



WORLD ANTI EXTREMISM
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UNCENSORED WATCH

Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism

Issue 15 | March 2026

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and Authoritarianism*

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Issue:

Uncensored Watch | Issue 15, March 2026

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Table of Contents

SECTION 1 -Welcome to Uncensored Watch - A Project of World Anti-Extremism.....	4
SECTION2-GlobalCrisisinFocus.....	6
Attack on Yanar Mohammed Reflects Growing Threats to Human Rights Activists.....	7
Human Rights at Risk: Authorities Deny Kidney Care to Chinese Land Rights Defender.....	9
Afghan Women Face Fear and Oppression Under New Taliban Decree.....	11
A Deaf Child’s Struggle: When Immigration Policies Overlook Vulnerable Families.....	12
Suppression of Women’s Voices: Arrests at Aurat March in Islamabad.....	14
Humanitarian Fallout of Israel-Iran Strikes Draws International Criticism.....	16
Iran’s Internet Blackouts Endanger Civilians, Violate Rights: HRW.....	18
Vietnamese Activist Held in Bangkok as Transnational Pressure Raises Concerns.....	20
Amnesty or Illusion? Venezuela’s Human Rights Crisis.....	22
Children’s Rights Denied: A Humanitarian Crisis.....	24
Arbitrary Detention of Journalists and Activists in Kashmir.....	27
SECTION - 3: Multimedia Update: Voices Against Authoritarianism.....	29
Research Presented at the Toronto Democracy Forum.....	30
The Return of the Opposition: Civil Resistance Against Authoritarianism in the 21st Century by Owen Lippert.....	30
Despotic Robustness and Social Movement Incapacitation in the Middle East by Fereydoon Rahmani.....	30
WAEN CEO Khalid Ramizy Presents The Stolen Republic at the University of Ottawa.....	31
SECTION - 4: Contact us.....	33



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 March edition of UncensoredWatch!

Across the globe this March, courage and resistance take center stage. From activists under fire in Iraq and China, to Afghan women navigating new restrictions, to children and journalists caught in systems that fail them, this edition captures resilience in the face of risk. Additionally, we highlight two insightful research papers from the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025: one on how opposition movements survive under rising autocracies, and another on why Middle East protests often struggle to translate courage into lasting change.

We are also proud to share highlights from WAEN CEO Khalid Ramizy's recent lecture on Afghanistan's last republic at the University of Ottawa, reflecting on lessons from the past and paths toward a more just future.

Thank you for being with us on this journey, every voice, every effort, and every connection helps us push for truth and justice.

Enjoy Reading!

The Uncensored Watch Team



SECTION - 2

Global Crisis in Focus

Attack on Yanar Mohammed Reflects Growing Threats to Human Rights Activists

The killing of Iraqi women's rights activist Yanar Mohammed has sparked deep grief and urgent calls for justice from activists and human rights advocates around the world. Mohammed, 66, was shot earlier this week when unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle opened fire outside her home in Baghdad. She was rushed to a hospital, but despite efforts to save her life, she later died from her injuries, according to the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, the group she helped establish. The organisation strongly condemned the attack, describing it as a cowardly act that strikes at the heart of the struggle for women's freedom and equality.

Global human rights groups quickly voiced their outrage. [Amnesty International](#) called the killing a brutal attempt to silence those who defend human rights, particularly women's rights activists who already work under immense risk. The organisation urged Iraqi authorities to ensure that those responsible are held accountable, noting that Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani has ordered an investigation into the attack. [For more than two decades](#), Mohammed had been one of the most visible and determined advocates for women in Iraq. According to Front Line Defenders, she dedicated her life to helping women facing gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, trafficking, and "honour killings." Through her work, she helped establish safe houses that offered protection and refuge to hundreds of women escaping abuse and exploitation. In a 2022 interview with Al Jazeera, she spoke about the ongoing struggles of women enslaved by Islamic State, explaining that many survivors continued to live on the margins of society, with their suffering often overlooked by the international community.

Throughout her life, Mohammed faced repeated death threats from extremist groups and others who opposed her work. Still, she remained outspoken and committed to defending women's dignity and rights. In 2016, she was awarded the Rafto Prize for her courageous and persistent advocacy under extremely difficult conditions. Following her death, organisations including Human Rights Watch and leaders in the human rights community paid tribute to her courage and longstanding commitment to defending women's rights.

The assassination of Yanar Mohammed is a painful reminder of the risks faced by those who challenge injustice. For many women in Iraq, she was not only an activist but a lifeline, someone who listened, protected, and fought for their dignity when few others would. Her death reflects a broader pattern of threats against human rights defenders, particularly women who speak against violence and inequality. Yet the grief and solidarity expressed worldwide also show how powerful her work was. Her case highlights the need for accountability and stronger protections for those who continue to advocate for justice and equality.



Photo by Gayatri Malhotra on Unsplash

Human Rights at Risk: Authorities Deny Kidney Care to Chinese Land Rights Defender

As China's annual 'Two Sessions' meetings began in Beijing, attention has turned to the plight of Yang Li, a 46-year-old woman human rights defender whose access to life-saving medical treatment has repeatedly been obstructed. Her family reports that after spending 15 months in detention for her work on land rights, her health has deteriorated to a [critical stage of kidney failure](#) due to prolonged denial of proper medical care. Since her release, local authorities have repeatedly restricted Yang's ability to travel to Beijing for dialysis, confining her to her home province of Jiangsu. Civil society groups monitoring her case say police have intercepted multiple trips to Peking University No. 1 Hospital, detained her for hours on arbitrary grounds, confiscated her and her father's phones, and allegedly assaulted her on one occasion. In early February 2026, Yang briefly reached Beijing and received a hospital admission notice on 11 February, but she was prevented from being admitted and forcibly returned to Jiangsu, where her family fears further denial of necessary care.

Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, have condemned these actions, describing the obstruction of medical treatment as retaliatory and a serious violation of her right to health. They have urged authorities to ensure her safe transfer to a trusted hospital, whether within China or abroad, and to guarantee that neither she nor her relatives face reprisals. Yang Li has long challenged unlawful land expropriation and related abuses through legal channels. During her detention from October 2024 to December 2025, she reportedly endured mistreatment and was denied medical care, violating international standards such as the Mandela Rules, which require prisoners to receive the same healthcare as the general population. On 5 February 2026, [UN human rights experts](#) called on Chinese authorities to provide her immediate access to adequate treatment, noting a persistent pattern of interference with her medical care even after her release. China became a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 2001, pledging to uphold citizens' rights to the highest level of physical and mental health, and frequently highlighting its policy commitments to safeguard economic, social, and cultural rights.

Yang Li's case highlights a stark violation of human rights, showing how activists can be denied essential healthcare as a form of retaliation for peaceful advocacy. Her worsening kidney failure, coupled with repeated police interference, reflects both the personal risks faced by human rights defenders in China and the broader failure of authorities to uphold the right to health, despite international obligations. The situation underscores the urgent need for accountability and protection for activists whose safety and well-being are threatened for challenging local abuses.

MEDICAL CLINIC



Photo by Erik Mclean on Unsplash

Afghan Women Face Fear and Oppression Under New Taliban Decree

A Taliban decree in Afghanistan has drawn international condemnation for formally allowing men to physically punish their wives as long as no [bones are broken or open wounds](#) are left, while also imposing the death penalty for sodomy and other crimes. Human rights observers warn that the decree will further limit women's access to justice and deepen gender-based oppression across the country. Under the decree, husbands may discipline their wives within these limits without facing legal consequences. Only if the abuse results in a broken bone, an open wound, or a serious bruise, and the wife seeks legal action, will the husband face a minimal penalty of 15 days in prison. [Women can face up to three months in prison](#) under the decree if they visit relatives without their husband's permission and refuse a court order to return home. Activists note that restrictions preventing women from leaving home without a male guardian effectively block most women from reporting severe violence or seeking justice.

The decree also grants fathers authority to punish children for not performing religious duties, allows teachers to be removed from their positions if they injure students while disciplining them, and imposes harsh penalties for anyone who insults Taliban leaders or officials. At the same time, those who force animals to fight face prison sentences, highlighting an extreme imbalance in the treatment of different forms of violence. In addition, the law prescribes death for a wide range of offenses, including theft, homosexuality, heresy, sorcery, spreading doctrines deemed contrary to Islam, or engaging in sexual acts other than vaginal intercourse. Observers warn that the vague definitions of "Muslim" in the decree leave religious minorities particularly vulnerable to arbitrary punishment.



Photo by bill wegner on Unsplash

Women's rights in Afghanistan have been steadily eroded since the Taliban regained power in August 2021. Most work outside the home is prohibited for women, and more than two million girls and women have been excluded from secondary school and university education. Experts argue that the new decree entrenches systemic discrimination and removes the limited legal protections women previously had. Rights groups emphasize that the decree gives men unchecked control over women's lives while denying women meaningful legal recourse. UN officials have described the decree as effectively legitimizing violence against women and children, warning that Afghanistan has become a severe human rights crisis where women and girls face persecution comparable to a gender-based apartheid system. Afghan activist groups have criticized the law for violating fundamental standards of justice, including equality before the law, and highlight that women across the country are increasingly left without protection.

The Taliban's decree has left Afghan women and girls in constant fear, subject to rules that give men total control over their lives while offering almost no protection from harm. By legalizing domestic abuse, restricting basic freedoms like visiting family, and punishing ordinary acts of independence, the law robs women of dignity, safety, and hope. Girls are denied education, families live under oppressive control, and everyday life has become a struggle for survival. This decree highlights the human cost of Afghanistan's collapsing rights system and underscores the urgent need for international attention and action to protect women and girls from ongoing persecution.

A Deaf Child's Struggle: When Immigration Policies Overlook Vulnerable Families

A six-year-old deaf boy, his younger brother, and their mother were deported to Colombia after being detained at a San Francisco ICE office, prompting urgent calls from California officials for their return. The family, led by Lesly Rodriguez Gutierrez, was taken into custody while reporting to ICE's Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP). A relative waiting outside was unable to deliver the assistive devices the older child relies on, including his cochlear implant, leaving him without a way to communicate. California Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond, described the removal as deeply concerning, stressing that no child, especially one who is deaf, should be separated from their home, community, and support network. He urged federal authorities to facilitate the boy's return so he can continue his education and receive the care he needs to thrive. Legal advocates said the deportation should have been avoided on humanitarian grounds. Nikolas De Bremaeker, managing attorney at ACILEP, said a six-year-old should never be placed in a situation that threatens his safety and wellbeing.



Photo by Maruf Choudhury on Unsplash

[The family and their attorneys also faced major obstacles](#) in trying to challenge the deportation. ICE initially indicated the family would be sent to a detention center in Louisiana, then to Phoenix, Arizona, and possibly Washington state. This confusion made it extremely difficult for lawyers to file legal petitions in the correct jurisdiction, which De Bremaecker suggested may have been on purpose. ICE did not respond to requests for comment. Ultimately, the family was briefly held in Phoenix before being sent to Colombia. Legal representatives argued that the lack of clear information prevented timely legal action to contest the removal. After arriving in the United States with her sons in 2022, Gutierrez submitted an asylum request in 2023. Although a judge initially denied her claim and issued a removal order, she appealed and was placed under a supervision order that required monthly in-person check-ins and weekly smartphone reporting. Since their deportation, educators and administrators, along with state officials, have pleaded for the boy's return. Because he communicates exclusively in American Sign Language (ASL), being removed from this environment could severely hinder his language and academic development. Thurmond emphasized that the student's education is carefully tailored to his learning needs, and being separated from ASL instruction threatens his progress and overall wellbeing. A school specialist highlighted the unique challenges the child faces. Detention is traumatic for anyone, but for a deaf child whose primary access to the world is through ASL, it can be particularly damaging. The specialist noted that the family came to the Bay Area specifically to access these opportunities, which were unavailable in Colombia, allowing the child to develop essential communication skills.

[Thurmond](#) called on federal authorities to intervene and ensure the boy's safe return so he can continue learning in a supportive environment, underscoring the human impact of the deportation on a vulnerable child. This situation exposes the deep vulnerability of children caught in immigration systems that fail to account for their specific needs. A young child, reliant on American Sign Language for connection and learning, faces life-altering setbacks simply because the system did not accommodate his disability. It's a stark reminder that policies must balance enforcement with empathy, ensuring that the most defenseless, especially children, are not collateral damage in bureaucratic processes.

Suppression of Women's Voices: Arrests at Aurat March in Islamabad

Ahead of International Women's Day, police in Islamabad detained multiple women's rights activists, including prominent members of the Aurat March, as they attempted to hold a rally on Sunday. The activists were reportedly stopped near Super Market in Sector F-6 while intending to march towards the National Press Club, where a significant police presence had been deployed, leading to their arrest and transfer to the Women's Police Station.

Authorities released the names of 19 detained women, which included prominent activists, Dr. Farzana Bari, her two daughters, and human rights defender Tahira Abdullah, alongside other organisers and participants of the march. Men present at the event were also detained, with one participant reporting that her husband and twenty other men were taken into custody. According to police, a total of 44 individuals were arrested, including 19 women and 25 men, while Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) remained enforced in the capital.

Tariq Mehmood Ghouri reported that more than 25 men and women had been taken into custody. He said the wife of HRCF Secretary General Haris Khaliq and other women who went to the Police Station to advocate for the detainees were themselves taken into custody. He noted that the marchers were assembled near Super Market without any plan to proceed to D-Chowk and claimed that the police had handled them roughly. A video shared by Aurat March Islamabad shows Dr. Bari and other women inside a police vehicle. [Police sources said Aurat March was deemed "illegal"](#) after the district denied an NOC, and with Lal Masjid opposing it, arrests were made to prevent clashes. March participants criticized the arrests of women on International Women's Day and called for accountability. Aurat March Islamabad condemned the detention of organisers and supporters, calling it unfair, and demanded their immediate release. They urged participants to disperse for safety and said they are working to secure their comrades' freedom and seek justice.

The PPP Human Rights Cell condemned police cases against Aurat March leaders, calling it an attack on the right to peaceful assembly. Ghouri, the cell's information secretary, criticized the Islamabad administration for using harsh measures to silence women and marginalized groups.



Photo by Gayatri Malhotra on Unsplash

He said the marchers gathered outside the NPC after their NOC was denied, and several were arrested. Using Section 144 and the Peaceful Assembly Act to target human rights work is a troubling indication for democracy. The cell demanded the immediate release of Dr. Bari and other activists, urging the government to focus on enforcing laws against domestic abuse instead of targeting defenders of the vulnerable. The cell urged the federal government to protect the right to protest, warning that selective law enforcement alienates citizens. A video showed families and lawyers being denied access to the detainees.

The Aurat March had previously held a press conference highlighting regional issues, including tensions surrounding Iran, and emphasized that this year's theme focused on advocating for a "Feminist Constitution." Organizers also called for the repeal of laws such as the Hudood Ordinance and the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments. Since 2018, the march has been an annual platform for feminist protest. [Previous year, Islamabad police filed a case](#) against organisers for violating Section 144 and other laws after authorities denied an NOC for a march from the NPC to D-Chowk, leading participants to gather outside the press club.

The arrests of Aurat March participants in Islamabad highlight a troubling pattern of suppressing women's voices and peaceful protest in Pakistan. Detaining activists on International Women's Day, including those advocating for constitutional reforms and gender equality, reflects how legal provisions like Section 144 and the Peaceful Assembly Act are being used to curb dissent rather than maintain public order. Such actions not only threaten the fundamental right to assemble but also signal broader challenges for democracy, showing a government willing to prioritize control over accountability. The incident underscores the ongoing struggle for women and marginalized groups to claim public space and assert their rights in a society where patriarchal and bureaucratic barriers persist.

Humanitarian Fallout of Israel-Iran Strikes Draws International Criticism

[The World Health Organization](#) has raised serious concerns over recent Israeli airstrikes on Iran's oil facilities, warning that the attacks could pose major health risks, especially for children and the elderly. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the strikes might contaminate air, water, and food supplies, adding that some areas had already seen oil-laced rainfall. Vulnerable groups and those with existing medical conditions could face particularly severe consequences.

Iranian officials reported that facilities in Tehran and Alborz province were hit on Saturday, with Israel claiming the strikes targeted fuel storage sites linked to military operations. The attacks sparked massive fires and thick plumes of black smoke over Tehran, and reports emerged of black rain falling early Sunday morning. [The assaults on Iran's energy sector occurred amid promises](#) from the US and Israel to continue military action, despite growing international concerns over the escalating conflict. In retaliation, Iran launched missiles and drones at various targets across the Middle East, including energy infrastructure in neighboring Gulf states. Human rights groups condemned both the strikes and Iran's retaliatory attacks. Agnes Callamard of Amnesty International criticized Israel for failing to take adequate precautions to protect civilians, arguing that the resulting toxic exposure was excessive and disproportionate. She stressed that civilians,

particularly children, are bearing the brunt of the conflict, highlighting the human cost of the US and Israeli military actions in Iran.

The recent strikes on Iran's oil facilities highlight the growing humanitarian and geopolitical risks in the region. While Israel frames the attacks as targeting military-linked infrastructure, the widespread environmental damage including toxic smoke and oil-contaminated rain highlights the potential for severe civilian harm. The response from international organizations like WHO and Amnesty International reflects a broader concern that such military actions blur the line between strategic objectives and public safety, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Moreover, Iran's retaliatory measures signal a cycle of escalation that threatens not only regional stability but also global energy security. This situation illustrates how modern conflicts increasingly endanger civilians indirectly through environmental and infrastructural damage, raising urgent questions about accountability, proportionality, and the protection of human rights in conflict zones.



Photo by Madhu Rima on Unsplash

Iran's Internet Blackouts Endanger Civilians, Violate Rights: HRW

[Human Rights Watch has called on Iranian authorities](#) to immediately restore internet access and lift ongoing communications restrictions, warning that the blackout is putting civilians at serious risk. The organization also urged the international community to take steps to ensure that Iranians can maintain connectivity during the crisis. On February 28, 2026, Iran experienced a near-total collapse of internet services following strikes across the country by the United States and Israel. Data from Cloudflare Radar, which tracks global internet traffic in real time, indicated a 98 percent drop, effectively signaling a nationwide shutdown. Government-linked media have reported that the National Information Network allows access solely to websites that have received prior authorization.

Tomiwa Ilori, senior researcher on technology and human rights at Human Rights Watch, highlighted the dangers of cutting internet access during crises, saying it blocks access to critical information about military strikes, safe routes, medical care, and other lifesaving services. Ilori added that the blackout can also cause severe psychological distress by preventing people from reaching out to family and loved ones. Iran has a history of imposing internet shutdowns during times of unrest or conflict. In January 2026, [authorities enforced a 21-day nationwide blackout](#) amid violent crackdowns on protests, leaving thousands of civilians killed or injured. Similar disruptions occurred during the Israel-Iran conflict in June 2025, a 12-day shutdown in November 2019 during nationwide protests, and intermittent restrictions during the Women, Life, Freedom protests from September to December 2022.

Human Rights Watch stressed that ongoing military operations by the US, Israel, and Iran do not justify complete internet restrictions. Such shutdowns violate human rights, hinder journalists and human rights monitors from reporting on potential laws-of-war violations, and increase the risk of impunity. They also put civilians directly in danger by blocking timely access to safety updates, emergency services, food, and shelter. International human rights law ensures that people have the freedom to access, share, and exchange information through all forms of media, including the internet. Any limitations on online access for security purposes must be clearly defined, legally grounded, and implemented only when truly necessary and proportionate to a specific threat. During armed conflicts, shutting down communication networks, such as mobile data, which is essential for both civilian and military use, must adhere to the fundamental principles of the laws of war, including necessity and proportionality. While limited internet restrictions can sometimes serve valid military objectives, such as preventing hostile forces from coordinating attacks, these measures must avoid causing excessive harm to civilians compared to the expected military advantage.

According to Human Rights Watch, Iran's widespread and indiscriminate internet shutdowns fail these standards, inflicting severe harm on civilians while lacking proportional justification. UN experts stated in their 2015 Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression that shutting down large sections of communication networks, often referred to as "kill switches" is never permissible



Photo by caniez on Unsplash

under human rights law, even during conflict. HRW urged Iranian authorities to restore full internet and communication access nationwide, while the international community should help ensure civilians remain connected. Ilori urged governments, companies, and policymakers to develop technical solutions such as satellite connectivity to support populations affected by shutdowns in conflict situations.

Iran's ongoing internet blackouts during conflicts highlight how communication shutdowns are increasingly used as a tool to control information, rather than address security concerns. These restrictions endanger civilians by cutting off access to safety information, medical guidance, and family contacts, while also preventing independent reporting on human rights abuses. Such actions undermine legal protections, violate international standards, and intensify the humanitarian impact of military and state operations, emphasizing the critical need for restoring connectivity and supporting civilians in conflict zones.

Vietnamese Activist Held in Bangkok as Transnational Pressure Raises Concerns

Vietnamese anti-corruption campaigner Le Chi Thanh remains in detention in Thailand, sparking concern over coordinated repression by Thai and Vietnamese officials. He is currently held at Bangkok's Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre. Amnesty International's Co-Regional Director Montse Ferrer described the arrest as part of a worrying pattern in which exiled activists are targeted beyond their home country. The cancellation of Thanh's passport by Viet Nam appears to be a tactic to compel him to return home, where he could face imprisonment or abuse.

Ferrer underlined that [Thai authorities must free Thanh immediately](#) and ensure he is not deported to Viet Nam, where his safety and human rights could be at serious risk. She called on the global community to denounce Viet Nam's continuing efforts to silence dissent abroad and stressed that sending individuals back to countries where they face real dangers would violate international human rights principles. Le Chi Thanh was taken into custody on 6 March 2026. Reports indicate that representatives from the Vietnamese Embassy visited the detention facility on the same day, heightening concerns about external pressure on Thai authorities. Thanh's lawyer stated that he had entered Thailand legally using a Vietnamese passport valid until 2031 and had obtained a legitimate Thai work permit. Despite this, he was detained after Thai officials claimed his work authorization was invalid, following Viet Nam's revocation of his passport, a decision Thanh had not been notified of before his arrest.

Le Chi Thanh, once a police officer, later became a well-known activist who used social media to expose corruption and wrongdoing within Viet Nam's public security agencies. In April 2021, he was detained following an alleged confrontation with traffic police in Thu Duc City, accused of resisting law enforcement. In January 2022, he was sentenced to two years behind bars, and later received an additional three-year sentence under Article 331 of Viet Nam's Penal Code for his online posts criticizing government authorities, which were deemed as misusing democratic freedoms to violate state and individual rights.

Thanh reported enduring severe abuse in pre-trial detention, including beatings and being suspended by his limbs for seven days. In November 2022, UN experts raised concerns with the Vietnamese government about these allegations. His case highlights the ongoing risks of torture and mistreatment faced by prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders in Viet Nam. UN experts have also documented Vietnamese officials pressuring Montagnard and Hmong refugees in Thailand to "voluntarily" return home. These cases raise doubts about Thailand's ability to effectively protect refugees from intimidation and coercion by foreign authorities. UN experts and civil society groups have warned that Thai and Vietnamese authorities are increasingly working together to target dissidents. Notable cases include the disappearance of Thai activists in Viet Nam in January 2019, the abduction of blogger Truong Duy Nhat in Thailand that same month, and the disappearance of journalist Duong Van Thai in April 2023. In February 2026, Thai officials [forcefully sent Montagnard human rights defender](#) Y Quynh Bdap to Viet Nam, highlighting a continued trend of transnational repression.



Photo by Bangun Stock Production on Unsplash

This case illustrates a troubling escalation of transnational repression, where authoritarian governments extend their reach beyond national borders to intimidate and punish dissenters. Le Chi Thanh's detention in Thailand, combined with the involvement of Vietnamese officials and the systematic targeting of activists and refugees, underscores the vulnerability of exiled dissidents in countries perceived as safe havens. It highlights the complicity, or at least the coercive influence, of host states in enabling human rights violations abroad, raising serious questions about international protections for refugees, the enforcement of non-refoulement principles, and the effectiveness of global mechanisms designed to hold governments accountable for cross-border abuses. This pattern reflects a broader strategy by Viet Nam to suppress criticism through fear, coercion, and legal manipulation, demonstrating that the risks to human rights defenders extend well beyond their home country.

Amnesty or Illusion? Venezuela's Human Rights Crisis

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, has expressed concern over reports that detainees in Venezuela continue to face torture following the removal of President Nicolás Maduro by U.S. forces in January. After his ousting, power was taken over by his close ally and former Vice-President, Delcy Rodríguez, who has since introduced an amnesty law. While Türk welcomed this measure, he cautioned that deep-rooted and systemic human rights issues still persist in the country despite the change in leadership. However, Venezuela's foreign minister dismissed his remarks as biased and rejected the allegations as baseless.

On Telegram, Foreign Minister Yván Gil criticized Türk, claiming that by referencing the allegations, he was [echoing the agenda of "extremists."](#) Meanwhile, in a Geneva update to the UN Human Rights Council, Türk reported that, even after last month's amnesty law was enacted, many Venezuelans are still being held without legal basis. He also noted that among those detained arbitrarily was a child. Just recently, the Venezuelan parliament, which is controlled by Maduro loyalists, announced that over 7,700 individuals had been fully freed under the terms of the new amnesty. According to the parliament's records, the majority of those reportedly released were not actually imprisoned but remained under restrictions such as house confinement or supervised release. By contrast, the Venezuelan advocacy group Foro Penal has so far been able to verify the liberation of fewer than 700 individuals. The group also cautions that over 500 people continue to be detained for political reasons in the country. Highlighting the gap between official figures and independent data, Türk has called on Venezuelan authorities to be more transparent.

Türk informed the UN Human Rights Council that his office had sought the official roster of released individuals and unrestricted entry to multiple detention facilities, but had not yet been granted access. He also reported ongoing torture and mistreatment at facilities including Rodeo 1 and Fuerte Guaicaipuro. Türk made his remarks only a few days after the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela provided the [UN Human Rights Council with an update](#) on its most recent findings. According to the mission, it has been continuing to collect firsthand accounts, victim testimonies, documents, and other evidence of human rights abuses occurring since January. Earlier inquiries by the Fact-Finding Mission revealed many cases in which individuals held in Venezuelan detention facilities endured torture, sexual abuse, or other harsh, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Venezuelan authorities, however, have rejected these earlier reports, describing them as politically motivated and influenced by malicious agendas.

The recent amnesty law in Venezuela might seem like a step forward, but the situation on the ground tells a more complicated story. While thousands are said to have been released, many remain under restrictions, and independent observations suggest that only a small fraction are truly free. Reports of arbitrary detention and ongoing mistreatment, including of children,

highlight that deep-rooted human rights problems persist. The government's dismissal of these concerns as biased underscores a polarized and defensive political climate. Without real transparency, accountability, and systemic reform, these legal measures risk being more symbolic than transformative, leaving many Venezuelans still trapped in fear and uncertainty



Photo by Andrés Silva on Unsplash

Children's Rights Denied: A Humanitarian Crisis

A former official has condemned the relocation of unaccompanied migrant girls, some as young as 13 and pregnant as a result of sexual violence, calling it a serious breach of human rights. [The Trump administration is relocating](#) every pregnant minor traveling alone, who is caught by immigration authorities, to one centralized shelter in South Texas, a move critics argue is intended to limit access to abortion services. Because detainees are often transferred rapidly between states, frequently to more restrictive regions, many pregnant individuals encounter significant barriers when trying to obtain essential reproductive healthcare while in custody.

Minors traveling alone without legal immigration status are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and other serious dangers, which place them under the responsibility of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The agency previously maintained centers across the United States capable of supporting children under 18 who were pregnant. Since July, over twelve pregnant minors have been transferred to a single center in San Benito, a small town near Texas's southern border. Some of these children are only 13 years old, and roughly half of the pregnancies resulted from sexual assault, according to a combined report by the Texas Newsroom and California Newsroom. In the state of Texas, abortion is prohibited in nearly every situation, including cases of rape and incest.

Jonathan White, who previously led children's programs at the ORR under both the Obama and Trump administrations, said that the transfers to Texas are intentionally designed to prevent pregnant minors from accessing abortion services. He explained that while a child remains in Texas, obtaining an abortion is effectively impossible unless a federal official explicitly authorizes it. The transfer intensifies ongoing worries about reproductive healthcare in immigration detention, including claims that pregnant individuals are denied proper medical care, nursing parents are separated from their babies, and some detainees have been subjected to coerced sterilization. Diana Romero, professor and director of the [Center on Immigrant, Refugee, and Global Health](#) at CUNY's Graduate School of Public Health, described the complete neglect of the rights of pregnant and nursing detainees as a severe breach of international law and public health standards that safeguard voluntary medical care.

Romero stated that compelling anyone to continue a pregnancy against their will constitutes a serious violation of rights, and transferring individuals from other parts of the country to states with stricter abortion restrictions raises an additional set of serious concerns. White emphasized that deciding for these girls whether they must carry a pregnancy resulting from rape represents a profound human rights crisis. He also noted that political agendas are being imposed on the bodies of these children. White noted that the average age of pregnant migrant minors traveling alone is around 15 or 16, though some are even younger. He emphasized that these are not adult women but very young girls. Due to their age, many face higher-risk pregnancies that require specialized medical attention, yet it remains uncertain whether the facility in southern Texas, located hours from major urban centers, is properly prepared to provide the necessary care.



Photo by Gayatri Malhotra on

The government does not collect data on sexual assault among migrant girls under 18 traveling alone, but other groups estimate it affects 80–90% of them, White said. He added that when he worked in the program, roughly half of the pregnant girls reported that their pregnancies were caused by sexual violence, either in their home country or during their journey. Many girls only discover they are pregnant during medical exams under ORR supervision. The Office of Refugee Resettlement, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is currently overseen by a long-serving immigration official. In response to questions about whether pregnant minors are receiving adequate medical care, if other pregnant detainees are being transferred to states with strict abortion restrictions, and the degree of control ORR currently has under immigration officials, HHS spokesperson Emily Hilliard dismissed the concerns as false. She emphasized that ORR continues protecting the health, welfare, and proper treatment of the children under its supervision.

The 1997 Flores settlement sets standards for the treatment of children in U.S. detention, including their right to receive full reproductive healthcare. In 2018, during the first Trump administration, the American Civil Liberties Union successfully sued HHS, requiring officials to ensure that pregnant minors traveling alone could access reproductive services if they chose to have an abortion. White explained that when he worked in the U.S., there was a constitutional guarantee to abortion services. However, following the Dobbs decision, access to abortion now varies depending on location, including where minors are held in detention. He added that placing a child in a facility where obtaining an abortion is extremely difficult creates a significant barrier to care.

Romero noted that obtaining an abortion is already challenging for residents in these states, and so-called “presumed immigrants”, individuals targeted by broad federal immigration enforcement based on race or ethnicity, encounter even greater obstacles, increasing the likelihood of human rights abuses. She added that there is a long-standing pattern in the United States of reproductive rights being denied to women of color. Romero explained that reproductive justice encompasses not only the right to end a pregnancy but also the right to continue it, ensuring that both the pregnant individual and the fetus, and later the child, are kept in safe conditions. Some of the girls have already given birth and remain confined at the Texas facility with their newborns. Anonymous sources informed the Texas and California newsrooms that the facility has a record of poor-quality care.

These detained children are usually in their sophomore or junior year of high school, navigating a foreign country on their own, and many are carrying pregnancies caused by sexual assault. White emphasized that this reality must guide how carefully we protect these children. He argued that a 16-year-old who has been sexually abused and wishes to end her pregnancy should not be blocked by the federal government, noting that by restricting access, she is essentially being kept as a prisoner. This situation highlights a deeper moral and ethical challenge: how society protects its most vulnerable. These are children navigating trauma, uncertainty, and fear, and yet their basic rights and bodily autonomy are at stake. True justice in this context isn’t just about laws or policies, it’s about creating environments where young people are cared for, supported, and given the ability to make decisions about their own health without coercion or added risk. It’s a test of compassion, accountability, and whether systems meant to protect children are actually doing so.

Arbitrary Detention of Journalists and Activists in Kashmir

Tomorrow marks three years since journalist and human rights advocate Irfan Mehraj was placed in detention without due process. Amnesty International, the undersigned civil society groups, urge his immediate and unconditional release and reaffirm their support for him and his family. They also call on the Indian government to halt its ongoing crackdown on journalists and human rights defenders in Jammu and Kashmir. Irfan Mehraj was taken into custody by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) on 20 March 2023, facing charges under the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) that were politically driven and falsely constructed. Authorities from the NIA claimed that Mehraj's arrest was linked to his connection with Khurram Parvez. Parvez is a human rights advocate and leads the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), a major civil society group in Jammu and Kashmir. For more than four years, Indian officials have detained Parvez arbitrarily, relying on politically driven and baseless accusations.



These prolonged detentions underscore a larger pattern of harassment and repression directed at human rights defenders and media workers in Jammu and Kashmir. In Jammu and Kashmir, authorities have relied on the harsh [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act \(UAPA\)](#) and the restrictive Public Safety Act (PSA), which allow prolonged detention without trial, to criminalize and suppress journalists and human rights defenders. This crackdown has intensified following the unilateral revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August 2019. In recent times, law enforcement in Indian-administered Kashmir has targeted journalists with intimidation and repeated questioning, compelling them to sign agreements to refrain from actions deemed capable of "disturbing peace." Repeated appeals from United Nations experts and international human rights organizations regarding violations in Kashmir have gone largely unanswered by the Indian government. India must uphold its global human rights commitments and cease its retaliatory actions against journalists and human rights defenders, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir. Member states of the UN Human Rights Council should hold India accountable for these blatant abuses, even as a sitting council member.

Indian authorities are urged to revoke repressive laws, including the UAPA and PSA, and to foster an environment where journalists and civil society can operate without fear or restrictions in Jammu and Kashmir. While India seeks to strengthen its multilateral and bilateral partnerships, Amnesty International urged the global community to pressure the Indian government to uphold its international human rights commitments, immediately free Irfan Mehraj, Khurram Parvez, and all other detained Kashmiri human rights defenders, and put an end to the ongoing repression in Jammu and Kashmir. This situation reflects a troubling erosion of basic human rights and the space for free expression in Jammu and Kashmir. When journalists and human rights defenders are detained for their work or associations, it isn't just a legal issue, it's a human one, affecting real people, families, and communities. Arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention, and intimidation create fear and silence critical voices, undermining both accountability and justice. Beyond laws and politics, this is about ensuring that those who shine light on abuses can continue their work safely, and that governments uphold the dignity, rights, and protections owed to every individual.



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 highlight two research papers from the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025: one examines how opposition movements resist rising autocracies worldwide, while the other explores why repeated Middle East protests often fail to achieve lasting change.

The Return of the Opposition: Civil Resistance Against Authoritarianism in the 21st Century by Owen Lippert

Can opposition movements survive when autocracies are on the rise worldwide? In 2024, autocracies outpaced democracies for the first time in decades, with freedoms under threat in 94 countries. Owen Lippert, Director of Opposition International, looks at how citizens, political parties, civil society, and diaspora communities fight back, despite censorship, surveillance, and aid systems that often end up strengthening authoritarian control. Drawing on Václav Havel's "living in truth" and the 2024 student protests in Bangladesh, Lippert highlights that rebuilding democracy requires self-sufficiency, research-driven strategies, and stronger diaspora links.

He also outlines concrete ways for actors in countries such as Afghanistan to connect across information and support networks, offering practical insights for those working to build credible, locally rooted opposition movements. To learn more, read our latest publication on the [website](#) by Owen Lippert, Executive Director, Opposition international, presented at the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025.

Despotic Robustness and Social Movement Incapacitation in the Middle East by Fereydoon Rahmani

Repeated protests have swept across the Middle East, from Iran and Iraq to Libya, Syria, and beyond yet even the most intense uprisings seldom translate into political change. So why do authoritarian regimes hold firm despite continuous resistance? Dr. Fereydoon Rahmani highlights that authoritarian regimes don't just rely on force, they thrive through intricate systems that keep society under control and power intact. Real chances for change arise only when regimes falter, security forces split, foreign backing fades, or crises rock the system. Even then, success isn't guaranteed: protests must be organized, and able to build institutions that can truly last.

To learn more about why revolutions fail, and how protests can succeed, read our latest publication on the [website](#) by Fereydoon Rahmani, Associate Professor, Department of Equity Studies, York University, presented at the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025.

WAEN CEO Khalid Ramizy Presents *The Stolen Republic* at the University of Ottawa

On March 10, 2026, Khalid Ramizy, CEO of WAEN, delivered a lecture at the University of Ottawa on his book 'The Stolen Republic: Untold Facts Behind the Collapse of Afghanistan's Last Republic'. The session, chaired by Paul Robinson, examined the fall of Afghanistan's last republican government in 2021, the Taliban's return, and ongoing challenges. Drawing on personal experiences, media accounts, and Afghan perspectives, Ramizy explored the human and structural dimensions of the republic's collapse and offered practical recommendations for supporting Afghan civil society, women, and democratic resilience. The lecture emphasized that Afghanistan's future must be determined by its people, rooted in unity, tolerance, and the defense of human rights.







SECTION - 4:

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