UNCENSORED WATCH

Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism

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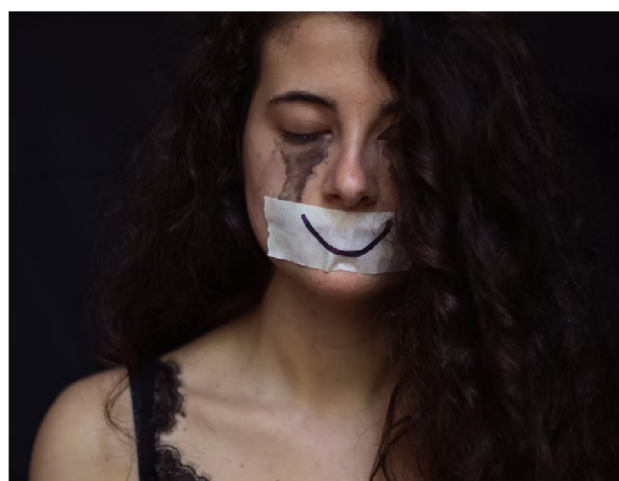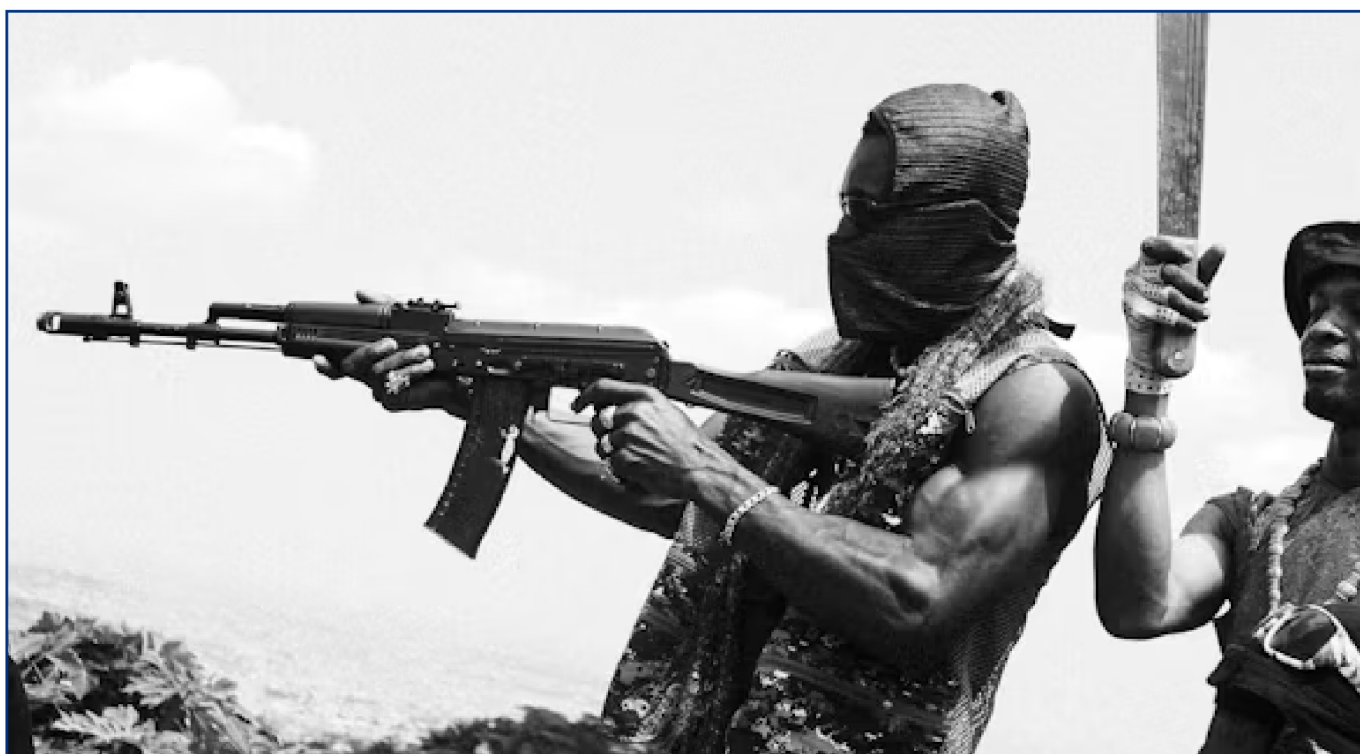
UNCENSORED WATCH

Issue 10|July 2025

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info@worldantiextremism.org

Issue:

Uncensored Watch – Issue 10 | July 2025

Credits:

Editor-in-Chief: Rajaab Muqarrab
Design: Suliman Haydari
Contributors: WAEN's Research and Interns Team

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WELCOME TO UNCENSORED WATCH- A PROJECT OF WORLD
ANTI-EXTREMISM NETWORK

Hello, Dear Readers, and welcome to the June edition of Uncensored Watch!

Last year, our Toronto Democracy Forum saw participation from more than 18 countries, and we proudly published four powerful case studies. This year, we're building on that momentum and opening a Call for Abstracts for papers under the theme: "*Civil Resistance Against Authoritarian and Religious Radicalism.*" You'll find all the details inside this newsletter, including the submission deadline; don't miss it.

Not just that, this issue is full of compelling updates from around the world, and some exciting new content, including our exclusive podcast episode with Simon Lee, which is a timely discussion, and exactly what you didn't know you needed. So, get into the discussion and enjoy the read.

Enjoy Reading!

The Uncensored Watch Team

SECTION – 2:

Global Crisis in Focus
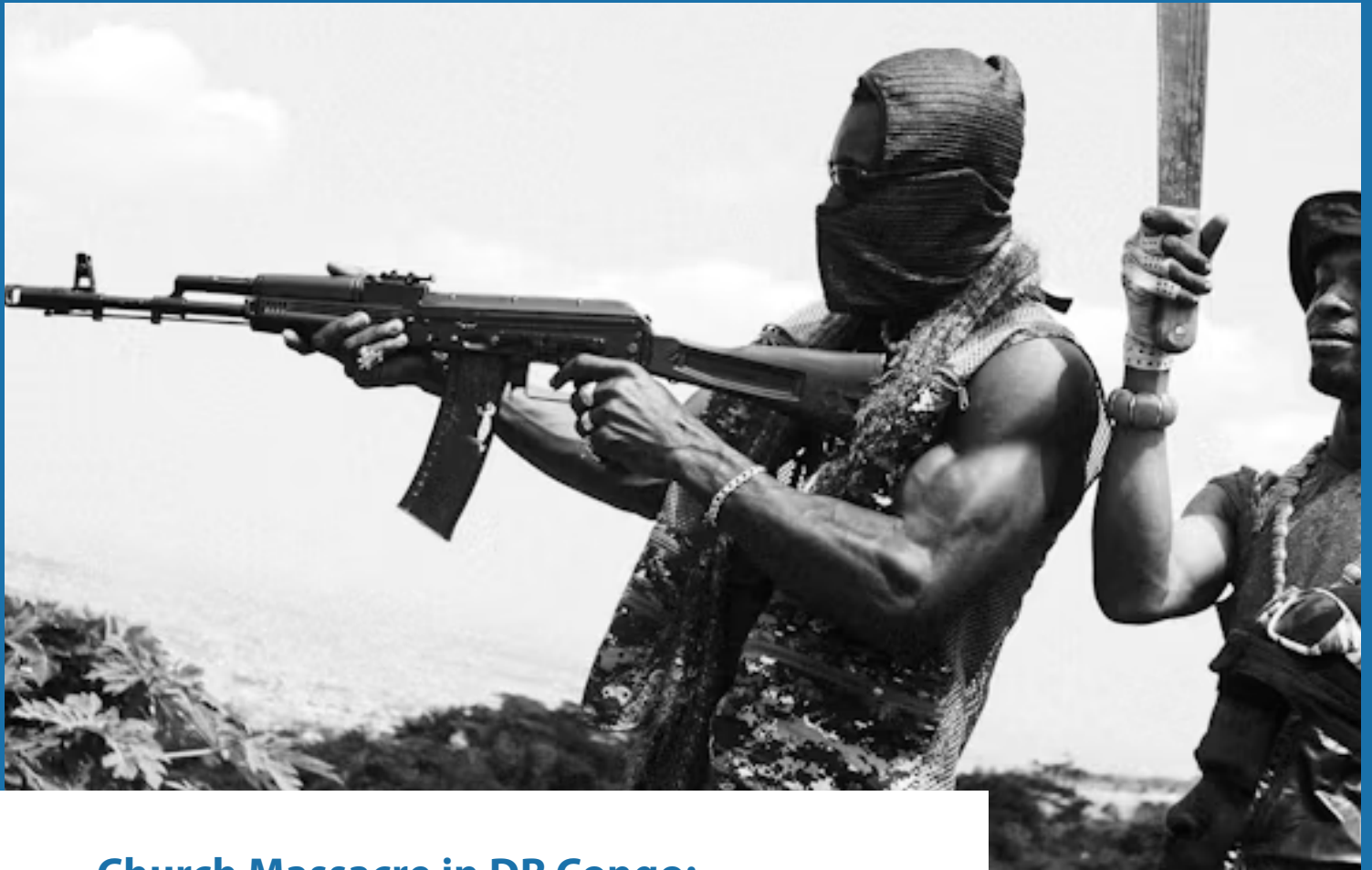
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Church Massacre in DR Congo: A Grim Reminder of State Failure and the Erosion of Human Rights

The Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has long been a hotspot of armed conflict, where rebel groups like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and M23 have terrorized civilians for decades. Despite numerous regional and international peace efforts, violence continues to escalate, especially in Ituri and North Kivu provinces. In this backdrop of ongoing insecurity and failed protection, a new wave of terror has struck.

At least 38 people were killed and 15 injured in a brutal attack on a Catholic church in Komanda, a city in Ituri province. The attackers, believed to be members of the ADF, stormed the church while worshippers were praying overnight. Armed with guns and machetes, they massacred civilians, set homes and shops on fire, and left many missing. Witnesses describe scenes of horror, bodies hacked or burned, people shot, and widespread panic. Local communities are especially angered because the attack occurred in an area with a significant military presence, raising urgent questions about the effectiveness and even the role of security forces.

The ADF, originally a Ugandan rebel group, has pledged allegiance to ISIS and is considered one of the deadliest militias operating in the region. Their attacks have intensified in recent years, leaving thousands dead and displacing many more. At the same time, the government recently signed a peace agreement with the M23 rebel group in Qatar, following negotiations in the U.S.

brokered by former President Donald Trump. While that deal offers a glimmer of hope for stability, the continued attacks by the ADF expose the fragility of peace efforts and the urgent need for effective protection of civilians.

The massacre at the [Catholic church in Komanda](#) is more than a tragic incident; it is a grim reflection of the deep collapse of human rights, the failure of governance, and a dangerous slide toward authoritarian neglect and totalitarian-like control in conflict zones of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). For years, eastern DRC has been plagued by violence from non-state armed groups like the ADF, while the state has consistently failed to fulfill its most basic responsibility: protecting the right to life. In this attack alone, dozens were slaughtered during a peaceful religious gathering, a blatant violation of freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and the right to life and security as guaranteed under international human rights law.

The presence of forces that were meant to ensure safety either failed to act or was absent entirely. This raises serious concerns about authoritarian complacency, where governments consolidate power but do little to uphold democratic values, accountability, or protect civilians. Entire communities live under constant fear and trauma, deprived not only of safety but of any meaningful participation in decisions affecting their lives. The displacement, loss of homes, and destruction of sacred spaces like churches further devastate people's cultural and emotional integrity. The DRC government must investigate and prosecute not only the perpetrators but also any local or military officials whose negligence enabled the attack. A thorough restructuring of the security forces is needed to eliminate corruption, increase effectiveness, and prioritize civilian protection over political agendas. The UN, AU, and regional actors must shift from reactive statements to concrete action, including peacekeeping reinforcements, arms embargoes on rebel groups, and pressure on the DRC government to implement security and justice reforms. All peace processes, including those with M23 or other armed groups, must be rooted in a human rights framework, not just ceasefire agreements. Sustainable peace is impossible if communities are left vulnerable.

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Kenya's Democracy Under Siege: Police Brutality, Protester Deaths, and the Rise of Authoritarianism

Kenya is facing growing anger and grief after deadly antigovernment protests turned violent, leaving at least 31 people dead and more than 100 others wounded. The demonstrations, held on July 7 to mark Saba Saba Day, a day that historically symbolizes the fight for democracy, turned tragic as police clashed with protesters across the country. Over 500 people were also arrested, and human rights groups have reported two cases of forced disappearances. The protests, which began in June 2024, were originally sparked by public outrage over tax increases. But over time, they grew into a broader movement against corruption, poor governance, and police brutality. Most of the protesters have been young Kenyans who feel abandoned by the system. Their demands for justice have repeatedly been met with violence. The most recent demonstrations were some of the deadliest yet. Police were accused of using excessive force, including live bullets and tear gas. In some cases, they were seen cooperating with armed gangs, carrying machetes and spears, adding to the chaos. Businesses were looted and destroyed in cities like Nairobi and Eldoret. Security forces were deployed in at least 20 counties across Kenya. Human rights organizations, including the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), have condemned the violence and called for accountability from all involved: police, state officials, and armed civilians. The Law Society of Kenya also criticized the deployment of heavily armed police using unmarked vehicles and hiding their identities, despite court orders that such tactics should not be used. The death toll from protests since last year has now crossed 100. This includes the recent killing of Albert Ojwang, a 30-year-old blogger and teacher who was arrested in June for allegedly posting critical content about a government official. He died

in police custody under suspicious circumstances. Though police claimed he had committed suicide, an autopsy revealed injuries consistent with torture, including severe head trauma and neck compression. Two police officers were later arrested in connection with his death. Ojwang's killing became a powerful symbol of the growing repression in Kenya. His funeral sparked emotional scenes, with youth carrying his coffin to the police station where he was last seen, setting it ablaze in protest. His story ignited fresh waves of demonstrations, especially among Gen Z protesters, who refuse to stay silent in the face of violence. Adding to the public outrage, President William Ruto recently made a controversial statement saying that protesters who vandalize property should be shot in the legs to "incapacitate them," though not killed. This comment has drawn criticism for encouraging police violence rather than calling for a peaceful resolution. The events are a textbook example of rising authoritarianism masquerading as democratic rhetoric. While the Kenyan constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms, including the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and protection from arbitrary detention, the state's actions clearly contradict these principles.

Authoritarian regimes often use state institutions to silence criticism and create a climate of fear. The police, who are meant to serve and protect citizens, have instead become instruments of state repression. Their involvement in killings, enforced disappearances, and

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torture shows a dangerous shift from public service to political enforcement. The case of Albert Ojwang illustrates how even mild online criticism of the government can cost someone their life in a lawless environment. The state's framing of protesters as enemies, rather than citizens with grievances, is an attempt to delegitimize dissent and criminalize civic engagement. It shows a government that fears accountability and sees free speech as a threat to its hold on power. What makes this situation more alarming is the normalization of violence by top leadership. When the President suggests that protesters be shot, albeit "only in the legs", he is not encouraging law and order, but signaling tolerance for brutality. Such rhetoric

further strengthens police officers to act without restraint and erodes whatever checks remain on their power.

The United Nations human rights office has also voiced concern over the killings, saying security forces used lethal force to suppress the protests. Meanwhile, Kenya's own National Cohesion and Integration Commission has urged leaders to avoid inflaming ethnic tensions and called out police for excessive force. As the country mourns the loss of young lives and demands justice, the call for police reform and protection of civil liberties has grown louder. For many Kenyans, these protests are not just about politics; they are about dignity, justice, and the right to be heard without fear of being silenced. To reverse this dangerous slide, urgent steps must be taken, like independent investigations and justice, demilitarization of protests, because protest is a democratic right, not a battlefield. Structural reforms are needed to dismantle the culture of impunity within the National Police Service. Human rights organizations, both local and international, must continue to amplify the voices of victims and demand accountability. International bodies should consider targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for abuses. The choice must be guided not by power, but by the principles of humanity, dignity, and the rule of law.

Kenya's Gen Z Protests Signal a Democratic Rebirth

In recent months, Kenya has witnessed a powerful wave of youth-led protests, primarily organized and driven by Generation Z. These young citizens have taken to the streets across the country to speak out against what they see as unfair, harmful, and exploitative policies under the leadership of President William Ruto. Far from being a moment of chaos or collapse, this youth movement reflects a vibrant and active form of democracy, where ordinary people take charge of their future, not just during elections, but every day.

The protests, which have remained largely peaceful, have been met with alarming government repression. Police have responded with excessive violence, arbitrary arrests, abductions, and in some cases, the use of terrorism charges against protest organizers. Yet, the youth have shown remarkable resilience and organization, mobilizing through social media, fundraising for victims, offering community support, and creating alternative platforms to express dissent and push for change.

Some government officials and political observers have attempted to frame this uprising as a failure of the democratic system. However, this interpretation misses the larger truth. What is happening in Kenya is not a breakdown of democracy; it is democracy in action. These young citizens are demonstrating political maturity by refusing to be passive observers. They are educating themselves and others, forming new civic networks, discussing policies, and directly challenging the status quo, without relying on traditional political parties or elite negotiations.

This movement is reminiscent of Kenya's pro-democracy struggles in the 1990s, when citizens mobilized to end the dictatorship of Daniel arap Moi. Today's protests echo those calls for justice and freedom, but the demands go deeper. Protesters chanting "Ruto must go" are not simply calling for a change in leadership; they are calling for a transformation in how power works in Kenya. They are aware that the removal of one leader does not guarantee structural change, especially when past transitions have only led to new faces repeating the same injustices.

What sets this movement apart is its independence and authenticity. It is not controlled by donors or political parties. It is a self-driven, community-rooted uprising that is redefining what it means to be a citizen. These young people are not fooled by backroom deals, hollow reforms, or performative consultations. They have seen the failures of the past and are determined not to repeat them. Their vision is not limited to regime change, but rather to building a new, accountable, and inclusive political culture.

In essence, the protests led by Kenya's youth are a hopeful sign, not of crisis, but of a new democratic awakening. They show that a generation long dismissed as apathetic is, in fact, deeply engaged and unwilling to accept a future defined by corruption, inequality, and broken promises. Their courage and persistence are a reminder that democracy lives not in speeches or ballot boxes alone, but in the active participation of citizens who care deeply about justice, fairness, and their country's future.

Balochistan Bleeds: Ethnic Violence and Honour Killings Highlight State's Failure to Protect

Two deeply tragic and disturbing incidents recently occurred in Pakistan's Balochistan province. First, on July 11, 2025, when bus passengers were kidnapped and killed. Gunmen stopped several buses traveling from Balochistan to Punjab, kidnapped passengers, apparently targeting them based on their Punjabi ethnicity, and later killed nine of them. Their bodies were found in the nearby mountains, filled with bullet wounds. This horrifying act of violence has not been officially claimed, but similar attacks in the past have been carried out by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist group fighting for Baloch independence. The Pakistani Prime Minister strongly condemned the attack, blaming it on "India-sponsored terrorists," although India has not responded to the allegation. This attack is tragically similar to the Jaffar Express train hijacking in March 2024, where BLA fighters stopped the train, separated passengers based on their ethnicity, and killed many of them, mostly Punjabis. These targeted killings highlight the growing ethnic tensions and the violent tactics used by separatist groups to make political statements.

In another case from Balochistan, a young couple, Bano Bibi and Ehsan Ullah, were brutally murdered in what appears to be an honour killing, a deeply rooted practice where people are killed for marrying without family approval. A video of their murder went viral, leading to national outrage. The couple was taken before a local tribal chief, Sardar Sherbaz Khan, who allegedly ordered their killing. At least 13 people have been arrested so far, but the main suspect, Bano's brother, is still on the run.

Balochistan, despite being rich in natural resources, has long been neglected by the central government. It is Pakistan's largest but least developed province and has suffered from both armed separatist insurgencies and oppressive tribal traditions. Women, in particular, suffer the most from forced disappearances, killings in the name of honour, to being punished simply for protesting. Rights groups say the state has failed to enforce the law, instead relying on tribal leaders and feudal lords who continue to support outdated and violent practices. Many such crimes go unpunished unless there's public pressure, such as viral videos.

As activist Sammi Deen Baloch said, women in Balochistan face two forms of violence: one from tribal customs and the other from state repression. Both work together to silence dissent and control the region, especially its women.

These incidents show how dangerous and lawless some parts of Balochistan have become for both ethnic minorities and women. The attacks on passengers and the honour killing of a couple reflect deep problems of ethnic conflict, weak law enforcement, and a justice system that too often protects the powerful instead of the victims. Without real reforms and the rule of law, such tragedies will continue to happen.

Photo by ev on Unsplash

Angola: Police Use Excessive Force Against Peaceful Protesters

On July 12, 2025, in Luanda, the capital of Angola, police used excessive force against peaceful protesters who were demonstrating against rising fuel prices and the removal of public transport subsidies. The protest had been officially approved by the authorities, but as the crowd reached a key area downtown, police suddenly cracked down using tear gas, rubber bullets, and batons—without any warning. At least nine people were injured, with some needing surgery due to serious injuries. Seventeen protesters were arrested, and some were only released after lawyers stepped in to help. Despite following proper procedures and getting permission for the protest, the police claimed they intervened because the protesters didn't follow the exact route suggested by the authorities. Protest organizers, however, say they complied with all requirements and had received official approval.

The violent response reflects a serious violation of basic human rights, particularly the right to freedom of assembly and expression. Despite following legal procedures and obtaining permission, the authorities responded with force, signaling a disregard for democratic norms and the rule of law. This incident reveals a deeper problem within Angola's security apparatus: a persistent pattern of using violence to silence dissent. Instead of respecting the voices of its citizens, especially those expressing legitimate concerns over economic hardship, such actions create an atmosphere of fear, suppress civic engagement, and erode public trust in state institutions. The use of force was not only unnecessary but also unlawful under international standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms and the African Guidelines on Policing Assemblies. These frameworks make it clear that force should only be used when absolutely necessary and in a proportionate manner. Using tear gas and batons against peaceful demonstrators, without warning, is a direct breach of those principles. Furthermore, the violence highlights the government's failure to implement meaningful reform within its security forces. Previous recommendations by human rights organizations have been largely ignored or weakly enforced, resulting in recurring abuses.

Human Rights Watch and other groups have long raised concerns about Angola's police using violence against peaceful demonstrators. Although there have been some attempts at reform, these repeated crackdowns show that current measures aren't enough. Angola is legally obligated under both African and international human rights laws to protect the right to peaceful protest, but the use of force in this case clearly violated those standards. To prevent such violations, Angola must take immediate steps to hold officers accountable through impartial investigations and disciplinary actions, regardless of rank, and strengthen oversight mechanisms to monitor police conduct during protests. There is also a need to implement comprehensive reforms within the security sector to align policing with human rights standards and guarantee protest rights in practice, not just on paper, by ensuring that citizens can express dissent without fear of violence or retaliation. In a democratic society, peaceful protest is not a threat; it is a right. Angola must start treating it that way.

India's Unlawful Expulsions: Bengali Muslims Deported Without Due Process, Stripped of Rights and Dignity

India has been expelling hundreds of Bengali-speaking Muslims, including many Indian citizens, to Bangladesh without following legal procedures. Since May 2025, the Indian government, led by the Hindu nationalist BJP, has increased efforts to remove people it claims are "illegal immigrants," particularly in states bordering Bangladesh such as Assam, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh. However, many of those expelled are actually Indian citizens who have lived in the country for decades or were even born there. People are being rounded up, detained, and forced across the border into Bangladesh, often during the night. Authorities are not verifying their citizenship status properly. Many of those expelled have reported being beaten, threatened at gunpoint, or forced into Bangladesh by India's Border Security Force (BSF). In some cases, their identity documents were torn up or ignored, and their phones were taken to prevent them from contacting their families. Some individuals have managed to return to India, but many remain missing or stranded in Bangladesh. Rohingya refugees, who had escaped violence in Myanmar, are also being deported or pushed into the sea, putting their lives at serious risk. These actions have sparked outrage because they violate international law and basic human rights. People are being expelled without a fair hearing or due process, and even those with legal cases pending in court have been deported. In several instances, individuals who had already been recognized as Indian citizens by official tribunals were still forced out. The Indian Supreme Court has refused to stop these deportations, including those involving Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh has criticized India's actions, stating that it will only accept individuals who are confirmed Bangladeshi citizens and who go through official repatriation procedures. The background to this issue includes a controversial citizenship verification process in Assam in 2019, which excluded nearly two million people, the majority of whom were Muslims. This has created confusion and fear among Bengali-speaking Muslims. The government and some media outlets have been using terms like "infiltrators" or "illegal" to describe Muslims, which has contributed to growing religious discrimination in the country. Alongside these expulsions, there have also been mass demolitions of Muslim homes, businesses, and mosques in BJP-ruled states like Gujarat, often without any legal process.

The ongoing forced expulsions reflect a sheer violation of basic freedoms, including the right to due process and non-discrimination. Many of those expelled have valid citizenship claims, yet they are being detained, stripped of their identification, denied the right to defend themselves, and pushed across borders, often violently. These actions directly undermine human dignity, as individuals are treated as disposable, stateless, and undeserving of the legal protections guaranteed under both Indian and international law. Families are being torn apart, elderly people and children are left helpless, and entire communities are being displaced and humiliated, largely because of their religion and ethnic background. This treatment of these individuals sends a dangerous message: that citizenship

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and belonging can be denied arbitrarily, and that one's faith or language can be weaponized against them. It reinforces a climate of fear and insecurity among minority communities and erodes the values of equality and justice that form the foundation of any democratic society.

To undo the damage and restore human dignity, the Indian government must immediately halt all unlawful expulsions, conduct an independent investigation into reported abuses by security forces, and ensure that any deportation process strictly follows legal and human rights standards. It is essential to guarantee access to fair hearings, legal aid, and transparent verification processes for all individuals in question. India must also reaffirm its commitment to protect the rights of minorities and uphold its obligations under international law, including the protection of refugees and prevention of statelessness. Rebuilding trust with affected communities will require not only accountability but also the political will to uphold the principles of justice, equality, and human dignity for all citizens, regardless of religion or ethnicity. Human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and United Nations experts have condemned these actions, arguing that India is violating the rights to citizenship, freedom from discrimination, and the principle of nonrefoulement, which forbids sending people back to places where they could face danger. These groups have urged India to stop the expulsions, respect legal rights, and ensure fair treatment for all individuals, particularly poor migrants and refugees.

Russia Blocks Global Web Access, Deepens Digital Isolation Since Ukraine Invasion

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Russian government has dramatically tightened its grip on the internet. A new report by Human Rights Watch, which was released on July 30, 2025, reveals that authorities are using powerful technology to censor online content, block websites, and monitor users. This crackdown is being justified in the name of national security, but in reality, it is isolating Russian internet users and severely restricting their freedoms.


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Thousands of websites have already been blocked. These include independent media, opposition leaders' pages, human rights organizations, and social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Accessing these platforms is now nearly impossible without using censorship circumvention tools like VPNs. But even these tools are increasingly being blocked, and many people in Russia don't know how to use them. As a result, people are being pushed toward Russian-made apps and browsers, which are heavily controlled by the state and promote government-approved content.

One example is the popular Russian browser Yandex, which has been used to display military recruitment ads more than two billion times. Although Yandex claims to prohibit political advertising, the Russian government requires all platforms to dedicate 5% of their ad space to "social advertisements," which often promote the state's interests, including the war in Ukraine. At the same time, international

tech companies like Apple, Cloudflare, and <u>Mozilla</u> are being pressured to comply with Russian laws, facing threats of fines or bans if they refuse to cooperate. The government's control goes beyond censorship; it now has authority over much of the country's internet infrastructure. Using a system called TSPU, Russian officials can slow down or shut off the internet in certain areas during so-called "drills," which often result in banking failures and disrupted access to apps. The government has also centralized control of IP addresses and created its own national domain system, further isolating the Russian internet from the global web. These efforts are not just affecting Russians inside the country. In the parts of Ukraine occupied by Russia, similar restrictions are being enforced, cutting off people from independent sources of information. This kind of censorship violates Russia's obligations under international law, which protect the rights to free expression, access to information, and privacy. This situation is a clear example of digital authoritarianism, where the government uses internet control as a tool to limit people's freedom. By doing so, the Russian authorities have created a digital environment where only state-approved information is easily available. People are slowly being pushed away from the global internet and into a tightly controlled space that serves the interests of the government. This type of system allows those in power to shape public opinion, silence critics, and control how citizens understand the world around them, all without the use of force, but through technology.
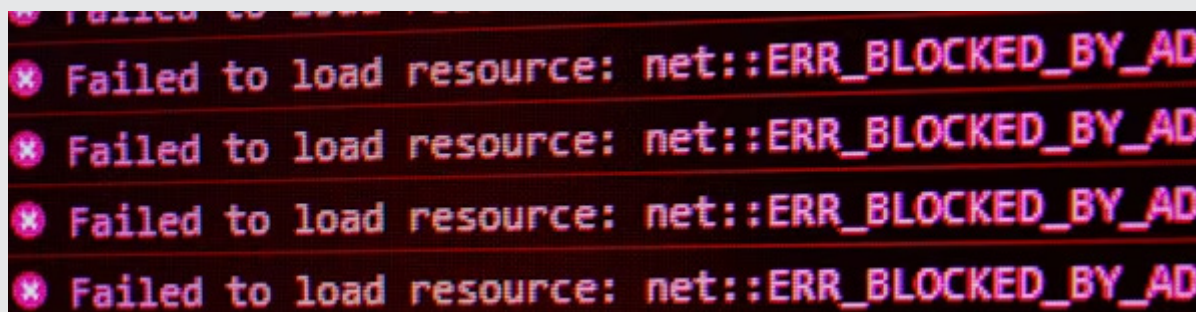
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In such situations, the solution is not confrontation, but support. International organizations and tech companies can help by developing safe, simple tools that people in Russia can use to access independent information. These tools should protect privacy and be easy to understand. Global internet platforms should also stay firm on human rights values and avoid helping governments censor or spy on users. They can look for legal ways to operate without compromising their users' freedom. Finally, it's important to support digital education. People should know how the internet works, how censorship affects them, and what they can do to protect their rights. This is not just about politics, it's about giving people the chance to make informed choices and hear different sides of a story. In short, what's happening in Russia shows how technology, if misused, can quietly limit people's freedoms. But it also shows the need to keep the internet open, safe, and free for everyone.

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A Human Rights Emergency: The Global Abandonment of Afghan Refugees

As international attention fades from Afghanistan, a quiet but devastating crisis is escalating. Afghan refugees, many of whom once fled Taliban violence, are now being forced back into the same danger they escaped. In 2025 alone, nearly 2 million Afghans have been returned or expelled, including unaccompanied children, according to UN experts. These are not just numbers; they are lives thrown into chaos, futures destroyed, and rights denied. In Iran, more than 1.5 million Afghans have been deported this year alone, amid a crackdown that intensified following its war with Israel. In Pakistan, a campaign that began with the deportation of undocumented refugees has now expanded to include those with valid legal status. Even the United States, long seen as a refuge, has moved to strip temporary protections from thousands

of Afghans, arguing that conditions in their homeland have improved. Europe and Central Asia have followed suit, halting asylum programs and issuing removal orders. Behind each decision is a chilling reality: Afghan women's rights activists, journalists, and minorities are being sent back to a regime known for imprisonment, torture, and public executions.

What makes this crisis so alarming is not just the scale of the expulsions, but the cruelty with which they are being carried out. Families are separated, children born in exile are torn from the only homes they've ever known, and returnees often face immediate persecution. Conditions in Afghanistan remain grim. The Taliban's regime has erased women from public life, banned girls from schools and universities,

and left female-headed households in deep poverty. Access to healthcare is nearly nonexistent. For many, a return is just like a death sentence. Yet global attention is fading. The international response suggests a growing reluctance to extend protection to Afghans. This is not just a regional gap in responsibility; it reflects a broader retreat from the principles of international law and shared human obligations. This is a global emergency. Each forced return undermines the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in international law. These rights are not optional. They were born from the ashes of past atrocities, meant to protect the most vulnerable from being cast back into horror.

To reverse course, states must act now. First, all deportations to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan must be halted immediately. Second, governments must restore and expand humanitarian

pathways, including temporary protection, resettlement quotas, and family reunification. Countries hosting large refugee populations must be supported through funding and shared responsibility, not left to shoulder the burden alone. Above all, the international community must acknowledge that these are not just political challenges. They are matters of life and death. If the world continues on this path of indifference, it becomes complicit in the suffering that follows. Every deportation, every closed border, and every policy of neglect sends a dangerous signal: that some lives are worth less than others. But the right to live free from persecution is universal. And until it is upheld for every Afghan, the promise of human rights remains tragically incomplete.

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Burkina Faso Faces Rising Jihadist Violence and Democratic Erosion

On <u>28 July 2024,</u> communities across Burkina Faso faced a brutal wave of jihadist violence that left scores dead and forced thousands to flee their homes. The al-Qaeda-affiliated <u>Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM)</u> carried out a deadly assault on a military base in Dargo, Centre-North region, reportedly killing around 50 soldiers. Simultaneous attacks in Kaya and Boucle du Mouhoun targeted civilian defense volunteers and security forces, leaving dozens dead. In a shocking strike on Fada N'Gourma's university, JNIM further isolated local populations, intensifying fear and displacement.

These attacks mark an increase in a conflict that continues to destabilize the Sahel, as JNIM and Islamic State factions compete for control. Burkina Faso and Niger's joint military operations along their shared border have yielded limited success, while extremist violence steadily undermines security. Humanitarian access is increasingly restricted, leaving civilians vulnerable to violence, hunger, and displacement. Amid this insecurity, Burkina Faso's military-led transitional government has consolidated power. On <u>16 July</u>, it dissolved the Independent National Electoral Commission, transferring its authority to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security. This move raises serious concerns about the fairness and transparency of upcoming elections and signals a troubling erosion of civilian oversight. Although some detained journalists and activists were released, the arrest of veteran opposition leader Hermann Yaméogo underlines ongoing political repression. The death of Burkinabè social media influencer Alain Traoré in an Ivorian prison on <u>29 July</u> triggered protests in Ouagadougou and worsened diplomatic strains between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. The incident raised concerns for the safety of Burkinabè nationals abroad and exposed vulnerabilities in regional relations.

The resurgence of jihadist violence exposes the growing strength of extremist groups and the weakening of local defense capabilities. Meanwhile, democratic backsliding and shrinking civic freedoms undermine public trust, potentially driving more individuals toward radicalization. Heightened tensions with neighboring countries further complicate regional cooperation and humanitarian responses. Without immediate reforms to protect human rights and restore democratic institutions, Burkina Faso risks descending deeper into instability. Authorities must prioritize the independence of electoral bodies and empower civil society to develop community-based solutions to violent extremism. Regional and international partners should increase humanitarian aid, advocate for accountability, and support comprehensive peacebuilding efforts that address the root causes of conflict.

Saudi Arabia's Travel Bans on Women's Rights Activists: A Quiet Tool of Repression

Photo by Javad Esmaeili on Unsplash

Despite its modern image campaign and preparations to host global events like the 2034 FIFA World Cup, Saudi Arabia continues to violate the fundamental rights of its own citizens, particularly women's rights activists. Human rights organizations have accused the kingdom of imposing arbitrary and extended travel bans on former political prisoners and vocal activists like Loujain al-Hathloul and Maryam al-Otaibi. These restrictions are not limited to individuals; they frequently extend to family members, forming a pattern of collective punishment.

What makes this situation deeply concerning is the quiet, unofficial nature of these bans. While no formal charges may be filed, affected individuals are blocked from international travel, defying even court orders in some cases. By avoiding high-profile arrests, authorities seek to escape international condemnation while still suppressing dissent. This creates a climate of fear and forced silence, where activists are isolated, monitored, and prevented from engaging with global audiences. These actions are a clear violation of internationally recognized human rights, specifically the rights to freedom of movement, association, and expression. They reflect a state strategy designed to weaken civil society from within by discouraging advocacy, activism, and even private dissent.

If Saudi Arabia genuinely aims to reform its global image, it must first commit to ending these covert tools of repression. This includes immediately lifting all travel bans against activists, halting the punishment of families, and ensuring judicial independence. The international community must not be swayed by the kingdom's soft power diplomacy and should hold it accountable through diplomatic pressure, public advocacy, and conditional cooperation. Without decisive action, these bans will remain a silent weapon against reform, deepening the gap between state rhetoric and reality, and signaling that basic freedoms remain out of reach for many Saudis, especially women.

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Second detainee death in Egyptian police custody in 24 hours raises urgent human rights concern

Karim Mohamed Abdo Badr, 25, died in custody at al-Saff Police Station in Giza on Sunday, marking the second detainee death reported in Egyptian police custody within 24 hours, according to the Egyptian Network for Human Rights (ENHR). Badr and his brother were arrested on allegations of attempting to steal a tuk-tuk. Authorities have yet to provide details on the circumstances surrounding his death.

Testimonies from former detainees describe horrific detention conditions at al-Saff police station, citing overcrowding, extreme heat, poor hygiene, and the spread of contagious diseases. ENHR suggests these inhumane conditions may have directly or indirectly contributed to Badr's death. He was buried in his family cemetery, and it was noted that he came from a low-income family, trying to support them by selling scouring pads.

This tragic death follows that of 21-year-old university student Ayman Sabry Abdel Wahab, who reportedly died after a week of torture at Belqas Police Station in Dakhalia governorate. While police claimed a cardiac arrest, family members reported clear signs of physical abuse, including beatings and electric shocks.

These deaths highlight a disturbing rise in detainee fatalities linked to torture, medical negligence, and appalling detention conditions across Egypt. In 2025 alone, rights groups report 15 detainee deaths and alarming incidents of mass suicide attempts in prisons, underscoring a severe human rights crisis.

The Egyptian government must urgently conduct transparent, independent investigations into these deaths and the conditions within detention facilities. Accountability is essential, and those responsible for negligence or abuse must be prosecuted. International human rights bodies and the global community should intensify pressure on Egyptian authorities to improve detainee treatment, end torture, and uphold fundamental human rights. No one should suffer or die in custody for alleged crimes without due process and humane treatment.

SECTION – 3:

Multimedia Update: Voices Against Authoritarianism

Countering Totalitarianism and Extremism with Simon Lee

Why are more and more young people around the world being drawn to extreme ideas and radical groups? What role does ideology play in today's totalitarian regimes, and is it still the driving force behind authoritarian control? And did you know that extremism isn't always religious; it can also take the form of dangerous secular or political ideologies?

These are just some of the big questions we explored in our latest episode of the *Scholarly Podcast* with Simon Lee, a freedom activist, entrepreneur, and political columnist from Hong Kong. In this timely discussion, Simon breaks down the roots of extremism, the warning signs of rising authoritarianism, and how ordinary people and communities can push back, safely and wisely. His insights are grounded in both lived experience and sharp analysis, making this episode a must-listen for anyone concerned about the growing threats to freedom and democracy today.

Listen to it <u>now</u> on our website and explore how ideology, power, and resistance intersect in today's world and what we can all do to resist extremism and totalitarianism.

Call for Abstracts | Toronto Democracy Forum 2025

The world is at a crossroads, facing authoritarianism, radicalism, and democratic backsliding. But in every region, people are standing up. Not with weapons, but with strategy. With patience. With courage. At the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025, we're not just asking what's happening. We're asking what's working. You are invited to share critical insights, case studies, or reflections that rethink what nonviolent resistance looks like in the 21st century. Call for Abstracts is open until August 15, 2025. Whether you're a scholar, practitioner, or activist, let's defend democracy together. Visit our website to learn more about the Panel themes and submission.

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SECTION – 4:

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