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**Global Crises Update:  
A Summary for Jewish World Watch  
March 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 my report of January, 2007. These descriptions are taken primarily from Human Rights Watch ([www.humanrightswatch.org](http://www.humanrightswatch.org)), the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Post.

This report is a bit longer than the January report because, since the writing of that report, Human Rights Watch has issued more detailed analyses of recent developments. I have omitted any reference to the situation in Sudan/Darfur/Chad with the understanding that others will report to JWW on that situation. I have made no attempt to rank the following crises. Instead, they are listed in alphabetical order.

**1. 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. Internal displacement in minority ethnic areas continues to be a serious concern, with over 500,000 civilians deemed to be internally displaced in eastern Burma, and thousands more whose numbers cannot be reliably ascertained, in parts of the country where effective monitoring is impossible. The SPDC restricts the activities of foreign aid agencies generally, and blocks humanitarian aid to areas of ongoing conflict. Untreated cases of malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other illnesses have reached serious levels. Since the start of the harvest season in November, 2006, 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.

**2. Congo/Uganda.** Conflicts raging across Africa's Great Lakes Region, particularly in northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have lead 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 2006 Uganda missed a key opportunity to reverse its deteriorating human rights record when its first multiparty presidential and parliamentary elections in 26 years were marred by intimidation of the opposition and widespread voting irregularities. Torture by security forces of detained suspected rebels and dissidents continued. Hopes were raised, however, for an end to the 20-year conflict in northern Uganda between the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan

government. A cessation of hostilities agreement is in effect while peace talks mediated by the regional government of southern Sudan continue. Under the terms of a cessation of hostilities agreement reached by the parties on August 26 and amended on November 1, 2006, LRA rebels are to assemble at two sites in southern Sudan. Other governments have pledged financial assistance for the talks through a UN-established fund.

Recently, however, peace talks appeared to be on the verge of collapse as the ceasefire between the government and LRA rebels expired and both sides threatened to resume violence if attacked.

**3. 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. Respect for basic human rights in Iran, especially freedom of expression and assembly, deteriorated in 2006. 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. The few independent dailies that remain heavily self-censor. Many writers and intellectuals have left the country, are in prison, or have ceased to be critical.

The government has considerably increased its harassment and intimidation of women's rights activists in recent weeks. On the morning of March 4, 2007, the Judiciary held a trial for four women's rights activists charged with "acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering." The gathering at issue was a peaceful demonstration on June 12, 2006 to protest discriminatory laws against women. Security forces attacked and broke up a gathering of hundreds of people marking International Women's Day in Tehran on March 8.

In 2006 negotiations over Iran's nuclear program dominated the policy of the European Union towards Iran, with human rights concerns a secondary matter. The EU pledged to tie Iranian respect for human rights to progress in co-operation on other issues, but the pledge had little impact. Iran refused to resume its "human rights dialogue" with the EU that it had suspended in 2005, despite the EU's repeated calls to do so. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vowed recently that Iran would never dismantle its nuclear program, even in the face of toughened sanctions from the United Nations Security Council.

**4. Iraq.** The human rights situation worsened significantly in 2006. The continuing armed conflict became increasingly sectarian in nature, with many commentators declaring the onset of a civil war, and Sunni and Shia armed groups targeting civilians from each other's communities. United States forces continued military operations against insurgent forces throughout the country, resulting in an unknown number of civilian deaths and injuries. In October, a Johns Hopkins-MIT mortality study estimated that 650,000 Iraqis had died as a result of the war since 2003, 600,000 of them in violent deaths; this figure was far higher than previous estimates. Relentless violent attacks caused greater displacement of civilians across Iraq, affecting Sunni and Shia communities as well as Christians and other minorities. The Iraqi government stated that 234,000 persons were

displaced since February, 2006, but a study published by the Brookings Institution and the University of Bern in October, 2006, estimated that the numbers were between 300,000 and 400,000.

Revelations have emerged of Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense personnel systematically torturing and sometimes killing detainees in their custody. Government investigations failed to lead to the arrest and prosecution of alleged suspects, despite mounting evidence.

**5. 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 last nine months have been completely transformative," said Kunda Dixit, editor of the weekly Nepali Times.

But the success of that transformation is by no means assured in what remains a deeply polarized, dirt-poor country. Nepal still ranks near the bottom of nearly all indexes of human well-being and development. Aggravating the problems of Nepal's already impoverished population, the decade of conflict seriously hampered aid distribution, health care and education. Economic disruptions caused by fighting and frequent blockades and checkpoints have curtailed food production and distribution, resulting in high rates of malnutrition and associated childhood maladies. Conditions are particularly bad for people displaced by the fighting and attendant economic problems, believed to number in the tens of thousands. After the ceasefire and the commitments made by the Maoists, some displaced Nepalese returned to their homes but thousands of others remained displaced, not returning because of a fear of reprisals or ongoing repression by Maoist forces. Unexploded ordinance and mines, mostly left behind by the Maoists, continue to injure civilians, particularly children.

In the new atmosphere since the peace agreement, historically marginalized groups such as those of low caste and oppressed ethnicities have suddenly awakened to the possibility of gaining a foothold in society. Many are agitating, sometimes violently, to ensure that their interests are written into the country's new charter. Strikes and protests are frequent. International observers say continued political unrest could delay the assembly elections set for June 2007. The vote is the Maoists' chief demand, one they hope will result in the abolition of the monarchy. Demonstrations for greater rights spun out of control in January, producing clashes in the south that have killed at least 27 people. Maoist leaders, champions of revolution by the downtrodden, suggested calling in the army to quell the movement.

**6. 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 government's assessment of an individual's and his/her family's political loyalty. The Washington Post reported in March, 2007, that North Korea has adopted a new hard line toward citizens who "illegally" crossed the border to China to find food or earn money to feed their families. According to recent border-crossers interviewed by Human Rights Watch, Pyongyang has implemented harsher punishments for those repatriated, who are regarded as traitors.

North Korea's announcement on October 9, 2006, of its first nuclear weapons test provoked grave concern and protest internationally. The UN Security Council resolution adopted in response condemned the test, called for sanctions including a ban on exporting material for weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles to North Korea, and authorized inspection of cargo entering or leaving the country to prevent illegal trafficking in unconventional weapons or ballistic missiles. In early November, North Korea agreed to return to the long-stalled six-party talks on its nuclear weapons program (involving also China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the United States), which it had been boycotting since November 2005 in reaction to US financial sanctions against it for its alleged complicity in counterfeiting US dollars and money laundering. At this writing the talks have yet to resume. In February, 2007, 6-Party talks in Beijing produced a breakthrough in negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program with Pyongyang agreeing to shut its Yongbyon nuclear reactor within 60 days.

**7. Saudi Arabia.** Overall human rights conditions remain poor in Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy. Despite international and domestic pressure to implement reforms, King Abdullah has not met expectations of improvements following his succession to the throne in August 2005. The government undertook no major human rights reforms in 2006, and there were signs of backsliding on issues of human rights defenders, freedom of association, and freedom of expression. Saudi law does not protect many basic rights and the government places strict limits on freedom of association, assembly, and 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 society. Many foreign workers, especially women, face exploitative working conditions.

The United States in 2006 transferred 29 Saudi detainees at Guantanamo Bay to Saudi custody. Nine of the 29 were released after three months, in addition to three other former Guantanamo detainees who had been transferred in July 2005. On February 19, 2007, the government executed four Sri Lankans charged with armed robbery and subsequently ordered their bodies to be publicly displayed, in circumstances that flout basic protections of international law. "The execution of these four migrants, who had been badly beaten and locked

up for years without access to lawyers, is a travesty of justice,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

**8. 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.

**9. Uzbekistan.** Human rights conditions in Uzbekistan deteriorated further in 2006. In the year-and-a-half since Uzbek government forces killed hundreds of unarmed protestors in the city of Andijan on May 13, 2005, no one has been held accountable for the killings. Instead, the authorities conducted closed trials and continued their campaign to silence critics of the government’s version of events. Many local and international civil society groups and media outlets had to cease operation, and human rights defenders and independent journalists were imprisoned or fled the country. The government secured the extradition of refugees and asylum seekers on grounds that in numerous cases appeared to be politically motivated. In 2006 at least nine human rights defenders and one journalist were convicted and imprisoned on politically motivated charges.

Uzbek authorities continued their unrelenting, multi-year campaign of unlawful arrest, torture, and imprisonment of Muslims who practice their faith outside state controls or who belong to unregistered religious organizations, branding peaceful religious believers as “religious extremists.” Dozens were arrested or convicted in 2006 on charges related to religious “extremism.” Human Rights Watch documented abuses in many of these cases. In 2006 there was no fundamental change in the widespread use of torture or in policies and practices that could effectively combat torture. Authorities persist in their refusal to acknowledge the main conclusion of the UN special rapporteur on torture, that “torture or similar ill-treatment is systematic,” and have not taken any meaningful steps on most of the special rapporteur’s recommendations. According to recent Uzbek government assertions, habeas corpus will be implemented in January 2008.

**10. Zimbabwe.** Human rights violations in Zimbabwe continued unabated in 2006. President Robert Mugabe’s government maintained its assault on the media, the political opposition, civil society activists, and human rights defenders. Police and state agents continue to arbitrarily arrest and detain peaceful activists, and the latter half of the year saw a marked increase in reports of torture and ill-treatment of government critics while in detention.

More than a year after the government's program of mass evictions and demolitions—Operation Murambatsvina—tens of thousands of people continue to suffer the catastrophic consequences. Despite numerous public statements from the government that it would initiate a reconstruction program to address the homelessness created by the evictions, few of the people displaced by the evictions have received housing and many remain in need of food, water, and other forms of assistance. In addition, the government has repeatedly hindered efforts by the United Nations to provide emergency shelter and has subjected many of the victims to repeated forced evictions. The humanitarian situation of the evictees and the HIV/AIDS situation are among problems that are being exacerbated by acute food shortages in the country. Food security is likely to remain precarious for many vulnerable groups.

International criticism of Mugabe has sharpened in March, 2007, after police cracked down on opposition supporters attempting to attend a banned prayer rally, arresting several members of the opposition group, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) including party leader Morgan Tsvangirai. MDC officials say Tsvangirai and a number of other detainees were badly beaten while in detention. Western critics including Britain and the United States have threatened more economic sanctions on Mugabe and his government, which is already battling Zimbabwe's worst economic crisis in decades with inflation now topping 1,700 percent. Mugabe recently vowed to survive any Western attempt to dislodge him from power, "Nothing frightens me, not even little fellows like Bush and Blair."