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BUILDING A FREE WORLD



# UNCENSORED WATCH

*Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism*

Issue 18 | June 2026

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Authoritarianism*

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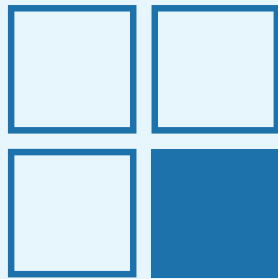
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# SECTION-1

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

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

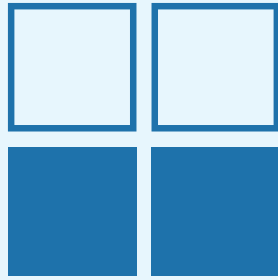
Dear Readers, welcome to the June edition of Uncensored Watch!

This June, we examine the suppression of peaceful dissent, shrinking space for free expression, and concerns over arbitrary detention from Afghanistan to the Philippines. We also explore challenges facing migrant workers, humanitarian personnel, women, and transgender communities, as well as ongoing efforts to seek accountability for past and present human rights abuses. Additionally, we feature an article by Rosita Sekandari on the plight of Afghan women workers under Taliban rule.

Join us as we explore the voices, challenges, and stories shaping human rights today.

Enjoy Reading!

The Uncensored Watch Team



# SECTION-2

Global Crisis in Focus

## Herat Protest Crackdown Raises Serious Human Rights Concerns

On June 9, 2026, Taliban security personnel in Herat reportedly responded violently to demonstrators, according to Human Rights Watch. Security forces allegedly assaulted protesters, opened fire in the direction of the crowd, caused multiple injuries, and arrested several individuals. The incident resulted in the death of an 11-year-old child. The demonstration was triggered by the recent detention of women accused of breaching the Taliban's strict clothing regulations. Reports indicated that at least 30 women had been taken into custody by June 7 for alleged violations of dress requirements. Residents of Herat stated that officials from the Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice had urged stricter compliance with clothing rules during Friday prayers on June 5, reflecting a broader enforcement campaign. Similar directives were reportedly communicated in Kabul.

According to [Fereshta Abbasi](#), Afghanistan researcher at Human Rights Watch, the Taliban have intensified efforts to suppress criticism and limit fundamental freedoms. She emphasized that Afghan citizens should be able to express their views and assemble peacefully without facing intimidation, violence, or detention. The protest took place in a mainly Hazara area of Herat. One participant explained that Taliban forces blocked surrounding roads before the gathering began, apparently to restrict attendance. She described the protest as peaceful at first, but said tensions escalated after security personnel started pushing and striking demonstrators. As more people joined, the forces allegedly began firing weapons. She witnessed several injuries, including a protester who was shot from behind.

[Eyewitnesses reported](#) that security personnel initially discharged weapons into the air but later directed gunfire toward the crowd. Some accounts stated that officers continued firing as people attempted to escape. Medical personnel in Herat reportedly treated several individuals for gunshot wounds, while the [UN stated that an 11-year-old boy](#) lost his life during the incident. Another witness, observing from her rooftop, recounted seeing panic spread through the area once shooting started. According to her account, Taliban members fired toward fleeing civilians and physically assaulted children in an effort to disperse them. She noted that many injured individuals avoided hospitals due to fears of arrest. She also described seeing the deceased 11-year-old child shortly after the shooting. The same witness stated that her father, who had attended the protest, was later arrested when security forces carried out searches of homes, checked mobile phones for protest footage, and detained both men and women.

Residents from neighborhoods where women had recently been arrested said public frustration over those detentions contributed to the demonstrations. Protesters reportedly chanted slogans demanding employment opportunities, education, and freedom. One woman explained that morality police had arrived in the area days earlier with large vehicles and detained numerous women, including elderly and pregnant women. She



*Photo by Nk Ni on Unsplash*

stated that although the women were wearing hijabs, authorities considered their style of dress unacceptable. The UN stated that those detained women were released on June 8. A spokesperson for the Herat police reportedly claimed that the demonstrations had disrupted public order.

International human rights standards, including the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), safeguard freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Restrictions on these rights are permitted only under limited circumstances and must be necessary, proportionate, and aimed at protecting legitimate public interests. International principles governing law enforcement further require that force be used only when unavoidable and that lethal force be employed solely to protect life. Afghanistan is also bound by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which requires authorities to eliminate discriminatory practices against women. Human Rights Watch argues that enforcing restrictive dress regulations and detaining women over clothing choices violate key protections related to equality, dignity, and freedom of movement.

[According to Human Rights Watch](#), the events in Herat are part of a broader pattern of policies that have restricted the rights and freedoms of women and girls since 2021. Human Rights Watch called for the release of those detained, accountability for the violence in Herat, and greater protection of fundamental freedoms. Fereshta Abbasi stated that attempts to curb dissent are likely to intensify scrutiny of the authorities' human rights practices rather than silence criticism. This incident reflects a deeper pattern where public frustration over restrictions, especially on women, turns into protest, and protest is then met with force. The response reported in Herat, including injuries, arrests, and the death of a child, points to serious concerns about proportionality and the protection of civilians. It also shows how quickly everyday grievances can escalate when channels for peaceful expression are limited, leaving both accountability and basic freedoms in question.

## Concerns Over Treatment of Detained Uzbek Human Rights Activist

Uzbek authorities are being urged to release a detained human rights defender and examine claims of abuse linked to his arrest, [according to Human Rights Watch](#). The case involves activist Javokhir Muminov, who reportedly told his lawyer that he was beaten and suffocated by police following his detention on June 10, 2026. Human Rights Watch described the case as concerning, noting that both Muminov and his legal representative have raised allegations of mistreatment. The organization stressed that these claims require immediate and thorough investigation in line with Uzbekistan's obligations under international human rights law. Muminov, aged 34, is associated with the Ezgulik Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and has actively reported alleged corruption and rights violations through his Telegram channel, particularly in the Kashkadarya region. He has also supported local farmers in rights-related disputes.

[The current situation is linked to earlier tensions](#) involving his efforts to assist a local

resident, Diura Akbarov, in a dispute with enforcement officials. Akbarov had previously suffered serious injuries during a confrontation with bailiffs, which later led to legal proceedings against a lower-ranking official. On June 5, police in Karshi arrested Muminov along with Akbarov and Akbarov's wife, accusing them of attempting large-scale extortion. The complaint originated from two bailiffs who alleged the group tried to obtain 220 million Uzbek soum, although part of the money had reportedly been transferred earlier to cover medical costs related to Akbarov's injuries. Following earlier violence in 2025, Akbarov had filed a complaint against the officials involved. While one junior officer was eventually convicted and given a restricted freedom sentence in 2026, questions remain about accountability for higher-level involvement.

Human Rights Watch said any proper review of the case should also consider whether retaliation may have influenced the extortion allegations. The organization further argued that holding the three individuals in custody during investigation is disproportionate and inconsistent with international standards, especially given the non-violent nature of the accusations and lack of clear charges. The case has also raised broader concerns about due process violations. Lawyers attempting to meet Muminov reported obstruction at the detention facility, including a confrontation with officers that led to physical injury and prevented access to their client. During a later meeting, Muminov allegedly told his legal representative that he had been beaten and suffocated in an effort to force a confession. A formal complaint regarding these claims was subsequently submitted to the local prosecutor's office, though there is no indication of a full investigation or medical examination being carried out.

Human Rights Watch called on international partners to press Uzbek authorities to release Muminov and ensure protection for detained activists. It also urged accountability for any abuse and safeguards for his safety if detention continues. Senior adviser Mihra Rittmann said authorities should stop retaliatory actions and let Muminov continue his human rights work without fear. The group further emphasized that [any other activists](#) facing similar circumstances should not be subjected to arbitrary detention and should be protected under international law. This case points to growing concerns about how a human rights activist is being treated in custody, especially allegations of violence, pressure, and limited access to legal support. It also raises questions about whether his arrest is linked to his rights work, which would be deeply troubling. Overall, it reflects risks around fair treatment, protection from abuse, and the space available for people to speak out without fear.



*Photo by Matthew Ansley on Unsplash*

## Kyrgyzstan's Proposed Anti-Trans Law Under Human Rights Scrutiny

A draft law under consideration in Kyrgyzstan's parliament has raised serious concerns among rights advocates, who warn it would severely restrict the rights of transgender and gender-diverse people. The proposal would block legal gender recognition, prohibit gender-affirming healthcare, and limit access to information on gender identity and transition-related issues for minors, [according to Human Rights Watch](#). The bill passed its first reading on June 4, 2026, and still requires approval in two further parliamentary readings as well as presidential endorsement. Observers caution that lawmakers may attempt to accelerate the process before the current session ends on June 30, reducing the opportunity for public debate and scrutiny. Human Rights Watch researcher Synat Sultanalieva said the proposal is based on harmful misconceptions and would have immediate negative consequences, including exclusion, discrimination, and heightened vulnerability to violence. She urged lawmakers to reject it entirely.

If adopted, the legislation would remove the remaining legal pathway for gender recognition in the country and introduce a full ban on gender-affirming medical care, except in narrowly defined cases described as “congenital anomalies,” which critics interpret as referring to non-consensual procedures on intersex children. It would also require children to be raised strictly in line with their assigned sex at birth and prohibit any efforts perceived as influencing a child’s gender identity. This would effectively block access to supportive services, counselling, and educational materials related to gender diversity. Kyrgyzstan had previously allowed administrative recognition of affirmed gender, though this was linked to a medical diagnosis of “transsexualism” until [August 2020](#), when the procedure was removed from civil registration rules. Since then, individuals seeking document changes have relied on court procedures. In 2024, access to gender-affirming healthcare was restricted to people aged 25 and older. The new bill would end remaining options entirely. Kyrgyzstan had [permitted](#) administrative recognition of gender identity before these restrictions were introduced.

Human Rights Watch said that requiring transgender people to use identity documents that do not match their gender can increase discrimination and expose them to harassment, violence, and exploitation. The UN expert on sexual orientation and gender identity has also [linked](#) the lack of legal gender recognition to higher risks of abuse, arbitrary detention, and psychological and physical harm. The proposed restrictions affecting children conflict with obligations under the Kyrgyz Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The requirement to prioritise the child’s best interests cannot be reconciled with blanket bans on healthcare, information, or psychological support. The law could also criminalise counselling, sexuality education, and access to basic information for transgender youth. International legal standards, including the ICCPR, are also engaged. The proposed ban on legal gender recognition undermines rights to privacy and legal



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recognition. The UN Human Rights Committee has repeatedly recommended that states introduce accessible self-identification-based procedures and remove excessive barriers.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has previously raised concerns with Kyrgyzstan on this issue. The ban on gender-affirming healthcare also conflicts with the right to the highest attainable standard of health under the ICESCR. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has criticised discriminatory barriers to such care in Kyrgyzstan and called for their removal. In international dialogue in [February 2025](#), Kyrgyzstan stated that transgender rights, including access to healthcare, are protected in the country. However, in May 2026, UN experts warned that the draft legislation is inconsistent with international human rights obligations. Human Rights Watch urged Kyrgyzstan's international partners, particularly the European Union, to raise these concerns in diplomatic engagement, noting that respect for human rights is central to the country's international commitments. Sultanalieva concluded that Kyrgyzstan should demonstrate its commitment to rights protection by rejecting the bill and engaging directly with affected communities rather than adopting measures that risk harm and exclusion.

Beyond its legal implications, the proposed bill could have a profound impact on the daily lives of transgender people in Kyrgyzstan. Restricting access to recognition, healthcare, and information may increase feelings of exclusion and vulnerability, particularly among young people seeking support and understanding. The debate surrounding the legislation highlights broader concerns about dignity, equality, and whether all members of society can live safely and authentically without fear of discrimination.

## **Migrant Workers Face Increased Repression Amid Gulf Conflict**

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International say GCC states have tightened limits on speech, association, and peaceful protest during the regional conflict and economic strain. They argue this has further restricted migrant workers' ability to report abuse and poor working conditions in an already highly controlled environment. [According to Human Rights Watch](#), the conflict has intensified monitoring of migrant workers' communications, creating fear around discussing workplace concerns, whether privately or online. In March 2026, researchers interviewed 38 migrant workers from India, Nepal, and Bangladesh living across Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Many expressed anxiety about speaking to journalists or rights groups, even anonymously.

Additional interviews conducted by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in April with workers and community representatives from several Gulf countries revealed similar concerns. Participants described growing fears of surveillance, arrest, and repercussions linked to online activity or public discussion of the conflict. [Amnesty International reported in May](#) that over 1,000 individuals across GCC countries were allegedly detained for sharing or expressing views related to the regional conflict. Authorities, along with employers and



diplomatic missions, have repeatedly cautioned against posting such content online, which has contributed to widespread self-censorship. In Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE, workers and community representatives also described authorities carrying out random checks of mobile phones. Some said people were fined or jailed after officers found images or videos linked to attacks, while others reported being instructed by employers to delete content and avoid social media activity.

The atmosphere has also made it increasingly difficult for journalists and rights organizations to gather information. Several workers reportedly declined interviews despite facing labor-related problems, citing concerns about surveillance and possible retaliation. While Gulf governments have justified restrictions as necessary to maintain security and combat misinformation, international human rights standards require any limitations on expression to be lawful, necessary, and proportionate. The Human Rights Committee's [General Comment No. 34](#) states that limits on sharing information must not endanger the essence of the right itself and should only be used in rare and exceptional cases. Some workers and activists believe the increased scrutiny is partly intended to protect the international image of Gulf states. Interviewees suggested authorities are seeking to project stability and avoid perceptions that could affect investment, markets, or economic confidence.

The situation is compounded by long-standing barriers to collective labor organizing. Across much of the region, trade unions are either prohibited, inaccessible to migrant workers, or subject to severe restrictions. Without effective channels to raise grievances, workers who attempt collective action may face retaliation, detention, deportation, or other penalties.

Concerns have also emerged beyond the Gulf. In January 2026, Saudi Arabia moved to end an [article 26 complaint](#) filed by African trade union groups at the International Labour Organization. Critics said authorities avoided addressing the substance of the case, instead exposing a trade union leader and rejecting anonymous testimony meant to protect workers. With formal unions largely absent or restricted, informal migrant networks and diaspora groups have stepped in to share information and provide support, though their capacity remains limited.

A labour organiser in Bahrain also said restrictions on public gatherings have disrupted efforts to deliver food and assistance to migrant workers facing unpaid leave or wage cuts. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International urged Gulf states to protect public safety without unduly restricting freedoms and to ensure migrant workers can report abuses, organize, and access social protections without fear of retaliation. Addressing these concerns requires easing restrictions on speech and ensuring migrant workers can safely report abuse without fear of arrest or retaliation. Governments should strengthen independent complaint mechanisms, protect digital privacy, and allow workers to organise or seek help through trusted channels. Reducing surveillance and improving labour protections would help restore trust and reduce the climate of fear affecting workers.

## Yemen: Huthi Detentions of Aid Workers Raise Human Rights Concerns

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies urged the Huthi authorities in Yemen to release detained UN and humanitarian personnel, warning that their continued detention has disrupted aid efforts for vulnerable communities. As of February 2026, 73 UN employees and numerous other aid workers reportedly remained in custody. The detentions began with raids launched in May 2024, during which Huthi authorities [reportedly took 13 UN staff members into custody](#) without legal justification and at least 50 employees of local and international civil society organizations. Although a few detainees have since been released, many remain held without freedom.

Fears over the welfare of those in custody grew after a World Food Programme staff member died while detained in February 2025. Rights organizations pointed to the authorities' history of [abuse and mistreatment of detainees](#) and warned that other detainees could face similar risks. Reports indicate that many were detained without legal documentation, with some allegedly held incommunicado for prolonged periods. Concerns have also been raised about inadequate medical care, particularly for individuals with pre-existing health conditions. Information from sources familiar with the cases suggests that access to legal counsel has been severely restricted. Although several UN employees were referred to a specialized court in late 2025, lawyers reportedly remained unable to consult with them.

In January 2026, Human Rights Watch stated that these detentions had further worsened [Yemen's already severe humanitarian emergency](#) . Meanwhile, international agencies warned that worsening food shortages could leave some communities in Huthi-controlled areas facing catastrophic levels of hunger.

The organizations also pointed to a media campaign by Huthi authorities accusing aid agencies and humanitarian personnel of acting against national interests or engaging in espionage. Amnesty International noted that similar allegations have frequently been used to target critics, political opponents, and peaceful activists. Families of detainees have reported that relatives were denied legal assistance and pressured into recording video confessions. Huthi authorities have previously [released footage of detainees](#) admitting to espionage-related offenses, while rights groups and UN experts have repeatedly documented the use of coercive methods to obtain statements and confessions. Humanitarian and human rights organizations continue to play a vital role in responding to Yemen's crisis despite major reductions in international funding. Aid workers remain responsible for delivering food, medical support, and protection services to vulnerable communities, including in areas controlled by the Huthis.

The groups noted that humanitarian personnel have been targeted previously. Several UN staff members detained in earlier years remain held without communication with their families or lawyers. They also referenced the death in custody of a senior staff member from Save the Children who had been arrested in 2023 and held incommunicado. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies urged governments with influence over the Huthis, as well as UN leadership, to intensify efforts to secure the release of detained aid workers. They called for an end to reprisals against humanitarian personnel and for guarantees that relief operations can function safely and without obstruction across Yemen. The continued detention of aid workers affects more than those behind bars, it can weaken the humanitarian response for millions of Yemenis who depend on assistance for survival. Ensuring the safety and release of humanitarian personnel is essential to protecting both human rights and access to lifesaving aid.



Photo by Khalil Radi on Unsplash

## Detention of Mosque Leader Raises Questions Over Free Expression Rights



Photo by Yuval Zukerman on Unsplash

A federal judge has ordered the release of [Salah Sarsour](#), president of Wisconsin's largest mosque, concluding that he had presented a significant argument that his detention may have been linked to his public support for Palestinian rights. Sarsour, a Palestinian-born lawful permanent resident, had been held by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) since March 30. While US authorities argued that he posed a foreign policy concern, his legal team maintained that the detention was retaliation for his political views. In the ruling, Judge James Patrick Hanlon stated that government lawyers had failed to provide sufficient evidence to counter allegations that Sarsour was being punished for protected speech. The judge also questioned why authorities had suddenly identified him as a threat after more than 30 years of lawful residence in the United States. He ordered Sarsour's release from detention while immigration proceedings continue.

Following the decision, Sarsour returned to his home in Milwaukee. In a statement, he expressed relief at reuniting with his family after nearly three months in custody and said the experience reinforced the importance of defending the right to speak on behalf of marginalized communities. His lawyers argued that he should never have been detained and described the ruling as an important affirmation of free speech protections. They also warned that actions taken against Sarsour raised broader concerns about the protection of constitutional rights. [The Department of Homeland Security](#) rejected claims that the detention was discriminatory, describing Sarsour as a security concern based on past convictions by an Israeli military court. Those convictions, dating back to 1989 and 1995, involved allegations related to attacks on Israeli forces and possession of weapons. Sarsour has denied the accusations.

Health concerns also featured prominently in the case. According to his attorneys, Sarsour, who has Type 2 diabetes, [lost more than 30 pounds](#) during detention and received inadequate monitoring of his condition. They argued that this placed him at serious risk of complications. Concerns about detainee healthcare gained further attention following reports documenting allegations of [negligence in medical treatment](#) in immigration detention facilities across the United States. Judge Hanlon noted that US authorities had been aware of the Israeli court convictions for decades and had previously reviewed them during multiple assessments of Sarsour's immigration status. The court also highlighted his strong family and community ties, including his wife, children, and grandchildren, all of whom are US citizens. Family members welcomed the ruling, describing his detention as deeply distressing and expressing relief that he had been allowed to return home while his case proceeds. The case raises concerns that immigration powers may be used in ways that discourage advocacy on sensitive political issues. It also highlights the need to protect free speech and ensure that lawful residents are not penalized for peacefully expressing their views.

## Calls for Safeguarding Peaceful Protest Rights Amid Mexico's Disappearance Crisis

Amnesty International has called on federal and Mexico City authorities to fully safeguard the rights of families of disappeared persons and search collectives to demonstrate peacefully, following incidents that occurred during a protest held around the opening of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The organization stressed that authorities must enable and protect peaceful assemblies rather than hinder them. It emphasized that responses to demonstrations should focus on dialogue, protecting participants, and preventing intimidation, repression, or unnecessary use of force. According to Amnesty International Mexico Executive Director Edith Olivares Ferreto, the state has a responsibility to ensure that people can exercise their right to peaceful protest safely and without interference.

[Amnesty International](#) highlighted the important role families of disappeared persons have played in exposing Mexico's disappearance crisis and advancing efforts to secure truth, justice, identification, and accountability. It noted that their activities constitute legitimate human rights advocacy and should receive recognition and protection from public authorities. The organization also stated that, despite national and international attention surrounding major events such as the World Cup, authorities must ensure that the demands of affected families can be expressed freely. It warned against actions that could obstruct their participation, stigmatize their efforts, criminalize their activism, or place them at greater risk. Amnesty International further noted that many families continue searching for loved ones because state institutions have not fully delivered truth and justice. It argued that these demands should not be viewed as a threat to public order and that protecting the right to protest is a legal obligation rather than a discretionary measure.

The organization called for any allegations of misconduct during the mobilization to be independently investigated. It also urged authorities to guarantee the safety of participating families and collectives and to ensure that future demonstrations take place in an environment that respects human rights, dialogue, and peaceful civic participation. Behind these demonstrations are families who have spent years searching for missing loved ones, often carrying the emotional burden of uncertainty and loss. Their calls for truth and justice reflect a deeply personal struggle that remains unresolved. Protecting their right to protest peacefully allows their voices to be heard and acknowledges the human impact of the disappearance crisis. Greater engagement, transparency, and accountability from authorities could help rebuild trust and bring families closer to the answers they have long sought.



*Photo by Charles Versaggi on Unsplash*

## Florida Immigration Center Faces Allegations of Coercion and Rights Abuses

Allegations of mistreatment have emerged from detainees held at Florida's controversial ["Alligator Alcatraz" immigration facility](#), who claim authorities withheld food and drinking water after they refused to sign English-language documents they could not understand. In a recorded phone call shared with an immigrant advocacy organization, several detainees alleged that officials pressured them to sign paperwork by restricting access to basic necessities. They also complained that water supplied over recent days was contaminated, foul-smelling, and reportedly contained mosquito larvae. According to the detainees, those who declined to sign the documents faced punitive measures, including delays in receiving medication and the suspension of water supplies. Some said individuals with medical conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure were particularly affected. Witnesses described growing frustration inside the facility, with detainees reportedly demanding access to clean water after repeated complaints about its quality.

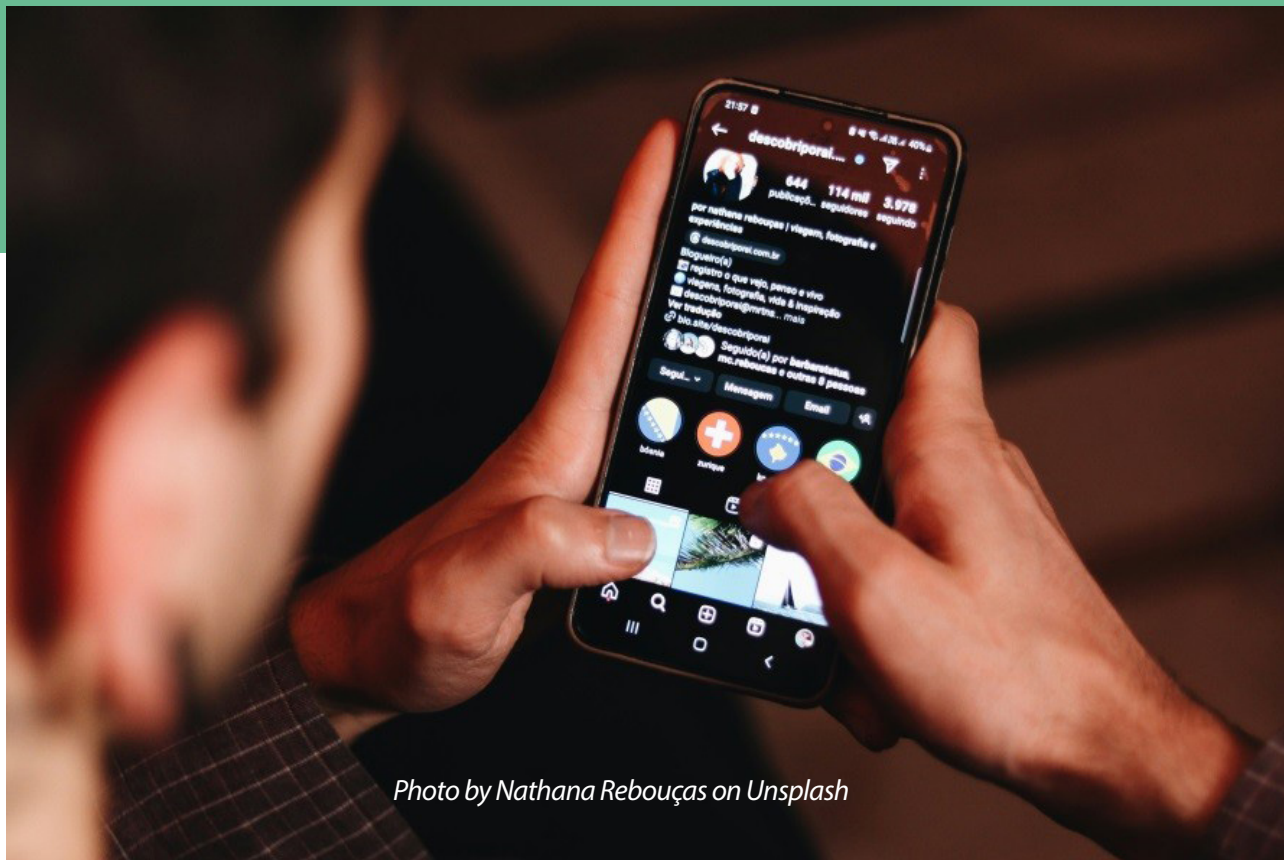
The facility, operated by Florida authorities on behalf of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), has been the subject of mounting criticism. Although reports earlier this year suggested the center could move toward a [planned shutdown](#), it remains operational and continues to face allegations concerning detainee welfare. Since opening, the remote detention site has drawn scrutiny over claims of [severe mistreatment](#) and other alleged rights violations. Advocacy groups have cited concerns including restricted access to legal counsel, sudden transfers between detention centers, and pressure on detainees to accept deportation without adequate legal advice. Representatives from the Workers Circle, which has been assisting detainees and their families, said the latest complaints indicate increasing pressure on migrants to sign documents without understanding their contents. The organization argued that denying food, water, or other necessities to secure compliance would constitute a serious violation of fundamental rights.

[Florida officials](#) have previously rejected allegations of abuse. In response to earlier complaints regarding medical care, state authorities stated that healthcare services, including pharmacy access, are available around the clock and maintained that detainees are not being mistreated. If these allegations are accurate, they point to a deeply troubling situation in which vulnerable detainees may be pressured into making important decisions without fully understanding their consequences. Ensuring access to food, water, medical care, and information in a language people can understand is essential to protecting human dignity and due process.

*Photo by Eklavya kumar on Unsplash*



# New Philippine Bill Could Expand Government Control Over Online Speech



*Photo by Nathana Rebouças on Unsplash*

Human Rights Watch has urged Philippine lawmakers to reconsider a [proposed law](#) aimed at combating online disinformation, warning that its broad language could be misused to restrict legitimate expression. The Digital Media Anti-False Information Act, which advanced through a second reading in the House of Representatives in May 2026, would criminalize the creation, distribution, funding, or support of information deemed false. The measure would penalize individuals who knowingly spread inaccurate information, or do so with disregard for its accuracy, where authorities believe it could cause public harm or threaten national security. Human Rights Watch warned that such provisions could be interpreted expansively and potentially used against criticism of government policies and actions.

The bill also targets information allegedly shared in coordination with foreign governments or entities. Rights advocates cautioned that this provision could affect individuals or organizations involved in legitimate international engagement or information-sharing activities. If enacted, the legislation would introduce severe penalties, including lengthy prison terms and substantial financial fines. [Human Rights Watch](#) argued that these sanctions could discourage public debate and create a chilling effect on free expression. The proposal would further expand the authority of the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), granting it significant oversight powers over digital

platforms. Large online services could be required to cooperate with content moderation and removal requests, while also providing access to platform data for regulatory reviews. Critics contend that the bill lacks sufficient safeguards against potential government overreach and inadequate protection of users' personal information.

Supporters of the legislation maintain that it is intended to address coordinated disinformation campaigns and online manipulation that may undermine democratic processes and elections. However, Human Rights Watch argued that existing provisions are too vague and insufficiently defined to meet international human rights standards. The organization pointed to international protections for freedom of expression under the ICCPR, noting that restrictions should be lawful, clearly defined, necessary, and proportionate. The [UN special rapporteur mentioned](#) when governing digital content, governments should avoid excessive penalties, including imprisonment, because of their potential impact on free expression. Human Rights Watch concluded that the bill, in its current form, risks expanding state control over online speech and could discourage criticism of public institutions and officials. The organization urged lawmakers to pursue narrower and more rights-respecting approaches to addressing disinformation. A law intended to combat disinformation should not come at the cost of silencing legitimate debate and criticism. Protecting the public from false information is important, but safeguards are equally necessary to ensure that freedom of expression and independent journalism are not undermined.

## China: Concerns Persist Over Lack of Accountability for Tiananmen Crackdown

[Human Rights Watch](#) has accused the Chinese government of further suppressing public discussion of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown while expanding mechanisms of social control across the country. The events stemmed from peaceful demonstrations that emerged in Beijing and other cities during the spring of 1989, when students, workers, and citizens called for greater political openness, democratic reforms, and action against corruption. On June 3 and 4, military forces moved into Beijing and used lethal force against demonstrators and civilians. Decades later, authorities have neither disclosed the full facts surrounding the killings nor provided justice, compensation, or accountability for victims and their families. Public remembrance of the events remains prohibited on mainland China.

Human Rights Watch researcher Yalkun Uluyol said that continued efforts to erase the history of Tiananmen undermine respect for fundamental rights and accountability. The organization called on authorities to end censorship, permit commemorative activities, compensate affected families, and release individuals imprisoned for seeking truth

and justice. In late December 2025, Beijing authorities reportedly disrupted a New Year gathering organized by the Tiananmen Mothers, marking the first time such an event had been blocked since the group began holding annual meetings in 2009. The advocacy group criticized the authorities in a statement, saying that instead of addressing past injustices, officials had interfered with citizens' legitimate social activities. On May 27, 2026, the Tiananmen Mothers issued another [statement](#), endorsed by 107 members, urging the



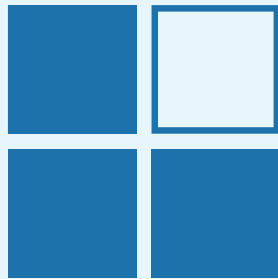
government to resolve the lingering injustices connected to the 1989 crackdown through lawful and peaceful means and to restore dignity to families who lost relatives.

A notable development occurred in November 2025 when previously unseen footage from the secret military proceedings against General Xu Qinxian surfaced publicly. The recordings showed Xu expressing reservations about the use of military force against protesters and indicating that he preferred a political resolution. He was later imprisoned and died in 2021. Authorities on the mainland continue to tightly censor references to Tiananmen, including the iconic image of a lone man standing before military tanks. Media reports have suggested that even seemingly unrelated images can be [flagged](#) by censorship systems if interpreted as symbolic references to the crackdown. In Hong Kong, annual June 4 commemorations once attracted large crowds. However, authorities halted the traditional vigil during the pandemic and subsequently closed the organizing group and its museum. Since 2022, alternative government-sponsored events have occupied the site traditionally used for remembrance activities.

On May 19, a Hong Kong court heard final submissions in the national security case against the former Hong Kong Alliance and two of its leaders, Lee Cheuk-yan and Chow Hang-tung. Prosecutors accuse them of inciting subversion under national security legislation, and a verdict is expected in July. Despite increasing restrictions, some residents have continued efforts to mark the anniversary. During the 2025 commemoration period, [police held](#)

[several individuals for investigation](#) briefly and arrested others under public order-related suspicions. Members of a former pro-democracy political group were also prevented from reaching Victoria Park. Observers note that restrictions on discussion of Tiananmen in Hong Kong increasingly resemble those long enforced in mainland China. Reports have described incidents in which individuals perceived as referencing the 1989 events faced intimidation and exposure of personal information.

Overseas Chinese communities have continued to mark the anniversary through public events, exhibitions, discussions, and publications, with commemorations planned in more than 30 cities across seven countries in 2026. Following the 1989 crackdown, thousands of people were arrested across China, and authorities have never fully accounted for those killed, injured, or imprisoned. The Tiananmen Mothers have documented at least 202 deaths linked to the suppression. Human Rights Watch argued that the continued lack of accountability has reinforced broader rights concerns over time and urged authorities to acknowledge the events, provide redress to affected families, allow an independent investigation, protect fundamental freedoms, facilitate the return of exiled individuals, and examine responsibility for the use of deadly force. The organization also urged foreign governments to renew efforts to seek accountability for past abuses. Uluoyol noted that, despite years of censorship and pressure, people in China, Hong Kong, and the global diaspora continue to preserve the memory of Tiananmen and advocate for justice. For many families who lost loved ones, the absence of truth and accountability means the trauma of 1989 remains unresolved. Efforts to suppress remembrance risk deepening those wounds, while open acknowledgment and justice would be important steps toward healing and reconciliation.



# SECTION-3

Multimedia Update: Voices Against  
Authoritarianism

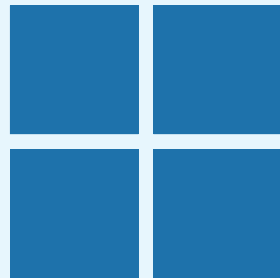
## **Write-up by an International Human Rights Certificate Program Participant**

This June, we are pleased to share the work of a graduate from the International Human Rights Certificate Program. This article examines the profound impact of the Taliban's employment restrictions on Afghan women since their return to power in 2021 and highlights the importance of protecting women's rights to work, equality, and participation in public life.

## **The Plight of Afghan Women Employees Under the Taliban's Rule Since 2021 by Rosita Sekandari**

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghan women have faced increasing restrictions on their participation in public life, including severe limitations on employment across humanitarian organizations, international agencies, and parts of the public sector. These measures have not only deprived women of livelihoods and economic independence but have also undermined humanitarian operations, deepened gender inequality, and restricted women's ability to contribute to Afghan society.

In this insightful article, Rosita Sekandari, a graduate of the International Human Rights Certificate Program, examines the development and enforcement of the Taliban's employment restrictions, the ideological and social factors underpinning these policies, and their far-reaching human rights and socioeconomic consequences. The article explores how these restrictions violate internationally recognized rights to work, equality, and non-discrimination while assessing their implications for Afghanistan's future development. To learn more about this issue in depth, read the latest publication on our [website](#).



# SECTION-4

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