



WORLD ANTI EXTREMISM
NETWORK
BUILDING A FREE WORLD



UNCENSORED WATCH

Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism

Issue 14 | February 2026

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*Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and
Authoritarianism*

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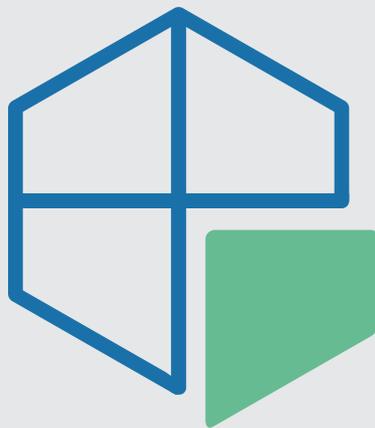
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SECTION - 1

Welcome to Uncensored Watch - A Project of
World Anti-Extremism Network



Welcome to Uncensored Watch - A Project of
World Anti-Extremism Network

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

We're grateful to have you with us as we review the events of February. This month's edition brings together urgent reports on authoritarian crackdowns, sectarian attacks, and curbs on free speech and assembly. From the targeted imprisonment of journalists and activists to attacks on religious and ethnic minorities, and the suppression of peaceful protests, these stories highlight the ongoing threats to justice, accountability, and freedom around the world.

Alongside our news coverage, this issue features research from the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025, highlighting how communities resist authoritarianism and extremism. The studies explore Uyghur activism in China and traditional Islamic madrasas in North Africa, showing how communities maintain resilience.

This edition is more than a roundup of events, it's an invitation to witness, reflect, and act. By engaging with these stories, you help challenge oppression, uplift silenced communities, and support those striving for justice around the globe.

At Uncensored Watch, we remain committed to shining a light on human rights abuses, amplifying voices too often ignored, and ensuring that injustice does not fade into silence.

Until Next Month!

The Uncensored Watch Team



SECTION - 2

Global Crisis in Focus

Crackdown Continues as Iran Sentences Nobel Laureate to Further Imprisonment

[Iranian Nobel Peace Prize laureate](#) Narges Mohammadi has received an additional prison sentence of seven and a half years, according to her lawyer. A court in Mashhad sentenced the prominent human rights defender to six years for “gathering and collusion” and another 18 months for “propaganda activities.” She was detained in December after authorities accused her of making provocative statements during a memorial ceremony. Her family has said she was assaulted during the arrest and later hospitalized.

Her lawyer, Mostafa Nili, stated that this was the first time he had been able to speak with her since mid-December. In addition to the prison term, she has been banned from leaving Iran for two years and ordered into two years of internal exile in the eastern region of Khusf. The Narges Foundation, which advocates on her behalf, condemned the proceedings as illegitimate and reported that she began a hunger strike on 2 February. Nili added that she was briefly hospitalized due to deteriorating health before being returned to detention, and that a phone call with her was abruptly cut off when she began describing the circumstances of her arrest.

Mohammadi’s husband, Taghi Rahmani, said she refused to defend herself in court because she does not recognize the judiciary’s legitimacy, calling the trial predetermined and unjust. Her daughter, Kiana Rahmani, has expressed serious concern for her mother’s wellbeing. Mohammadi, 53, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023 for her advocacy against the oppression of women in Iran. She became only the second Iranian woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, following [Shirin Ebadi’s landmark recognition](#) in 2003 for advancing democracy and human rights. She has already spent over a decade behind bars, and the foundation supporting her says the cumulative sentences imposed on her now total 44 years. Since 2021, she has been serving a 13-year term on charges related to propaganda and national security, which she rejects.

She had been granted temporary medical leave from Tehran’s Evin Prison in December 2024 but was expected to return to serve multiple outstanding sentences. Her most recent detention occurred while she attended a memorial for Khosrow Alikordi, a lawyer whose death earlier that month has been described by the Norway-based organization Iran Human Rights as suspicious, prompting calls for an independent investigation. Witnesses cited by the Narges Foundation allege that plainclothes security agents physically assaulted Mohammadi at the event. Local prosecutors claim she was among dozens arrested for encouraging chants that disrupted public order.

Mohammadi had also signed a petition criticizing Iranian authorities and accusing Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei of responsibility for violence against protesters during nationwide unrest. The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reports tens of thousands of arrests and thousands of deaths linked to those protests. Several other activists connected to the petition have also been detained. Mohammadi’s husband has called for the release of all political prisoners in Iran.

Mohammadi's case underscores the broader pattern of repression within Iran's political system, where charges such as "collusion" and "propaganda" are frequently used to silence dissent. The additional sentencing of an internationally recognized Nobel laureate signals a calculated disregard for global scrutiny and reflects the state's prioritization of control over reputation. Her reported mistreatment, hunger strike, and mounting prison terms illustrate how legal mechanisms can be deployed to legitimize prolonged detention of critics. In the wider context of mass arrests and alleged protest-related deaths, this case exemplifies how authoritarian regimes often criminalize peaceful activism, restrict civil liberties, and rely on the judiciary as an instrument of political suppression rather than independent oversight.



Photo by Ye Jinghan on Unsplash

Who Is Leqaa Kordia? The Columbia Protester Still Held in ICE Custody

Leqaa Kordia, a 33-year-old Palestinian woman, remains in United States immigration detention nearly a year after her arrest and was recently hospitalized following a seizure at a Texas detention facility. She has been in the custody of [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\)](#) since March and is currently held at the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas. Kordia was detained amid a broader federal crackdown under President Donald Trump targeting pro-Palestinian campus demonstrations. Her legal team argues she was singled out because of her participation in protests near Columbia University in

2024 opposing Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Federal authorities, however, maintain that her arrest stems from immigration violations, specifically the alleged overstay of her F-1 student visa.

Born and raised in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, Kordia moved to the United States in 2016 on a visitor visa and later adjusted her status to a student visa. Her mother, a U.S. citizen living in New Jersey, petitioned for her residency, and her green card application was reportedly approved in 2021. According to her lawyers, confusion regarding visa status led to the expiration of her student visa in 2022. Before her detention, she worked in a Middle Eastern restaurant in New Jersey and helped care for her autistic half-brother. Kordia has said she felt compelled to protest due to personal loss, stating that more than 200 of her relatives have been killed since the outbreak of war in Gaza in October 2023. Human rights organizations, a UN commission, and some legal scholars have characterized the scale of destruction and civilian casualties in Gaza as amounting to genocide. If deported, Kordia could be transferred to Israeli authorities. She was initially arrested during an April 2024 protest outside Columbia University, though those charges were later dropped. In March 2025, she appeared at an ICE office in Newark for what she believed would be routine immigration processing and was detained and transferred to Texas. She is now the only individual still held in connection with the Columbia demonstrations. Other high-profile detainees, including Mahmoud Khalil, were released, although Khalil continues to face legal proceedings regarding his immigration status. The Department of Homeland Security has stated that her detention is unrelated to protest activity and is solely based on visa violations. Authorities have also cited financial transfers to relatives in the Middle East as raising security concerns. Kordia and her lawyers dispute these claims, asserting that she is being punished for constitutionally protected speech.

An immigration judge has twice ordered her release, but administrative procedures have reportedly delayed implementation of those decisions. In a written account published while in detention, Kordia described harsh and degrading conditions, including overcrowding, sleeping on a plastic shell on the floor, limited privacy, and inadequate medical care. She has also alleged repeated denial of religious accommodations, including access to halal meals, appropriate prayer space, and clothing consistent with Islamic practice. Advocacy groups such as Amnesty International and the Council on American-Islamic Relations have criticized her treatment, describing violations of her religious rights and calling for her immediate release.

On Friday, Kordia reportedly fainted, struck her head, and experienced a seizure in a detention facility bathroom. She was taken to [Texas Health Huguley Hospital](#) in Burleson after medical staff at the Prairieland Detention Center reported that she had suffered a seizure. Her attorneys and family members say they were not informed of her location or medical condition and were unable to contact her. They have demanded transparency from federal authorities regarding her health and whereabouts. The protests at [Columbia University in 2024](#) were part of a broader student movement opposing Israel's military operations in Gaza and calling for divestment from companies linked to the Israeli military. The demonstrations led to police intervention, numerous arrests, student expulsions, and significant political fallout. Columbia later faced funding disputes with the federal government amid allegations of antisemitism and disputes over free speech protections.

Kordia's prolonged detention highlights the intersection of immigration enforcement, political

expression, and national security policy in the United States. While authorities frame her case as a routine visa matter, the broader context, including her participation in pro-Palestinian protests, the use of administrative delays to override judicial release orders, and allegations of punitive detention conditions, raises concerns about selective enforcement and political retaliation. The case reflects how immigration systems can become instruments of state power in moments of heightened political tension, particularly when activism intersects with foreign policy controversies.



Photo by Hugo Breyer on Unsplash

Rising Islamophobia Sparks Debate Over Anti-Muslim Hostility Definition in UK

Baroness Shaista Gohir has cautioned that refusing to adopt a formal definition of anti-Muslim hostility would send a damaging message to Muslim communities across the UK that their safety is of lesser concern. Her comments come amid growing debate over whether the government should formally define anti-Muslim discrimination, as critics argue that doing so could conflict with existing laws. Gohir, who leads the [Muslim Women's Network](#), served on a government-appointed working group established in 2025 to develop guidance on anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia. The group submitted a proposal in October recommending a non-statutory definition of "anti-Muslim hostility," designed to align with current legal protections while offering clearer standards for identifying prejudice and discrimination.

She criticized Downing Street's handling of the issue, particularly after official figures showed that anti-Muslim hate crimes rose by nearly 20% in 2025. According to Home Office data, reported offences increased from 2,690 to 3,199 in England and Wales over a 12-month period. Gohir argued that rising abuse, including personal attacks, underscores the urgency of clearer protections, especially as the country moves closer to a general election. Recent research reinforces these concerns. A report titled *The Crisis of Belonging by Muslim Census*, conducted in partnership with Islamic Relief UK and the National Zakat Foundation, found that only 8.2% of British Muslims feel optimistic about their future in the UK, while nearly two-thirds feel negative. Just over half reported a strong sense of belonging to the country, a sharp decline compared with figures recorded a decade ago. Participants cited rising Islamophobia, political rhetoric, economic insecurity and feeling unwelcome as major factors.

Separately, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee recently reported that Muslim women face disproportionately high levels of abuse, both online and offline, with significant impacts on community cohesion. However, the proposed definition has drawn resistance from some faith groups and policy organizations. The thinktank Policy Exchange warned that such a definition could be used to challenge counter-terrorism policies, immigration enforcement and foreign policy decisions without democratic oversight. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has also opposed adopting a new definition, arguing that existing protections under the Equality Act 2010 already prohibit religious discrimination and that introducing an additional definition could create legal confusion or conflict.

Under current law, Islam is protected as a religion, though Muslims are not classified as a racial group. In contrast, the UK government formally adopted the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) definition of antisemitism in 2016, a move endorsed across major political parties. A separate working definition of Islamophobia was adopted in 2019 by the Labour Party and several other political groups, though not by the Conservative government at the time.

The government's current working group is chaired by barrister Dominic Grieve, a former attorney general. If approved, the proposed definition would likely be subject to public consultation. Gohir maintains that the proposal would not limit freedom of expression but would instead provide guidance for police, public institutions and communities in identifying anti-Muslim hostility and encouraging victims to report incidents. She argues that resistance to the definition reflects unequal treatment compared with antisemitism protections and warns that failure to adopt it would reinforce perceptions of marginalization within Muslim communities.

Failing to adopt a definition of anti-Muslim hostility risks leaving British Muslims without clear recognition or protection against discrimination. Rising hate crimes and declining feelings of belonging show that many Muslims feel vulnerable and marginalized. A formal definition could give authorities and communities a practical tool to identify and respond to abuse, while sending a clear message that Muslims' safety matters. Without it, the government risks reinforcing inequality and allowing hostility to continue unchecked, undermining both community cohesion and trust in public institutions.



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China Detains Two Investigative Journalists Over Corruption Report

Human rights organizations are raising concerns after two Chinese investigative reporters were detained following a report exposing alleged corruption by a senior official in Sichuan province. Rights groups identified the journalists as [Liu Hu and Wu Yingjiao](#), who were reportedly taken into custody on Sunday after publishing their investigation. Local authorities in Chengdu stated on Monday that the two men, aged 50 and 34, were being probed for “making false accusations” and “illegal business operations.” A spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized that the case is being handled according to Chinese law and asserted that all citizens are equal under the law. Liu, a well-known investigative journalist, had previously been arrested in 2013 on defamation charges after accusing a senior official of corruption, though he was released in 2014 and continued reporting on social media. Wu frequently collaborates with Liu on a WeChat account used to share investigative stories. According to Chinese Human Rights Defenders, Liu went missing while preparing to travel from Chongqing to Beijing, and Wu was detained in Hebei province on the same day.

The pair's report allegedly highlighted a county official whose actions had driven multiple businesses into bankruptcy. Prior to his arrest, Liu had received messages from a Chengdu disciplinary official urging him to refrain from publishing his findings, according to Reporters Without Borders. RSF described the arrests as indicative of China's increasingly hostile stance toward independent journalism and called for global pressure on the Chinese government, warning against normalizing relations in ways that could reinforce repression.

In 2025, Reporters Without Borders ranked China 178th out of 180 countries for press freedom, highlighting its status as the [world's largest jailer of journalists](#). Human Rights Watch's 2026 report also noted that China's censorship extends beyond its borders, influencing media and information control in other countries. Currently, RSF reports that over 120 journalists are detained in China, making it the largest jailer of journalists worldwide.

The detention of Liu Hu and Wu Yingjiao underscores China's systematic suppression of independent reporting, particularly on corruption and governance issues. By criminalizing investigative journalism under broad charges such as "false accusations" and "illegal business operations," authorities maintain tight control over public information and discourage scrutiny of officials. These arrests highlight the dangers faced by journalists in authoritarian states and signal that exposing wrongdoing carries severe personal and legal risks. The case also emphasizes the need for international pressure and solidarity to protect press freedom in environments where the judiciary and law enforcement are used to silence dissent rather than uphold accountability.



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Tunisia: Human Rights Lawyer Ahmed Souab Faces Unjust Detention

Human Rights Watch has reported that prominent Tunisian lawyer and human rights defender [Ahmed Souab, 69](#), is facing a new appeal trial on February 12, 2026, after being sentenced on terrorism-related charges. Authorities in Tunisia are being urged to drop the baseless accusations, release Souab, and halt retaliation against critics and legal defenders. Souab, a former administrative judge and vocal advocate for judicial independence, was prosecuted for public statements made while representing clients in a high-profile “conspiracy against state security” case. On October 31, 2025, a Tunis anti-terrorism court sentenced him in absentia to five years in prison with an additional three years of administrative supervision. His trial lasted only minutes, barred both his presence and media coverage.

Following remarks he made after the verdict in April 2025, Souab was arrested at his home by anti-terrorism agents. His statements, widely circulated on social media, highlighted the pressure judges face under political interference. Human Rights Watch notes that Tunisia’s authorities have increasingly undermined judicial independence, including President Kais Saied’s dismantling of the High Judicial Council in 2022, allowing the executive to manipulate courts for political purposes. Several leading opposition politicians, such as [Rached Ghannouchi from the Ennahda party](#) and Abir Moussi from the Free Constitutional Party, are serving prison sentences on a range of charges.

Souab faces charges under multiple laws, including the 2015 Counterterrorism Law, the Penal Code, and cybercrime regulations, with allegations ranging from forming a terrorist organization to spreading false information. He was held in pretrial detention for over six months. The court conducted his trial remotely, which Souab refused to attend in protest against procedural unfairness. Remote trials, especially in politically sensitive cases, have become a tool for the Tunisian government to limit fair-trial rights, denying detainees physical access to judges and legal oversight.

His family has raised concerns over his health, noting cardiac issues and unexplained nosebleeds during detention. Over the past three years, Tunisian authorities have increasingly wielded security and terrorism laws to harass critics, impose arbitrary detention, and restrict the professional activity of lawyers. Human Rights Watch emphasizes that these actions violate both international human rights standards and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which safeguard legal professionals from retaliation. Souab’s case exemplifies systemic judicial abuses and the politicization of legal mechanisms to silence dissent, highlighting the urgent need for Tunisian authorities to guarantee fair trials, release arbitrarily detained individuals, and respect the independence of the legal profession.

Souab’s detention illustrates how authoritarian practices exploit anti-terror and security

Photo by Tingey Injury Law Firm on Unsplash



legislation to suppress dissent and target legal advocates. Remote trials, arbitrary pretrial detention, and prosecution in absentia undermine fundamental rights, reflecting a broader trend of eroding judicial independence in Tunisia. The case underscores the risk faced by lawyers and human rights defenders in regimes that weaponize the law to intimidate critics, eroding both the rule of law and public trust in judicial institutions.

Attack on Religious Freedom: Suicide Bombing Claims Lives in Pakistan

At least 31 people were killed and dozens more wounded in a suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in Islamabad, one of the deadliest attacks in the capital in recent years. The blast occurred at [Khadija Tul Kubra mosque](#) in the Tarlai Kalan area during Friday prayers. Pakistan's Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, said mosque security guards tried to stop the attacker, who fired at them before detonating explosives among the worshippers. Authorities suggested the suspect had ties to Afghanistan. Rescue teams transferred 169 victims to nearby hospitals.

The Islamic State (ISIL/ISIS) claimed responsibility for the attack via its Telegram channel, sharing a photo of the masked attacker holding a firearm. ISIL affiliates have previously targeted Pakistan's Shia minority. Graphic footage on social media, verified by Al Jazeera,

showed bloodied victims amid shattered glass and debris. Islamabad resident Aun Shah reported his father was seriously injured. At the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences hospital, medics and bystanders helped carry victims, including adults and children, some arriving on stretchers or by vehicle, highlighting the chaos and urgency of the response. Senior Pakistani leaders condemned the attack.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed profound grief, while President Asif Ali Zardari called the violence a “crime against humanity.” Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar condemned the attack as a “heinous act” against worshippers. Shia leader Raja Abbas Nasir criticized authorities for failing to protect lives and questioned the effectiveness of law enforcement. International leaders also condemned the attack. The UK ambassador to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, described the incident as “abhorrent,” while the EU Delegation in Pakistan expressed solidarity with the victims’ families. This attack follows a series of deadly incidents in Islamabad, including a suicide bombing at the District Judicial Complex in November 2025 that killed 12, and the 2008 Marriott Hotel bombing, which claimed at least 63 lives and injured over 250. According to the [Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies \(PICSS\)](#), overall violence across Pakistan rose sharply in 2025, leaving 3,413 people dead, up from 1,950 in 2024, including 2,138 militants among the fatalities.

The suicide bombing at the Khadija Tul Kubra mosque highlights the persistent threat of sectarian violence in Pakistan, particularly targeting the Shia minority. The attack demonstrates the continued operational capability of ISIL affiliates in the region and highlights gaps in security measures at places of worship, despite previous attacks. The rapid spread of information through social media and the international condemnation indicate that such incidents not only destabilize local communities but also affect Pakistan’s global image. The pattern of repeated attacks in Islamabad suggests the need for stronger intelligence, community-based security initiatives, and proactive counter-terrorism strategies to protect vulnerable populations.



Photo by Andrew Solok on Unsplash

Law and Order or Rights Violation? Police Suppression of Sydney Protests

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that during protests against Israeli President Isaac Herzog's visit to Sydney on February 9, 2026, New South Wales police used excessive and violent force against demonstrators. Verified video footage shows officers [punching protesters lying on the ground](#), aggressively dispersing people kneeling in prayer, and deploying pepper spray against nonviolent participants. HRW called for a thorough investigation and appropriate accountability for the officers involved. The protests erupted after Herzog's invitation by the Australian government, following a December attack on Jewish holiday celebrants at Bondi Beach. Pro-Palestinian groups opposed Herzog's visit, citing a [UN commission report](#) accusing him of inciting genocide against Palestinians. Authorities attempted to prevent protesters from marching by issuing special orders and enforcing new anti-protest laws passed in December 2025, which restrict demonstrations in Sydney's central business district. These measures have been criticized for curbing citizens' right to peaceful assembly over the past several years. Eyewitnesses and journalists reported that police employed disproportionate force despite little to no provocation from the protesters. Video evidence shows at least two officers repeatedly punching a restrained protester in the head and torso, while multiple other clips depict officers pepper-spraying demonstrators and chasing them down city streets.

Legal observers, who were

clearly identified by high-visibility vests, were also assaulted, sprayed, and had personal items like phones and protective goggles taken by police. Several protesters were arrested, though HRW could not independently verify the charges against them.

The New South Wales government defended its actions, claiming that officers were threatened or assaulted and needed additional powers to maintain order. However, HRW emphasized that these laws and enforcement practices unnecessarily restrict legitimate protest and create opportunities for abuse. Experts, including UN Special Rapporteur Ben Saul, have stated that the anti-protest laws contravene international human rights standards and hinder constructive coordination between authorities and event organizers. International human rights standards, such as those outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Australia is a party, uphold freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials require that authorities use minimal force and resort to violence only when strictly necessary. Chemical irritants like pepper spray should be applied solely in response to imminent threats. In this instance, HRW found the police actions to violate these norms, demonstrating an erosion of civil liberties in Sydney.

The incident highlights a troubling trend in Australia where law enforcement, under the guise of new protest regulations, infringes on citizens' rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. The documented use of excessive force, assault on legal observers, and indiscriminate pepper-spraying reflect systemic issues in policing that disregard international human rights obligations. The government's approach prioritizes control over accountability, undermining trust in law enforcement and threatening the democratic principle of lawful protest.



Photo by Nikolas Gannon on Unsplash

Activists Call on Airlines to End Participation in UK–France Deportation Scheme

Human rights and refugee advocacy groups have appealed to several airlines to stop operating deportation flights connected to the UK's controversial "one in, one out" asylum arrangement with France. A [coalition of 28 organizations](#) from the UK and France sent formal letters to four carriers believed to be involved in the removals: Air France, Titan Airways, AlbaStar, and Corendon Airlines. The groups urged the companies to withdraw from what they describe as forced and harmful deportations. Campaigners have specifically called for a consumer boycott of Air France and requested that the other airlines publicly commit to ending their cooperation with the UK Home Office on removals.

In their correspondence, the organizations accused the airlines of enabling the deportation of vulnerable individuals, including survivors of torture, trafficking, and modern slavery. They argue that by transporting asylum seekers against their will, the airlines are contributing to serious human rights concerns. Reports indicate that dozens of asylum seekers were returned to France on Thursday morning despite warnings from advocates that some could face renewed exploitation or harm there. Several detainees had reportedly begun a hunger strike in protest. Accounts from inside detention facilities described widespread distress, with individuals expressing fear, desperation, and in some cases suicidal thoughts.

One Syrian detainee compared the facility to a prison, saying many of those held had committed no crime but were being treated as offenders for arriving in small boats. Another man said he was suffering severe medical pain and required urgent surgery. While he feared being placed on a deportation flight, officials stated he had been deemed medically fit to travel. Earlier this year, two scheduled flights were canceled, one reportedly due to operational difficulties on the French side. Under the bilateral arrangement, for every person transferred legally to the UK, another who arrived irregularly by boat is returned to France.

A [protest](#) prior to a previous deportation flight resulted in a strong security response, including the deployment of riot police, dogs, and tear gas. United Nations experts have warned that the policy may conflict with international human rights obligations. The latest deportations follow a High Court challenge brought by 16 asylum seekers seeking to block aspects of the scheme. The case contests updated guidance that limits opportunities for individuals to have trafficking claims reconsidered. Some applicants are also questioning whether France is fully meeting its responsibilities under international anti-trafficking agreements. The legal proceedings have been fast-tracked due to the continuation of removals.

Griff Ferris of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants criticized the policy as degrading and inhumane, arguing that people fleeing war and persecution should be treated with dignity rather than punishment. Since the policy began last September, 305 individuals have been sent from the UK to France, while 367 have been allowed entry to the UK under the reciprocal arrangement. The number of deportations represents a small fraction, under 2%, of those who have crossed the Channel by boat. This year alone, 1,528 people have made the crossing, a figure reportedly influenced by weather conditions. The Home Office and the airlines involved were contacted for comment.

The UK's "one in, one out" policy raises concerns about compliance with international refugee law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning people to places where they may face harm. Deporting vulnerable asylum seekers, including possible trafficking or torture survivors, without thorough safeguards could breach human rights obligations. The participation of private airlines also raises ethical questions about corporate responsibility in facilitating state actions that may undermine due process and protection standards



Photo by CHUTTERSNAPE on Unsplash

Human Rights Concerns in the Deportation of a 5-Year-Old Asylum Seeker

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has confirmed it will continue pursuing deportation proceedings against [five-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos](#) and his father, Adrian Conejo Arias, despite their recent release and return to Minnesota. DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin rejected claims that the government is seeking to fast-track their removal as retaliation. She stated that the case is proceeding under standard immigration processes and described the enforcement action as routine. The case has attracted widespread public attention since the child's detention on January 20. Images circulated online showing the boy standing in the snow wearing blue bunny ears while an immigration officer held his Spiderman backpack.

Officials from the Columbia Heights Public School District alleged that immigration agents used the child to draw out his father. DHS disputed this account, asserting instead that the father left the child behind when authorities approached. Both sides have challenged each other's version of events. The arrests occurred during Operation Metro Surge, an immigration enforcement initiative launched under President Donald Trump's administration in Minnesota. At its peak, the operation involved up to 3,000 federal agents. However, footage captured by bystanders has raised concerns about the force used during the crackdown, particularly in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area.

In recent weeks, two US citizens, Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, were fatally shot during enforcement actions, intensifying criticism of the operation. Amid growing public backlash over alleged excessive force and reports of arrests without warrants, the administration announced plans to withdraw approximately 700 agents from the state. Liam and his father were detained while returning home from preschool and were transferred to an immigration processing facility in Dilley, Texas, as authorities sought to remove them from the country. [Liam's older brother](#), who is in middle school, returned home after 20 minutes, to discover that both his father and younger brother were gone. On January 27, Judge Fred Biery ordered their release, stating that they were entitled to due process while contesting their deportation.

The family, originally from Ecuador, reportedly entered the United States legally and were pursuing asylum claims when detained. Their attorney, Danielle Molliver, said DHS had filed paperwork to accelerate their removal, arguing that the move was unjustified and created unnecessary legal hurdles. The case remains ongoing as the family continues to challenge the deportation proceedings. The attempted deportation of Liam Conejo Ramos and his father raises serious human rights issues, including violations of due process, child protection, and asylum rights. Detaining a five-year-old in immigration proceedings and potentially expediting removal without full legal review conflicts with international standards for the treatment of children and refugees.



Photo by Julie Ricard on Unsplash

Harsh Sentence for Pro-Democracy Media Figure Raises Global Human Rights Concerns

Jimmy Lai, a prominent [pro-democracy media entrepreneur in Hong Kong](#), has been sentenced to 20 years in prison for collaborating with foreign forces under the city's national security law. Rights groups condemned the ruling as a harsh verdict for the 78-year-old, who faces health concerns, while Hong Kong's leader described the outcome as "deeply gratifying." This marks the stiffest penalty imposed under the law, which China implemented after massive 2019 protests demanding greater freedoms and defends as essential for maintaining order in the city. Lai, who holds British citizenship, is one of the most high-profile figures among hundreds detained under the legislation. He has been an outspoken critic of the Chinese government and frequently used his newspaper, Apple Daily, to champion pro-democracy causes.

Jimmy Lai's son has described his father's imprisonment by Chinese authorities as effectively a "[death sentence](#)." He expressed frustration over the UK government's inaction despite multiple appeals and criticized Prime Minister Keir Starmer's recent visit to China as a missed opportunity. Sebastien described the ruling as "signifying the total destruction of the Hong Kong legal system

and the end of justice.” Hong Kong authorities and China’s foreign ministry, however, defended the verdict, asserting that it upholds the rule of law. The judges highlighted Lai’s “serious and grave criminal conduct” and labeled the conspiracies he was involved in as among the most severe.

Under heavy security, supporters gathered outside the courthouse. Inside, Lai remained calm as the sentence was announced, while emotional scenes unfolded and his wife, Teresa, held back tears. Previously, Lai had been convicted of fraud and unauthorized assemblies, spending more than five years in detention. On the same day, six former executives of Apple Daily and two activists received sentences ranging from six years and three months to ten years under the national security law. Throughout the trials, Lai denied all charges, asserting that he was advocating for Hong Kong’s core values, including freedom of speech and the rule of law. The case largely revolved around a 2019 meeting he held with then-US Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, during which he briefed them on the protests in Hong Kong. Lai testified that he never tried to influence US policy and was simply providing information.

Human rights organizations condemned the ruling. Jodie Ginsberg of the Committee to Protect Journalists called it “the final nail in the coffin for press freedom in Hong Kong” and urged global pressure for his release. Human Rights Watch’s Asia director, Elaine Pearson, said the case demonstrates China’s determination to silence independent journalism and intimidate critics of the Communist Party. Lai’s international legal team, led by Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, which was barred from defending him in court, called on the global community to demand his freedom so he can return to his family in London. Several nations, including the UK, Australia, the EU, and Japan, have voiced concern, and UN human rights chief Volker Turk urged his release due to age and health risks. China, however, dismissed external criticism, calling the trial an internal matter and affirming its support for Hong Kong’s handling of national security.

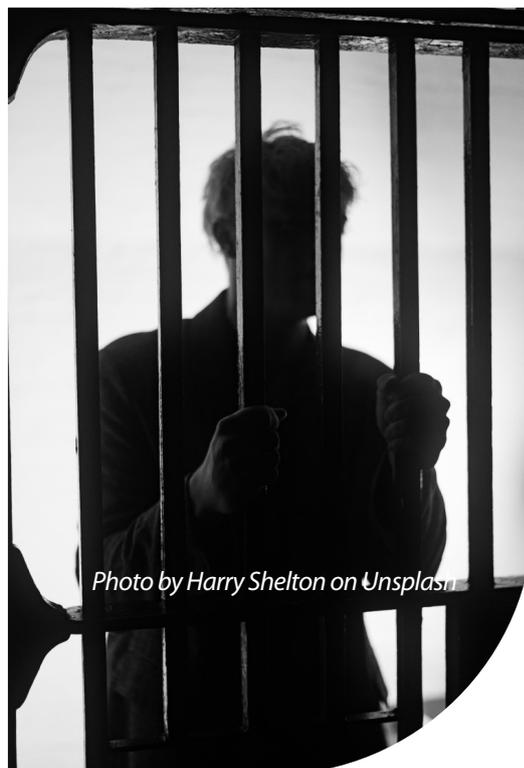


Photo by Harry Shelton on Unsplash

In 2020, in his final interview before prison, Lai said he had achieved everything in Hong Kong and saw jail as “redemption.” Born in Guangzhou, he arrived in Hong Kong at 12 as a stowaway, rose from factory work to build the Giordano clothing brand, and after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown became a leading pro-democracy figure, founding Apple Daily and Next magazine and joining protests for Hong Kong’s freedoms. Jimmy Lai’s imprisonment shows how Hong Kong’s national security law is being used to crack down on pro-democracy voices and independent journalism. The harsh sentence sends a chilling message to activists and media, undermining press freedom and highlighting the growing influence of China over Hong Kong’s legal and political systems.

Hate Crime at Place of Worship Raises Human Rights Concerns in Brisbane

A 32-year-old man has been formally charged after allegedly driving a vehicle into the [gates of a synagogue](#) in central Brisbane. Authorities have clarified that while the act is being treated as a hate-related offence, it is not being investigated as terrorism. According to police, the incident occurred shortly after 7pm on Friday when a Toyota Hilux utility vehicle struck and damaged the gates of the synagogue located on Margaret Street in Brisbane’s CBD. The driver reportedly left the scene but was apprehended a short time later. No injuries were reported. The man, who is from Sunnybank, was scheduled to appear before the Brisbane Magistrates Court. He faces multiple charges, including wilful damage, serious vilification (hate crime), dangerous operation of a vehicle, and drug-related offences.

Queensland Police Acting Superintendent Michael Hogan stated that counter-terrorism officers were involved from the outset; however, investigators determined the event does not meet the threshold for a terrorist act. He noted that the man’s mental health and possible intoxication are being considered as contributing factors. Police described the act as deliberate and directed at the Jewish place of worship, calling the targeted nature of the attack an aggravating element in the charges. CCTV footage reportedly shows the vehicle intentionally crashing into the gates, with a person inside the synagogue grounds seen jumping back as the vehicle made impact. Authorities believe the suspect did not attempt to enter the building itself.

Libby Burke, vice-president of the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies, expressed that the Jewish community in the state was deeply shaken by the incident. She emphasized that Jewish residents should be able to attend synagogue and live without fear, describing the attack as an assault not only on the Jewish community but on broader social values. She highlighted the synagogue as a sacred space meant for prayer and communal gathering. [Queensland Premier David Crisafulli](#) also addressed the incident, stating that he had spoken with both community leaders and law enforcement. He reaffirmed the government’s commitment to public safety and referenced proposed legislation aimed at strengthening protections for people at places of worship. The draft laws would grant the Attorney-General authority to ban certain phrases, with public use potentially punishable by up to two years’ imprisonment.



However, during a parliamentary inquiry into the proposed legislation, several organizations — including the Federation of Islamic Councils, the Islamic Council of Queensland, and the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, reported that they had not been consulted during the drafting process. Police confirmed that investigations into the synagogue incident remain ongoing.

Although authorities have ruled out terrorism, the deliberate targeting of a Jewish place of worship highlights ongoing concerns about religiously motivated hostility. The incident reflects broader tensions affecting minority communities and underscores the psychological impact such attacks can have, even when no physical injuries occur. At the same time, the debate surrounding new hate-speech legislation raises important questions about balancing community protection with inclusive consultation and civil liberties.



SECTION - 3

Multimedia Update: Voices Against Authoritarianism

Research Presented at the Toronto Democracy Forum

We are pleased to announce the publication of research presented at this year's Toronto Democracy Forum under WAEN's Call for Abstracts on "Civil Resistance Against Authoritarian and Religious Radicalism." Scholars from South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Uyghur diaspora contributed original research examining how communities respond to authoritarianism and radicalism.

Below, we feature two research papers from the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025: one examining Uyghur nonviolent resistance to authoritarian repression in China, and another exploring how traditional Islamic madrasas in North Africa serve as grassroots actors of civic resilience against religious radicalism.

The Global Challenge of Authoritarianism (China) and the Plight of the Uyghurs: An Urgent Call for International Solidarity by Dolkun Isa

The plight of the Uyghur people in East Turkestan (Xinjiang) illustrates the extreme measures used by authoritarian regimes to suppress ethnic and religious identity. In this compelling paper, Dolkun Isa, President of the Uyghur Center for Democracy and Human Rights and former President of the World Uyghur Congress examines the nonviolent resistance led by Uyghur activists, centering his own experience in confronting censorship, surveillance, and transnational repression.

Blending personal testimony with analytical reflection, the [paper](#) highlights how digital advocacy, peaceful protest, and engagement with global leaders and human rights organizations can amplify nonviolent movements and build international solidarity. By placing the Uyghur struggle within the broader context of everyday resistance to authoritarianism, it draws practical lessons about resilience, strategy, and the global interconnections of civil resistance.

To learn more about these critical insights, read our latest publication on the [website](#) by Dolkun Isa, President of the Uyghur Center for Democracy and Human Rights, presented at the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025.

Traditional Islam Facing Radical Islam: Pedagogical and Ethical Practices in Souss Fiqh Madrasas by Vaclava Tlili & Badr Tachouche

How do traditional religious institutions respond when faced with the rise of radical ideologies? In parts of North Africa, madrasas in South Algeria and South Morocco offer a quiet yet powerful answer. Rooted in their communities, these schools preserve an Islamic intellectual tradition grounded in pluralism, interpretive diversity, and ethical discipline. In this [timely paper](#), Vaclava Tlili and Badr Tachouche draw on ethnographic fieldwork to show how these institutions function as everyday agents of nonviolent resistance. Through jurisprudential pluralism, engagement with Arabic literature, and strong ties to Sufi and Maliki traditions, they subtly counter extremist narratives and reinforce inclusive theological norms. Rather than confronting radicalism politically, they strengthen social stability from within.

To learn more, read our latest publication on the [website](#) by Vaclava Tlili, Lecturer at University of West Bohemia, Pilsen, and Badr Tachouche, Adjunct Lecturer, Anglo-American University, Prague, presented at the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025.



SECTION - 4:

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