



WORLD ANTI EXTREMISM  
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# UNCENSORED WATCH

*Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism*

Issue 17 | May 2026

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Authoritarianism*

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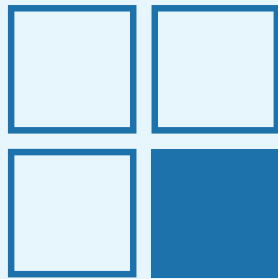
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# SECTION-1

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

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

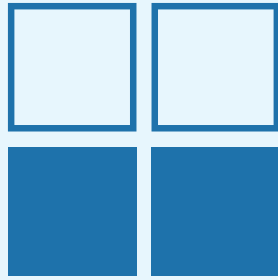
Hello, Dear Readers, welcome to the May edition of Uncensored Watch!

This month, we cover escalating violence, rising intolerance, and widening crackdowns on journalists and civil society across multiple regions. We also examine concerns over refugee protections, antisemitic violence in the US, and pressures on global civic space following the suspension of RightsCon in Zambia. Additionally, we feature research from the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025, such as Muhammad Anwar's paper on nonviolent civic resistance in Pakistan, alongside an article by Aryan Adib on the erasure of girls' education in Afghanistan.

Dive in, reflect, and stay informed, this edition brings together voices and stories that matter. We're glad you're here with us.

Enjoy Reading!

The Uncensored Watch Team



# SECTION-2

Global Crisis in Focus

## Al-Qaeda-Linked Group Escalates Attacks, Strikes Prison and Blocks Bamako Supplies

An [al-Qaeda-linked insurgent group](#) has escalated violence in Mali by launching a coordinated prison assault and disrupting food routes into the capital, Bamako. Fighters from Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) reportedly attacked the Kenieroba Central Prison, a high-security facility located about 60km from Bamako that holds around 2,500 detainees, including individuals considered high-value by the state. Authorities said the complex has been a key detention site for militants and suspects arrested after [coordinated offensives carried out in the previous month](#) involving coordinated offensives by JNIM and Tuareg separatists from the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA).

Alongside the prison assault, militants also targeted transport routes by burning trucks carrying essential food supplies bound for the capital. Security reports indicated that armed fighters have increasingly attempted to isolate Bamako by intercepting and destroying logistics convoys. The recent escalation follows a period of intense unrest, including coordinated raids on military positions and urban areas, which reportedly killed senior officials such as Mali's Defence Minister Sadio Camara and several others. In response, the country's transitional leadership under Assimi Goïta has tightened security operations and ordered mass arrests of suspected collaborators within military and civilian circles.

Authorities claim that some detainees are linked to opposition figures and extremist networks, while human rights monitors, including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, have warned of possible abuses during the crackdown. [In a report](#) by UN human rights officials, allegations were raised regarding extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances reportedly carried out by state security forces in the aftermath of the attacks. Meanwhile, militants have expanded pressure on the capital by intensifying their rural presence and reportedly [established roadblocks on major entry routes](#) into the city effectively restricting movement of goods and civilians. Witnesses and journalists describe armed patrols using motorbikes and heavy weapons to control traffic and enforce the blockade. The tightening siege has raised concerns of a worsening humanitarian situation, as disrupted supply chains threaten food availability across the capital and surrounding regions. Local officials in affected areas have urged urgent government intervention to prevent shortages from escalating further.

The situation in Mali shows an escalation beyond conventional fighting into pressure tactics that directly affect civilian survival. By disrupting access routes and essential supplies into Bamako, armed groups are extending conflict into daily life, where food, movement, and basic security become tools of influence. This kind of strategy increases fear and instability because it targets systems civilians rely on rather than only military positions. At the same time, state responses

involving broad arrests and intensified security operations risk deepening tension and mistrust, especially if accountability is unclear. Overall, the conflict is tightening around the population itself, leaving civilians caught between armed control, state reaction, and shrinking access to stability.



*Photo by Carlin Trezil on Unsplash*

## Growing Intolerance Against Christians in Jerusalem: A Deepening Concern

[The assault on a French nun](#) in East Jerusalem shocked many observers internationally, but members of the local Christian community say such hostility has become more frequent in recent years. Christians in Israel and East Jerusalem, many of them Palestinian, describe facing regular harassment ranging from verbal abuse and spitting to vandalism targeting churches and religious symbols. Although Israeli officials condemned the incident and described it as unacceptable, many Christians say confidence in meaningful state protection remains weak. [Researchers and rights groups](#) note that many cases are never formally reported due to fears of inaction, social pressure, or concerns over residency and visa status.

Christian communities have existed in the region for more than two millennia, yet many clergy and worshippers now say they feel increasingly vulnerable amid Israel's political shift toward

ultranationalism and expanding far-right influence within government and society. According to monitoring organisations, dozens of incidents targeting Christians have already been recorded this year, including assaults on clergy members and acts of vandalism against church property. Analysts say public hostility toward Christians has become more visible and socially tolerated over the past several years.

Hana Bendcowsky of the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations said the broader political climate has emboldened extremist attitudes. She added that Israel [has responded to developments in Gaza](#) and southern Lebanon in ways that reflect a declining concern over international criticism. Observers also point to the growing influence of ultranationalist and settler movements, which critics say have intensified hostility toward non-Jewish communities, including Palestinian Christians. Israeli activist Rabbi Arik Ascherman warned that harassment against Christians has become deeply embedded in the current atmosphere, extending from street-level abuse to restrictions affecting churches and foreign clergy.

International backlash has occasionally pushed Israeli authorities to respond quickly. After footage circulated of Israeli soldiers damaging a Christian statue in southern Lebanon, the government was [quick to issue its own condemnation](#). Similar reactions followed criticism from foreign leaders after Israeli police obstructed Christian religious ceremonies in Jerusalem earlier this year. Israeli strikes on churches in Gaza and Lebanon were [largely addressed only](#) after international and especially US support risked weakening. Analysts say this growing intolerance risks weakening Israel's long-standing support among younger Christians internationally, many of whom increasingly question the gap between their religious solidarity and the treatment of Christian communities in the region.

This reflects how extremism and hardening political identities can slowly shrink space for minority rights, turning everyday religious practice into something that feels unsafe and contested. When harassment becomes routine and accountability feels inconsistent, it signals more than isolated abuse, it points to normalization of intolerance within a charged political environment. In such conditions, weak trust in protection systems and the sense that justice depends on outside pressure further deepen vulnerability. The result is a cycle where fear, resentment, and polarization reinforce each other, pushing an already small community further to the margins.



*Photo by JR Ross on Unsplash*

## Iran Carries Out Executions Amid Growing Crackdown on Dissent

Authorities in Iran have executed three men accused of involvement in anti-government demonstrations earlier this year, amid what rights groups describe as an intensifying wave of executions during heightened regional conflict involving the US and Israel. The judiciary confirmed the executions of Mehdi Rassouli, Mohammad Reza Miri, and Ebrahim Dolatabadi, all of whom had been linked to [protests and disturbances in Mashhad earlier this year](#). Iranian state media alleged the men played roles in violence during the protests, including the killing of a security force member. As per [Human Rights Activists News Agency](#), two of the men were executed at Vakilabad prison in Mashhad during the early hours of Sunday. Rights organisations identified the three as political prisoners and criticised the judicial process surrounding their convictions.



*Photo by Kevin Martin Jose on Unsplash*

The demonstrations, [which began in December](#) amid frustration over economic hardship, later expanded into nationwide anti-regime protests. Iranian authorities responded with a sweeping crackdown, while officials accused foreign powers including the US and Israel of fuelling the unrest. Rights groups say thousands were killed in the crackdown, while Iranian authorities blamed unrest allegedly backed by the US and Israel. State media accused Rassouli and Miri of killing a security officer and described Dolatabadi as a protest instigator. [Rights group IHR](#) said the men were political prisoners sentenced after unfair trials, adding that Iran has executed 24 political detainees since March. International rights organisations, including Amnesty

International, have urged stronger international action, warning that the increasing use of executions against protesters and dissidents is aimed at creating fear within society during a period of growing political and military tension. Rights monitors say Iran remains among the countries with the highest number of executions globally, with hundreds of hangings recorded annually.

The executions highlight growing concerns over the use of capital punishment as a tool of political control during periods of unrest and conflict. When protests linked to economic frustration and public dissent are met with mass crackdowns, disputed trials, and executions, it raises serious questions about due process, freedom of expression, and the protection of fundamental human rights. Rights groups argue that the climate of fear created by repeated executions does not only affect political activists, but also sends a wider message of intimidation across society. In highly tense political environments, the absence of transparent legal proceedings and accountability risks deepening public mistrust, silencing dissent, and further shrinking civic space for ordinary citizens.

## Algeria's Crackdown on Journalists Raises Serious Human Rights Concerns

Authorities in Algeria are facing renewed criticism from Amnesty International over what it describes as a widening crackdown on journalists and media workers, with calls for the immediate release of several individuals detained in connection with their reporting and online expression. The organization says journalists including Abdelwakil Blamm, Hassan Bouras, and Christophe Gleizes have been targeted through arrests, prosecutions, and prison sentences linked to their journalistic activity, particularly as authorities increasingly use national security and terrorism-related charges against critical voices. Blamm is currently facing trial on terrorism-related accusations after spending over a year in pretrial detention following his arrest in December 2024 during World Press Freedom Day [commemorations](#). He is accused of supporting online protest movements and communicating with individuals labelled as security threats by the authorities. Amnesty says his detention is part of a broader pattern of repression.

The crackdown intensified [within a wider wave of repression](#) on an online protest movement calling for socio-economic reforms and an end to political repression. Rights groups argue that many of the prosecutions are based on peaceful expression, including social media activity and contact with activists. Among those affected is journalist ex-affiliated member of the [now-disbanded](#) Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH). Hassan Bouras, who has been held in pretrial detention since April 2026. He was arrested near his home and reportedly denied adequate legal access at the time of detention. He is currently on hunger strike, with rights groups urging authorities to ensure proper medical care and respect for his rights. Bouras has previously been detained in earlier cases linked to his reporting, reflecting what observers



Photo by engin akyurt on Unsplash

describe as repeated judicial pressure on independent journalists. Another case highlighted is that of French journalist Christophe Gleizes, who was sentenced in connection with reporting activities and alleged communication with individuals designated as security threats by Algerian authorities.

[Amnesty International](#) says the situation reflects a broader deterioration in press freedom, noting that multiple journalists have faced prison terms, suspended sentences, or travel bans in recent months. The organization also criticizes vague legal charges such as harming national unity or insulting state symbols, arguing they are being used to silence dissent rather than address legitimate security concerns. Officials, meanwhile, maintain that prosecutions are based on violations of national law, but rights groups say the scale and pattern of cases point to systematic restrictions on independent journalism and freedom of expression. This case shows how press freedom is being steadily narrowed through arrests and prosecutions that treat reporting and online expression as security threats. When journalists are detained for covering protests or contacting activists, it sends a clear warning to others that speaking or writing critically can carry real personal cost. The use of broad charges and long pretrial detention doesn't just affect individuals like Blamm or Bouras, it creates a chilling effect across the entire media space, pushing journalists toward self-censorship.

## Allegations of Torture and Abuse Surface in Case of Russian Prisoner Azat Miftakhov

[Amnesty International](#) has called for an urgent, independent investigation into allegations that imprisoned mathematician and anarchist activist Azat Miftakhov was tortured and subjected to sexualized violence in a Russian penal colony. Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty's Deputy Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, said authorities must ensure accountability through fair proceedings and guarantee Miftakhov's protection from further abuse, stressing that the reported treatment reflects deeply entrenched patterns of coercion and brutality within parts of the prison system. He warned that the involvement of both prison staff and inmates suggests a system where violence is not only tolerated but used as a method of control and intimidation, including sexual violence that disproportionately targets vulnerable prisoners and echoes some of the harshest practices seen in Soviet-era detention systems.

According to the account released by his support group on 5 May 2026, Miftakhov was allegedly abused shortly after being transferred to Penal Colony No. 18 in the Yamalo-Nenets region. The report claims that after he refused to carry out a degrading cleaning task, he was physically assaulted, restrained, and subjected to repeated humiliation by staff and inmates. It further alleges he was beaten, threatened with sexual violence and suffocation, and tortured with electric shocks to his toes in order to force compliance. Supporters say this is not an isolated case, pointing to earlier episodes in which Miftakhov [reported](#) ill-treatment following his initial



arrest in 2019 over an alleged arson-related case, as well as claims that he was targeted inside prison through the circulation of private images intended to expose him to abuse within the inmate hierarchy. After his release in 2025, he was quickly detained again and later sentenced on charges related to allegedly “justifying terrorism,” extending his imprisonment. If true, the allegations point to a detention system where violence and humiliation are used as tools of control, particularly against politically sensitive prisoners. It raises serious human rights concerns about accountability inside Russian prisons and the lack of protection for detainees once in custody.

## Tunisia Accused of Tightening Control Over Civil Society Organizations

Tunisian authorities are facing growing criticism for an escalating campaign against civil society organizations, with courts increasingly ordering suspensions and moves toward dissolution of NGOs under the stated justification of regulating foreign funding and safeguarding “national interests,” [according to Amnesty International](#). Over the past two years, a wide range of groups working on human rights, media freedom, anti-corruption, migration, and social justice have been subjected to increasing pressure, including financial restrictions, asset freezes, prosecutions of staff, and now judicial steps aimed at shutting them down entirely. Rights advocates say this reflects a broader tightening of civic space, where legal and administrative tools are being used to silence independent voices rather than protect public order. Critics argue that organizations created after the 2011 revolution, once seen as a cornerstone of Tunisia’s democratic transition, are now facing systematic rollback.

Authorities have imposed temporary suspensions on at least two dozen organizations, including well-known groups such as the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, Lawyers Without Borders, and other civil society and media-related associations. Many of these organizations have challenged the measures in court but have so far failed to overturn them, leaving them exposed to possible dissolution proceedings. Some cases have also directly impacted humanitarian and legal support services, with partner organizations reporting disruptions to assistance for vulnerable groups due to suspended operations. At the same time, several NGOs and their staff have faced investigations into funding sources, travel restrictions, and repeated questioning by security units. Civil society actors say the pressure has been accompanied by public smear campaigns, with NGOs accused of foreign allegiance or undermining national security, particularly those receiving international funding or working on sensitive issues such as migration and protests.

Legal experts note that while Tunisian law provides procedures for regulating associations, international standards require that any restrictions on freedom of association must be necessary, reasonable, and clearly justified. Rights groups argue that the current wave of measures falls short of these standards and risks undermining fundamental civic freedoms. The situation highlights increasing pressure on civil society in Tunisia, as NGOs and rights groups face growing scrutiny for their advocacy and public work. When organizations are suspended or investigated for peaceful activities, the impact extends beyond activists to the communities relying on them for support and representation. Over time, such measures risk shrinking independent civic space and discouraging open public participation.



*Photo by Mohamed Jamil Latrach on Unsplash*

## Rwanda Faces Questions Over Death in Custody of Government Critic Karasira

Authorities in Rwanda are facing renewed scrutiny following the death in custody of government critic and academic Aimable Karasira on the day he was expected to be released from prison, prompting calls from Human Rights Watch for an independent investigation. Rwandan Correctional Services claimed Karasira died from a medication overdose shortly before his scheduled release on May 6. Officials said he had taken excessive amounts of medicine prescribed for an existing medical condition. Reports indicate he died at a hospital in Kigali.

[Karasira](#) had become known for publicly criticizing the government and discussing the deaths of relatives during the 1994 genocide and the aftermath involving the RPF-led government. Following videos posted on his YouTube channel, he reportedly faced threats, intimidation, and pressure from security officials. He was taken into custody in [May 2021](#) and prosecuted on charges including genocide denial and divisionism, accusations often used against critics in Rwanda according to rights groups. During his imprisonment, rights organizations and court testimony indicated that Karasira endured [torture](#), mistreatment, and denial of adequate medical care. He alleged prison authorities subjected him to sleep deprivation, beatings, forced court appearances despite poor health, and restrictions on food and financial support from relatives.

Although he had been serving a prison sentence linked to his speech and online activity, prosecutors were still seeking a harsher punishment at the time of his death. Human Rights Watch said the circumstances surrounding Karasira's death raise serious concerns, particularly given Rwanda's record regarding critics and opposition figures who die in detention or under suspicious conditions. The case has drawn comparisons to the [2020 detention death](#) of singer and government critic Kizito Mihigo, whose death after arrest also sparked international concern and questions over official explanations. Rights groups are calling for a transparent investigation involving independent international experts, arguing that the government has a responsibility to fully clarify the circumstances surrounding Karasira's death and ensure accountability if wrongdoing occurred.

Karasira's death highlights the deep risks faced by critics and dissenting voices in environments where questioning authorities can lead to imprisonment, intimidation, or worse. When a detainee dies under unclear circumstances after years of alleged mistreatment and threats, it raises serious concerns about accountability, transparency, and the protection of basic human rights. Beyond one individual case, such incidents can create fear across society, sending a message that outspoken criticism may come with severe personal consequences.

*Photo by Yosri Gam on Unsplash*



## Human Rights Groups Condemn Tunisia's Targeting of Refugee Support Workers

Authorities in Tunisia are facing mounting criticism from Human Rights Watch over the prosecution of aid workers from the Tunisian Council for Refugees, in what rights groups describe as part of a broader crackdown on civil society and refugee support organizations. Five staff members of the [Tunisian Refugee Council](#) are set to appear in court on May 13, 2026, after appealing earlier convictions linked to their work assisting asylum seekers and refugees. Rights groups say the case reflects a wider effort by authorities to criminalize humanitarian assistance and restrict independent civil society activity.

The case follows the closure of the organization in May 2024, when authorities [detained](#) its founder and director along with senior staff, later pursuing criminal charges against multiple employees over their involvement in providing shelter, aid, and administrative support to refugees registered with international agencies. Human rights organizations say the prosecutions are directly tied to legitimate humanitarian activities, including accommodation and [financial support for basic needs](#), which they argue are standard forms of refugee protection coordinated with international partners. The council, established in 2016, previously worked alongside UN agencies to help process asylum seekers and provide essential services such as emergency housing and medical support. However, its operations came under scrutiny amid rising anti-migrant sentiment and a broader government crackdown on migration-related organizations.

Authorities later froze the organization's assets and personal bank accounts of key staff, effectively shutting down its ability to operate and leaving employees and partners facing financial hardship. Rights groups argue that the legal charges rely on broad interpretations of migration laws and effectively punish organizations for assisting people in irregular situations, despite international protections for refugees and asylum seekers. Human rights defenders say the case is part of an escalating pattern in Tunisia, where NGOs working on migration, anti-racism, and social justice have faced prosecutions, suspensions, and dissolution threats in recent years.

International legal standards emphasize that states must protect the right to seek asylum and ensure that humanitarian workers are not penalized for providing assistance. Critics say the current approach undermines these obligations and leaves vulnerable refugees without access to essential support or legal protection. [Human Rights Watch](#) has urged Tunisian authorities to drop the charges, end prosecutions, and restore space for independent civil society organizations operating in the country. This case highlights how humanitarian work is increasingly being treated as a security issue, even when it involves basic support like shelter and financial aid for refugees. When aid workers are detained and prosecuted for helping people in vulnerable situations, it creates a climate where providing assistance itself becomes risky. This not only undermines civil society, but also leaves refugees and asylum seekers without essential protection or support. In human rights terms, it reflects a shrinking space for both legal asylum systems and the people trying to fill the gaps left by them.



Photo by Frederick Shaw on Unsplash

## Deadly Antisemitic Attacks Highlight Rising Extremism in the US

Antisemitic violence in the United States reached its highest level in 2025, according to a new report by the Anti-Defamation League, which also recorded the first deaths from such attacks since 2022. Among the most severe cases, [two employees](#) of the Israeli diplomatic mission were shot and killed last May outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. In another incident, a man in Colorado carried out an [arson-attack](#) at a Jewish community event focused on Israeli hostages in Gaza, an attack that later led to the death of an 82-year-old woman due to her injuries. According to the ADL, physical assaults linked to [antisemitism](#) rose by 4%, while attacks involving weapons increased by 39%, even though overall recorded antisemitic incidents declined compared to the previous year. The organization recorded more than 6,000 incidents nationwide, averaging around 17 per day. The report also highlights that while harassment and vandalism decreased, violent incidents remained a serious concern, with hundreds of individuals affected across all 50 states and Washington, DC. It notes that antisemitic incidents have remained significantly higher than levels recorded before October 2023.

High-profile cases, including an attack on Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's residence during Passover, have further intensified concerns about targeted violence and intimidation in everyday settings. ADL officials say the data reflects a persistent climate of fear, where victims experience lasting psychological and social impacts. Survivors of attacks have described feeling unsafe in public spaces and daily life. The organization also reports that a significant share of incidents involved references to Israel or Zionism, though it stresses that political criticism becomes antisemitic when it is used as a justification for harassment or violence against Jewish individuals. While campus-related incidents saw a notable decline, the ADL warns that antisemitism remains widespread across society and is increasingly expressed in violent forms. The report calls for stronger security measures for vulnerable institutions, including synagogues and schools, and urges legislative support for initiatives aimed at improving protection and preventing attacks on religious communities. The rise in violent antisemitic attacks reflects a deepening climate of fear for Jewish communities, where prejudice is increasingly turning into real physical harm. Beyond the numbers, it affects daily life, safety, and a basic sense of security in public spaces.



*Photo by Lainie Berger on Unsplash*

## New Refugee Database in Malaysia Sparks Privacy and Rights Fears

[Authorities in Malaysia](#) have come under criticism from [Human Rights Watch](#) over a new refugee registration initiative that rights groups say could increase surveillance and weaken protections for asylum seekers and refugees in the country. The system, introduced in January 2026 and known as the Dokumen Pendaftaran Pelarian (Refugee Registration Document, DPP), is intended to replace the existing UNHCR-managed registration process. It is being developed as part of broader efforts by the government to tighten immigration enforcement amid rising raids, detentions, and public hostility toward migrants. Human rights advocates warn that the new framework could place already vulnerable populations under greater state control. Refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia reportedly live with constant fear of arrest, deportation, and exploitation, particularly as immigration enforcement operations have intensified in recent years.

The system, designed by Malaysia's applied research agency MIMOS Berhad, [will gather](#) biometric and other personal data to build a national refugee database. Authorities say the DPP card will become the only official form of recognition for refugees, while the role of UNHCR will be limited largely to resettlement processes. Rights groups have raised concerns that the new arrangement will not [meet fundamental standards](#) of refugee protection, including safeguards related to fairness, confidentiality, and access to appeal procedures. They warn that without such safeguards, the system could expose refugees to misuse of sensitive personal data and arbitrary decision-making. Malaysia currently hosts more than 200,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers, the majority from Myanmar, including large numbers of Rohingya. Many also come from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan. However, Malaysia has no formal refugee law and has not ratified key international refugee conventions, meaning asylum seekers remain without legal recognition under domestic law.

Photo by George Prentzas on Unsplash



The introduction of the new system follows years of intensified enforcement actions, including large-scale immigration raids and prolonged detention practices. Authorities [described 2025](#) as the “year of enforcement,” as authorities carried out widespread operations targeting undocumented migrants and expanded plans for further crackdowns. At the same time, concerns have been raised about detention conditions and limited access for international protection agencies. Thousands of migrants and asylum seekers remain in detention centers with no clear legal time limits, while UNHCR access has been restricted in recent years, limiting oversight of asylum claims. The government has also previously attempted similar registration schemes, which rights groups say failed to provide meaningful protection, as many individuals who registered were still detained or deported.

Human rights observers note that refugees and migrants in Malaysia remain highly vulnerable to exploitation, including extortion, unpaid labor, and abuse, due to their lack of legal status. Reports also suggest growing fear within refugee communities about registering under the new system, with some expressing doubts about its safety and legitimacy. [Core data privacy standards](#) require authorities to clearly explain how personal data is collected, used, and safeguarded, particularly when dealing with sensitive biometric information. Rights groups say transparency in this process is essential to prevent misuse and ensure accountability. Human Rights Watch has urged Malaysia to suspend the new registration system and instead develop a comprehensive legal framework for refugee protection in line with international standards. It has also called on other countries to expand resettlement opportunities for refugees currently in Malaysia. This highlights how a system meant to register refugees can also deepen their insecurity if protections are weak. Instead of offering safety, it risks increasing surveillance and fear for people who are already vulnerable. Without clear legal rights or strong privacy safeguards, refugees may end up feeling even less protected, not more, despite being officially recorded by the state.

## Human Rights Watch Warns of Shrinking Civic Space in DR Congo

Authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are facing growing criticism over an intensifying crackdown on journalists, activists, and opposition figures, as political tensions and armed conflict continue to deepen across the country. [Human Rights Watch](#) says restrictions on free expression and peaceful assembly have increased amid the ongoing conflict involving the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group in eastern Congo and debate surrounding possible constitutional changes that critics fear could allow President Félix Tshisekedi to remain in power beyond the constitutional limit. Rights groups and opposition members report that security forces have increasingly targeted critics, protesters, and independent voices through arrests, intimidation, and surveillance.



In March, police reportedly dispersed peaceful demonstrations in Kinshasa opposing proposed constitutional revisions using tear gas and force, [based on reports from local media](#) and opposition representatives present at the scene. Journalists critical of government policies have also reportedly gone into hiding after intelligence officials searched for them following public commentary on political developments and constitutional reform. The authorities have further intensified actions against individuals accused of links to the M23 armed group or affiliated opposition networks. In January, intelligence agents detained civil society activist Jordan Saidi Atibu and allegedly held him for weeks in harsh conditions without proper access to light or communication. In another case, journalist [Serge Sindani](#), director of Kis24.info, was arrested by intelligence officers and questioned over alleged connections to armed opposition groups before being held for several days without formal charges. Human Rights Watch also referenced cases it had [earlier recorded](#) involving enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions of opposition figures and activists allegedly held by the National Cyber Defense Council and other security bodies. Several opposition party members remain in detention over accusations tied to insulting state authorities or alleged collaboration with armed groups, while opposition offices have reportedly been vandalized by groups linked to ruling party supporters.

Civil society organizations and protest movements advocating for issues such as public security, electricity, and access to clean water have also faced arrests and prosecutions. Activists from the Lucha citizens' movement were detained after organizing peaceful demonstrations over insecurity and basic public services. Human rights organizations warn

that the current environment reflects an expanding pattern of repression against dissenting voices as political tensions rise. They argue that the targeting of journalists, activists, and opposition members undermines democratic participation and fundamental freedoms. [The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) and other regional human rights agreements protect freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, while prohibiting arbitrary detention. Rights groups say Congolese authorities should uphold these protections and ensure that critics and civil society actors can operate without fear of intimidation or arrest. The situation in Congo shows how growing political tensions and conflict are making public criticism increasingly risky. As journalists, activists, and opposition figures face arrests and intimidation, fear can begin to silence open debate and discourage people from speaking out on issues affecting their daily lives.

## Zambia's Suspension of RightsCon Raises Fears of Expanding Chinese Transnational Pressure

Authorities in Zambia are facing criticism after the abrupt postponement of [RightsCon](#), a major international conference focused on technology and human rights, following allegations of foreign pressure linked to the participation of Taiwanese civil society groups. Rights organizations say the decision reflects growing concerns over transnational repression and the expanding influence of authoritarian governments beyond their own borders. Organizers from [Access Now](#) said they believed outside interference played a role in the suspension of the event, which had been scheduled to take place in Lusaka and online with thousands of participants from around the world. In their [statement](#), organizers said Zambian officials had privately indicated that pressure from Chinese diplomats was connected to concerns over Taiwanese participation in the conference. The Zambian government later announced an indefinite postponement, arguing that additional review was needed to ensure discussions aligned with national priorities and public interest. Rights groups, however, say the explanation raises serious concerns about censorship, shrinking civic space, and political interference in global human rights discussions.

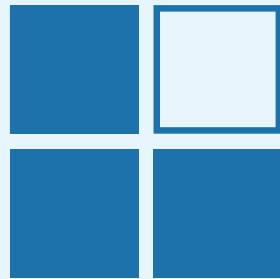
RightsCon, widely regarded as one of the leading international forums on digital rights and technology governance, was expected to host activists, researchers, policymakers, and civil society representatives from more than 150 countries. The event agenda included discussions on surveillance technologies, artificial intelligence, digital authoritarianism, and China's growing influence over global technology governance. Members of Taiwanese civil society, including representatives from [Amnesty International Taiwan](#), were also expected to participate alongside Uyghur, Tibetan, Hong Kong, and mainland Chinese activists. Human rights organizations argue that the postponement reflects a broader trend in which governments use political and economic leverage to restrict critical voices beyond their own borders. Amnesty International described the situation as part of a wider pattern of transnational repression, warning that pressure on host governments to silence certain groups threatens freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly internationally. Critics also note that the cancellation came despite months of coordination between organizers and Zambian authorities, causing significant disruption for civil society groups

and local businesses involved in the summit.

Observers say the controversy has intensified concerns over Zambia's democratic direction ahead of upcoming elections, particularly as authorities have introduced increasingly restrictive cyber and surveillance laws in recent years. [Rights advocates](#) warn that limiting independent forums for debate on technology and human rights risks weakening already fragile civic spaces at a time when authoritarian influence and digital repression are expanding globally. This incident reflects growing concerns over authoritarian influence reaching beyond national borders to restrict free expression and civil society spaces. The reported pressure surrounding RightsCon suggests how governments can use political and economic leverage to silence critical discussions, particularly on surveillance, censorship, and human rights. It also sends a wider message that even peaceful global forums are no longer free from intimidation or political interference.



*Photo by Robin Jonathan Deutsch on Unsplash*



# 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 the 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 a research paper by Muhammad Anwar, presented at the Toronto Democracy Forum 2025, examining how nonviolent civic resistance in Pakistan helps reclaim civic space and supports democratic renewal.

## Civil Courage in Pakistan: Nonviolent Resistance to Authoritarian and Religious Power by Muhammad Anwar

Against the backdrop of recurring military rule and rising religious extremism in Pakistan, civic freedoms and democratic participation have repeatedly come under pressure. In this paper, Muhammad Anwar, Chief Executive Officer of Freedom Gate Prosperity, explores how ordinary citizens including lawyers, students, women, artists, and grassroots activists have used nonviolent resistance to challenge authoritarianism and reclaim civic space.

The [paper](#) examines key dimensions of civil resistance in Pakistan and argues that authoritarianism and extremism thrive where fear remains unchallenged, while solidarity, cultural expression, and collective civic action create pathways toward democratic renewal. Offering practical insights for activists, policymakers, and scholars, the paper serves as a concise guide for those working to strengthen democratic values and social change.

To learn more about this paper, read our latest publication on the [website](#) by Muhammad Anwar, Chief Executive Officer of Freedom Gate Prosperity.

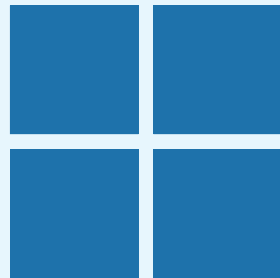
## Write-up by an International Human Rights Certificate Program Participant

This May, we are pleased to share the work of a graduate from the International Human Rights Certificate Program. This article highlights one of the most pressing human rights issues facing Afghanistan today and reflects the importance of protecting equal access to education for all.

## **From Classrooms to Silence: The Erasure of Girls' Education in Afghanistan by Aryan Adib**

Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, millions of Afghan girls have been denied access to secondary and higher education, reversing years of progress in girls' rights and educational access. The restrictions have not only limited opportunities for learning and employment but have also intensified poverty, gender inequality, and psychological distress among Afghan women and girls.

In this powerful article, Aryan Adib, a graduate of the International Human Rights Certificate Program, examines how the ban on girls' education violates international human rights obligations, undermines Afghanistan's future development, and contradicts the fundamental principles of Islam that encourage the pursuit of knowledge. To learn more about this issue in depth, read the latest publication on our [website](#).



# SECTION-4

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