists from the National Constitutional Assembly in Harare. Riot police armed with batons stopped the march, asked the activists to sit down, and proceeded to beat them one at a time with batons before ordering them to leave. During the beatings, a number of people panicked, which led to a stampede that injured about 24 people, seven of them seriously. Police have also used laws such as the Public Order and Security Act and the Miscellaneous Offences Act to justify the arbitrary arrest and detention of hundreds of civil society activists around the country. After arrest, most of the activists are released within hours, but some are held for days, often without charge. Others are brought before the judicial authorities to answer charges that, in many cases, are dismissed by the courts.

8. Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's disastrous human rights record worsened after a government massacre of demonstrators in Andijan in May 2005. The government has a history of violating the rights to freedom of religion, expression, association, and assembly, and such abuses only increased after the May massacre. Uzbekistan has no independent judiciary, and torture is widespread in both pre-trial and post-conviction facilities. The government continues its practice of controlling, intimidating, and arbitrarily suspending or interfering with the work of civil society groups, the media, human rights activists, and opposition political parties. In particular, repression against independent journalists, human rights defenders, and opposition members increased in 2005. Government declarations of human rights reform, such as an announcement

that the government will abolish the death penalty and the president's declaration of support for habeas corpus, had no practical impact. Uzbekistan has for many years fostered a hostile and dangerous environment for the work of human rights defenders and others in civil society. But in the 18 months following the May 2005 massacre, the government unleashed its fiercest crackdown on human rights defenders, independent journalists, and NGO activists, and political activists since independence. More than two dozen human rights defenders have had criminal charges brought against them, and according to the Uzbek human rights group Ezgulik, at least 17 are currently in prison. Many others have endured periods of arbitrary detention, interrogation, house arrest, vigilante attacks, Soviet-style "hate rallies," increased surveillance, detention of their family members, and interference with their work. One defender was released from prison in October, and many hope the annual amnesty and international pressure could result in more gaining their freedom. Dozens of others have had to flee Uzbekistan, following unrelenting persecution.

9. Iran. As in the case of North Korea, 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 uses torture and ill-treatment in detention of dissidents, including prolonged solitary confinement. The judiciary has been at the center of many serious human rights violations. Abuses are perpetrated by what Iranians call "parallel institutions": paramilitary groups and plainclothes intelligence agents violently attack peaceful protesters, and intelligence services run illegal secret prisons and interrogation centers. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, elected in June 2005, appointed a cabinet dominated by former members of the intelligence and security forces, some of whom are allegedly implicated in the most serious human rights violations since the Islamic Republic of Iran was established twenty-six years ago, such as the assassination of dissident intellectuals. Iran's ethnic and religious minorities are subject to discrimination and, in some cases, persecution. On November 9, Abbas Jaafari Dowlatabadi, head of the Judiciary in the southern province of Khuzistan, told the Islamic Republic News Agency that Iran's Supreme Court has confirmed the execution sentence of 10 Iranian Arabs. On December 3, branch 1059 of Tehran's Judiciary commenced a trial against four internet bloggers on charges of "participation in formation of groups to disturb national security," "propaganda against the state," "dissemination of disinformation to disturb public opinion by writing articles for newspapers and illegal internet sites," and "interviews with foreign radio broadcasts." The Baha'i community continues to be denied permission to worship or engage in communal affairs in a public manner.

10. 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. But events during the last month have been dramatic. For the first time since 1991, there is a credible government based in Mogadishu, the capital, with serious outside support and no organized military threat from within. On 6 December, the UN Security Council passed a resolution authorizing a regional peacekeeping force in Somalia under the auspices of the regional Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU). The mandate of the 8,000-strong IGASOM force is principally to protect the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and train its security forces. There have been clashes between a large pro-TFG Ethiopian force in the country and the forces of the Council of Somali Islamic Courts (the Islamic Courts). In October the Islamic Courts declared *jihad* ("holy war") against Ethiopian troops in Somalia, and called for the removal of all "foreign forces" from Somalia. But in the last month the Islamic forces have been routed and just abandoned their final outpost in the country on January 1.