

**Human Rights in Crises:
A Summary for Jewish World Watch***
March 2006

The purpose of this report is to identify for Jewish World Watch the most egregious human rights crises existing at this time. Unfortunately, there are so many incidents and outrages now 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.

These descriptions are taken primarily from the 2005 country reports of Human Rights Watch (www.humanrightswatch.org). Other websites consulted were www.oxfam.org, www.amnesty.org (Amnesty International), and www.doctorswithoutborders.org,

1. **Sudan/Darfur.** For the update on Darfur, please refer to the March Update report prepared by Honey Kessler Amado.

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. The human rights situation in Nepal worsened markedly in 2005. King Gyanendra staged a coup against the civilian government, which he claimed was a necessary step to tackle the Maoist insurgency. Security forces arrested all leaders of major political parties. Authorities also severed all communications links within Nepal and with the outside world. Many civil and political rights, including freedom of movement and freedom of assembly, were suspended. Approximately three thousand political, human rights, and student activists were detained for months after the coup. The crackdown forced many human rights defenders to leave the country and others to curtail their work. After months of internal bickering, the political parties in September 2005 organized a series of protests against the king's usurpation of power. However, a renewed clampdown on the press towards the end of 2005 demoralized the political opposition and the media.

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 January and June 2005, security forces killed dozens of men, women, and children protesting electoral delays in Kinshasa, Mbuyi Mayi, Goma and other towns. In May 2005, the national security service arrested over one hundred people, primarily from southern Katanga, supposedly suspected of planning a Katangan secession attempt. They detained some for months

* this report was prepared by Victor Gold and Peter Finlayson for JWW

without charge. 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.

4. North Korea. The regime of leader Kim Jong Il, the subject of an intense personality cult, is among the most repressive in the world. North Korea (The Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, DPRK) in 2005 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. Under North Korea's penal code, premeditated murder and so-called anti-state crimes such as treason, sedition, and acts of terrorism are punishable by death. During the food crisis in the 1990s, North Korea began executing people accused of crimes related to economic difficulties, such as stealing grain from agricultural cooperatives. Numerous eyewitness accounts by North Korean escapees have detailed how executions are carried out publicly, often at crowded marketplaces, and in the presence of children.

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. The kingdom carried out some seventy-three executions as of late September 2005, more than double the thirty-two executions in the whole of 2004. 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. The government continued to harass independent Saudi Arabian human rights defenders and stifle their efforts to establish independent rights monitoring groups.

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. It has suppressed the democratic movement represented by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, under detention since May 30, 2003, and has used internationally outlawed tactics in ongoing conflicts with ethnic minority groups. 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. The removal of Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt in October 2004 reinforced hard-line elements within the SPDC and resulted in increasing hostility directed at democracy movements, ethnic minority groups, and international agencies.

7. **Zimbabwe.** The continuing erosion of human rights in Zimbabwe was highlighted in 2005 by Operation Murambatsvina, the governments program of mass evictions and demolitions which began in May, and, which, according to the United Nations, deprived 700,000 men, women and children of their homes, their livelihoods, or both throughout the country. The evictions and demolitions occurred against a background of general dissatisfaction in many of Zimbabwes urban areas over the political and economic situation in the country. The country is currently spiraling into a huge economic and political crisis. The government continues to introduce repressive laws that suppress criticism of its political and economic policies. In August, parliament passed the Constitutional Amendment Act, which gives the government the right to expropriate land and property without the possibility of judicial appeal, and to withdraw passports from those it deems a threat to national security.

8. **Uzbekistan.** Uzbekistans disastrous human rights record worsened in 2005 after a government massacre of demonstrators in Andijan in May. 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.

9. **Iran.** The government routinely uses torture and ill-treatment in detention of dissidents, including prolonged solitary confinement. The judiciary, which is accountable to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 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. The Baha'i community continues to be denied permission to worship or engage in communal affairs in a public manner. In April 2005, protests erupted in the southern province of Khuzistan, home to nearly two million Iranians of Arab descent, following publication of a letter allegedly written by Mohammad Ali Abtahi, an advisor to then-President Mohammad Khatami, which referred to government plans to implement policies that would reduce the proportion of ethnic Arabs in Khuzistan's population.

After security forces opened fire to disperse demonstrators in Ahvaz, the confrontation turned violent and spread to other cities and towns in Khuzistan. The next day, Abtahi and other government officials called the letter a fake. During the clashes, security forces killed at least fifty protestors and detained hundreds more.