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UNCENSORED WATCH

Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism

Issue 22 | October 2026

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Defending Freedom, Challenging Extremism and Authoritarianism

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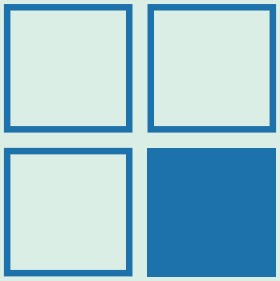
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SECTION–1

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

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

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

This month, we examine human rights developments across different regions, including the death sentences facing individuals in Iran and Saudi Arabia, the crackdown on LGBTQ+ communities in Senegal, and restrictions on women's access to education and professional opportunities in Syria. We also look at the prosecution of humanitarian workers in Yemen, police violence against demonstrators in India, and growing concerns over freedom of expression, the use of capital punishment, and the protection of fundamental rights in the United States and beyond.

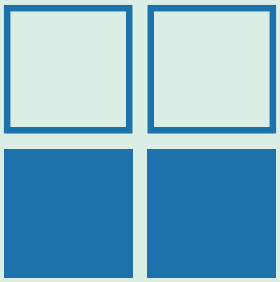
Additionally, we feature an IHRC graduate's contribution on the oppression of Indigenous Lumad communities in the Philippines, alongside two infographics on the Balochistan Liberation Army and restrictions on civil liberties in Vietnam.

We also share updates on the successful completion of the International Advocacy Seminar 2026 and the upcoming 8th Edition of the International Human Rights Certificate for Young Leaders.

Take a closer look at the people, stories, and struggles behind today's human rights concerns.

Enjoy Reading!

The Uncensored Watch Team



SECTION–2

Global Crisis in Focus

Iranian Authorities Sentence Young Woman to Death Over Social Media Remarks

Human rights organisations have condemned the death sentence handed to 23-year-old Iranian student Najmeh Amini for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad in a social media post, warning that the authorities are increasingly using capital punishment to silence dissent. Amini, an accounting student, is currently detained at Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad. She has received a death sentence in one case and a prison term of 12 years, six months and one day in another. The latter sentence relates to charges of acting against national security and spreading propaganda against the Iranian government.

According to a source close to her family who spoke to the US-based Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI), Amini was charged with sab ol-nabi, meaning insulting the Prophet. She was reportedly identified through online surveillance conducted by Iran's Cyber Police. Authorities have not publicly revealed the content of the post. Amini was arrested during the nationwide protests in January, which were met with a violent government crackdown. Thousands of people were reportedly killed, while more than 50,000 were detained, according to HRAI's news agency, Hrana. In an audio message released last month and attributed to Amini, she appealed to the United Nations, legal professionals and human rights organisations to intervene and examine her case. She urged the international community to speak out on her behalf, describing herself as an innocent young woman with dreams and a family anxiously waiting for her return.

Human rights organisations say the case reflects a wider pattern of using executions to intimidate the population and discourage criticism of the authorities. Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) reports that more than 600 people have been executed in Iran so far this year. Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, the organisation's director, warned that executing someone over a social media post could further normalise capital punishment for peaceful expression. He also said that the Iranian government was testing how much tolerance the international community would show towards its use of the death penalty, adding that a weak response could encourage similar cases. Under Article 262 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code, insulting the Prophet Muhammad or revered Shia religious figures can carry the death penalty. Article 263, however, provides certain exceptions where the remarks were made unintentionally or under the influence of alcohol, although other punishments may still apply.

Iranian newspaper Khorasan, which confirmed the court proceedings, reported that Amini told judges she had made the remarks while experiencing hallucinations after consuming psychedelic mushrooms with friends. Her defence described the incident as an

unintended verbal mistake. The judge reportedly dismissed this explanation, questioning why she had not insulted other people or political opponents if she had genuinely been experiencing hallucinations. Her death sentence is not yet final and can still be challenged before Iran's Supreme Court. The case comes amid broader efforts by Iranian lawmakers to criminalise communication with foreign media, including social media content considered to be funded by overseas sources. The growing climate of surveillance has also raised concerns among young Iranians. A 24-year-old protest participant, identified by the pseudonym Elnaz, said she had been arrested over social media activity despite keeping her account private. She described living with constant fear of being monitored and said that the threat of arrest and violence had made online expression increasingly difficult.

Although executions in Iran have risen sharply in recent years, reaching their highest level in three decades, death sentences for blasphemy remain uncommon. The last documented executions for such offences took place on 8 May 2023, when Yousef Mehrad and Sadrollah Fazeli-Zare were executed over blasphemy-related convictions linked to their online activities. The case of Najmeh Amini is a disturbing reminder of how dangerous it has become for people in Iran to express themselves freely, even on social media. A young woman with her own hopes and future now faces the possibility of execution over words she allegedly posted online. No one should lose their life for expressing themselves. The case raises serious questions about freedom of expression, the use of the death penalty and the growing fear among ordinary people in Iran. The international community must not remain silent and should urge Iranian authorities to overturn her sentence.



Photo by Mason C on Unsplash

Hundreds Arrested as LGBTQ+ People Face Crackdown in Senegal



Photo by Tong Su on Unsplash

More than 320 people have been detained in Senegal since February amid an intensifying campaign against LGBTQ+ individuals, according to figures from the HIV Justice Network cited by Human Rights Watch (HRW). At least 84 detainees have also faced accusations of deliberately transmitting HIV, reportedly based solely on their HIV status. The crackdown has raised concerns over mass arrests, compulsory HIV testing and restricted access to legal defence. The situation has worsened following a series of legal amendments adopted by Senegal›s parliament on 11 March. The revised penal code increased the maximum prison sentence for consensual same-sex relations to 10 years and introduced penalties of up to seven years› imprisonment for advocating for homosexuality or providing financial and other assistance to LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations.

Larissa Kojoué, an LGBTQ+ rights researcher at HRW, said the measures were forcing people to abandon ordinary activities and avoid public spaces out of fear of detention and discrimination. Although same-sex relations have been criminalised in Senegal since 1965, political opposition to LGBTQ+ rights has intensified, with President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and former Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko both pledging tougher restrictions during the 2024 election campaign. Police have reportedly relied on confiscated mobile phones,

allegations from third parties and searches of private properties to identify and arrest suspected individuals. HRW also found that the legal changes have made lawyers reluctant to defend those accused, while healthcare workers warn that fear of prosecution is driving people away from HIV testing and treatment. Sylvie Beaumont of the HIV Justice Network raised concerns about reports of declining attendance at HIV clinics. She also challenged the basis of several HIV-related accusations, noting that some detainees reportedly learned of their HIV status only after arrest, while others were detained despite using protection or receiving treatment that prevents sexual transmission.

The report further documented cases in which confidential investigation details, including individuals› HIV status, were disclosed to the media. Such exposure has increased the risk of family rejection, public humiliation, threats and physical violence. Many LGBTQ+ people have responded by concealing their identities, limiting their movements or leaving the country. Those interviewed by HRW also described heightened anxiety and psychological distress. HRW warned that the campaign undermines fundamental protections, including privacy, equality and the right to a fair trial. Senegal›s actions also reflect a wider regional shift towards harsher restrictions on LGBTQ+ communities. Niger criminalised same-sex relations in February, following similar measures in Mali and Burkina Faso. Ghana has advanced legislation targeting LGBTQ+ activities, while Uganda›s 2023 law introduced the death penalty for certain same-sex acts.

Senegal's crackdown on LGBTQ+ people goes beyond arrests and prison sentences; it is creating an atmosphere of fear that affects people›s everyday lives, access to healthcare and ability to seek legal protection. The growing risk of exposure and discrimination is also pushing people into hiding and discouraging them from accessing essential HIV services. What makes the situation particularly concerning is that efforts to enforce these laws may also undermine public health and place already vulnerable individuals at greater risk. No one should have to choose between their personal safety and access to basic healthcare or justice.

Saudi Man Faces Execution Over Protests He Attended as a Teenager



Photo by Abdulrhman Alkhnaifer on Unsplash

A Saudi man is at risk of execution over activities he took part in as a teenager, including attending demonstrations and funerals, according to human rights organisations. The case has renewed concerns over Saudi Arabia›s use of capital punishment against individuals accused of non-violent offences committed before adulthood. Youssef al-Manasif was detained in 2017 when he was accused of participating in protests organised by members of the Shia religious minority and attending funerals that authorities considered political demonstrations. He was subsequently sentenced to death by the Specialised Criminal Court, a tribunal originally established to handle terrorism-related cases.

According to Reprieve, Manasif was subjected to torture and pressured into signing a confession he did not make. The organisation also reported that he did not meet his state-appointed lawyer until 2022, five years after his arrest. His death sentence has reportedly since received approval from Saudi Arabia›s Supreme Court, leaving him with few remaining opportunities to challenge the ruling. Duaa Dhainy, a consultant for Reprieve and the European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights, said Manasif›s relatives were unable to speak publicly about his situation because doing so could expose them to intimidation or arrest. She argued that he should not face capital punishment for actions allegedly committed before turning 18.

The case comes amid a sharp rise in executions under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Saudi Arabia carried out a record 356 executions in 2025, with foreign nationals convicted of non-violent drug-related offences accounting for a significant proportion. Reprieve also estimates that at least 17 people have been executed since 2015 for alleged crimes committed while they were children. Despite a 2020 royal decree intended to end death sentences for offences committed by minors, authorities have continued to pursue capital punishment in cases involving underage defendants. In April 2026, Ali al-Subaiti was executed alongside his uncle, Mustafa al-Subaiti, over offences reportedly committed when Ali was 12. UN human rights experts have previously called on Saudi Arabia to stop executions involving individuals convicted for acts allegedly committed before the age of 18. Human Rights Watch has also condemned the case, describing the possible execution of Manasif over a non-violent offence committed as a child as another serious violation of human rights.

The case raises serious questions about how Saudi Arabia treats people accused of offences committed as children. Reports of torture, a forced confession and years without proper legal representation make the prospect of his execution even more troubling. Punishing someone with death for non-violent actions during their teenage years is difficult to reconcile with basic principles of justice and human rights.

Women Shut Out of Syria's Military and Security Colleges

New university admission policies are limiting women›s access to military and security education in Syria, raising questions about gender equality and women›s place in the country›s future institutions. Women seeking careers in Syria›s defense and security sectors face new educational barriers after authorities introduced admission policies reserving most programmes at two state-run universities for men. Human Rights Watch (HRW) says the restrictions risk pushing women further away from decision-making and professional roles during the country›s political transition. The rules, made public by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research on September 30, leave female applicants with very few options. At the National University of Defense Sciences, women are excluded from military colleges and programmes covering law, economics, administration and social sciences. At the Syrian University for Security Sciences, their only available field is cybersecurity.

The consequences extend beyond university access. Students at these institutions are trained for careers in the armed forces and security services, with graduates required to complete lengthy periods of government service. By reserving most of these programmes for men, the authorities are restricting women›s opportunities to enter these professions. While women remain eligible to study subjects such as law and economics at other

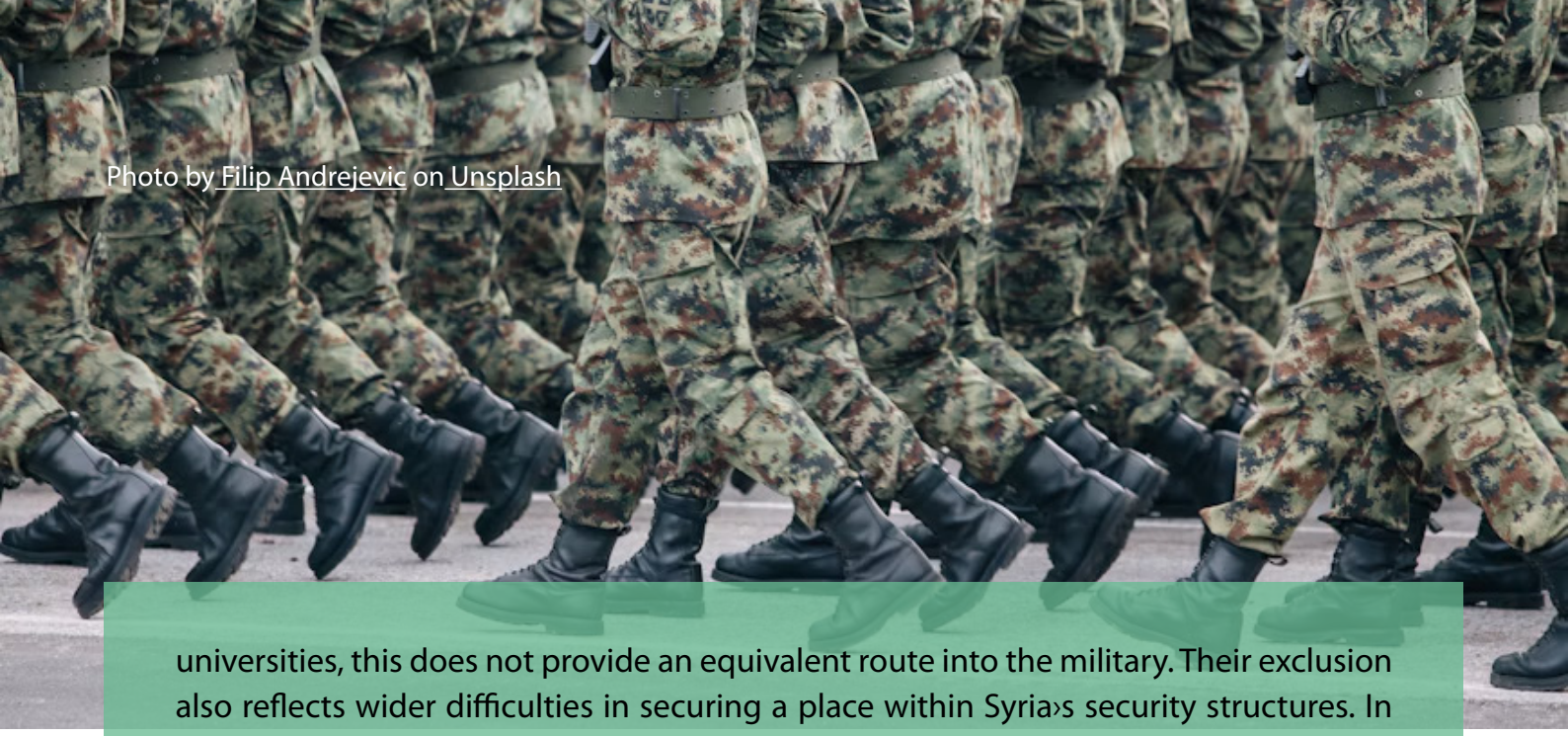


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universities, this does not provide an equivalent route into the military. Their exclusion also reflects wider difficulties in securing a place within Syria›s security structures. In August 2026, authorities reportedly rejected a proposal for the Kurdish-led Women›s Protection Units (YPJ), an all-female fighting force, to join the national army.

Human Right Watch (HRW) argues that the new admissions policy conflicts with protections already established under Syria›s Constitutional Declaration, signed into force in March 2025. The document guarantees equal treatment regardless of gender and recognises women›s rights to education, employment and participation in public affairs. Syria›s commitments under international agreements, including CEDAW, also require equal opportunities for women in education, employment and public service. The organisation further cautioned that assigning women to traditionally care-focused professions while reserving military, security and technical fields for men perpetuates outdated assumptions about what roles each gender should occupy. Such restrictions are particularly concerning during post-conflict reconstruction, when women›s involvement in rebuilding public institutions and reforming the security sector is essential.

The admission rules are part of a wider pattern of limited female representation in public life. Women obtained just six of the 119 elected seats in Syria›s October 2025 parliamentary elections. Government figures have also made controversial statements questioning women›s ability to hold certain public positions. In another development, a directive issued in Latakia in January 2026 restricted female government employees from wearing makeup considered excessive, without clearly defining the term or specifying the penalties.

Syria›s transition cannot be truly inclusive if women are prevented from accessing the same opportunities as men. Excluding them from defense and security education does more than limit their career choices; it also reduces their ability to contribute to decisions that shape the country›s future. After years of conflict, Syria needs institutions that reflect and serve its entire population. Women›s participation should be treated as an essential part of rebuilding the country, not an option that can be restricted by gender.

Houthis Refer UN and NGO Employees for Prosecution in Yemen

Eight humanitarian and civil society workers in Yemen have been referred to criminal proceedings that could end in death sentences, intensifying fears over the safety of people working with international organisations. A new wave of legal action by Yemen›s Houthi authorities has placed eight humanitarian and human rights workers at risk of capital punishment. Those referred for prosecution since August 18, 2026, include three people connected to the United Nations and five others employed by local or international organisations. Their professional work covered healthcare, emergency assistance, human rights and other community programmes, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Instead of being charged over acts involving violence, the eight individuals are accused of espionage and assisting an enemy. Yemen›s Penal Code allows the death penalty for both offences. Prosecutors have also portrayed their work with humanitarian and civil society organisations as part of an alleged scheme against society, without clearly explaining the basis for these claims. The cases come against a backdrop of widespread arrests targeting people associated with aid agencies and civil society groups. Since May 2024, Houthi forces have taken more than 100 such workers into custody. Many were held for prolonged periods without formal charges, contact with relatives or meaningful access to legal counsel. In some cases, authorities concealed their detention and whereabouts, leaving families unaware of their fate. The conditions of those now facing prosecution have added to the alarm. Information shared with the two rights organisations by people familiar with the cases indicates that all eight remain behind bars, with several experiencing serious medical problems.

One detainee is receiving chemotherapy for stomach cancer, while others reportedly have diabetes or conditions requiring specialist treatment. Relatives have also raised allegations that some prisoners were tortured or threatened into making statements admitting to espionage. The experiences of three detainees highlight the reported treatment inside Houthi-run facilities. Sami Kallabi, 41, a former UN employee arrested on June 6, 2024, is receiving chemotherapy for cancer at a military hospital. Despite his serious condition, authorities have reportedly denied his family access to him and withheld information about his place of detention. Labib Shayef, 57, a consultant arrested on the same day at his office in Sanaa, has been allowed just one family visit since August 2025. His health has deteriorated in custody; he has diabetes and contracted Hepatitis B but has reportedly received inadequate medical care. Prosecutors have also questioned him about his involvement in programmes related to gender and peacebuilding.

Dr Ali Al-Mudhwahi, who previously advised the Houthi-controlled health ministry and worked as a UNICEF consultant, has reportedly faced solitary confinement and physical and psychological abuse. His wife told HRW that interrogators tried to make him describe vaccines as instruments of espionage and portray himself as an agent recruited by the World Health Organization. The campaign against aid workers has continued for more than two years. Following raids in May 2024, further arrests were reported across territories under Houthi control. By October 5, 2026, 72 UN employees, alongside dozens of humanitarian and civil society workers, were still being held. All were Yemeni nationals. The death of a World Food Programme employee in Houthi custody in February 2025 has further heightened fears about the fate of those who remain imprisoned. Amnesty International and HRW say the espionage accusations reflect a pattern in which the Houthi authorities have used national security charges to intimidate critics and restrict independent activity. They have also previously documented allegations of torture being used to obtain confessions.

Behind these cases are people who were working to help others, yet now find themselves facing imprisonment and even the possibility of execution. Their families are left waiting, worrying about their health and safety, often without knowing what will happen next. No one should have to risk their life for providing medical care, supporting vulnerable communities or defending human rights. When aid workers become targets, it is not only their lives that are affected; the people who depend on their support also suffer.

Photo by Khalil Radi on Unsplash





India: Halt Police Crackdown and Arbitrary Arrests of Demonstrators

A growing wave of demonstrations over India›s electoral process has been met with heavy-handed policing, raising concerns about the government›s treatment of dissent and the protection of democratic rights. Thousands of people have taken to the streets in several Indian cities to challenge the country›s voter registration exercise and demand accountability from the Election Commission. The demonstrations, involving young activists, opposition groups, students and civil society organisations, have increasingly focused on Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and allegations of irregularities in the electoral system.

At the centre of the dispute is the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), a nationwide review of voter records introduced in June 2025. Although officials describe the exercise as an effort to remove outdated and duplicate registrations, more than 130 million names have reportedly disappeared from electoral lists. This has fuelled fears that eligible citizens could lose their right to vote, particularly among minority communities, women and people living in poverty. Opposition parties have further alleged that the changes could give an electoral advantage to Prime Minister Narendra Modi›s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Photo by Alex Radelich on Unsplash

The controversy gained momentum after media reports exposed disagreements within the Election Commission over the handling of the revision. Demands for the chief election commissioner›s removal and legal challenges to the process followed, prompting demonstrations that spread across the country from late September. Instead of addressing the protesters› concerns, police operations have reportedly involved widespread physical force and mass arrests. Demonstrators have described being beaten, pulled along the ground and transported in police vehicles, sometimes without information about where they were being taken. Restrictions on public movement and interruptions to mobile internet have further limited people›s ability to organise and communicate.

The crackdown has also affected the media. Reporters attempting to document the demonstrations have faced detention, harassment and assaults. At least 30 journalists were reportedly taken into custody over two days in October, with some having their phones and professional equipment confiscated. Female reporters also accused police officers of sexual harassment. In one account, a journalist described being struck by officers while recording an arrest, while another said he and other detainees were trapped inside a police bus that became dangerously overheated. Security measures surrounding a major October 10 demonstration in Delhi were particularly extensive. Authorities deployed more than 40,000 personnel, disrupted rail services, closed numerous metro stations and cut mobile internet access. Activists travelling to the capital were reportedly removed from trains and buses, while some organisers were detained before reaching the demonstration. Others were placed under house arrest.

Reports of police entering places of worship added another dimension to the controversy. Officers allegedly warned Muslims against attending protests during Friday prayers and later entered a Sikh temple where demonstrators had taken refuge. The intervention prompted civil society representatives to call for an independent investigation into the conduct of the police. The judiciary has also intervened. On October 11, the Supreme Court instructed authorities to protect peaceful gatherings, prevent unlawful arrests, restore internet connectivity and allow normal movement, within lawful limits. However, concerns have continued over the implementation of these directions. International criticism has followed as well. The United Nations human rights office expressed concern about the large number of people detained and urged Indian authorities to engage with demonstrators through dialogue. New Delhi rejected the criticism, arguing that it amounted to inappropriate interference in the country›s internal affairs.

When people take to the streets to question how elections are being conducted, they should be heard, not threatened or silenced. The police response in India is worrying because it risks turning a demand for fair elections into a struggle for basic democratic freedoms. Detaining protesters, targeting journalists and restricting internet access only make it harder for people to seek answers. A democracy should have room for criticism, even when that criticism challenges those in power.

US Plan to Livestream Military Execution Draws Human Rights Criticism



Photo by Johannes Blenke on Unsplash

Amnesty International has condemned the US administration›s plan to broadcast a military execution live, warning that the decision would add another layer of cruelty to the use of capital punishment. The Trump administration has scheduled the first execution by the US military since 1961 for December 3. The individual, convicted in connection with the 2009 mass shooting at Fort Hood military base in Texas, is due to be executed by firing squad. US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced on October 8 that the procedure would also be livestreamed to the public. Justin Mazzola, Deputy Director of Research at Amnesty International USA, described the announcement as deeply troubling, arguing that making an execution available for public viewing demonstrates a disregard for human dignity and the right to life.

Mazzola said public executions conflict with international human rights standards prohibiting cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. He also challenged the argument that capital punishment prevents crime, noting that there is no convincing evidence that it provides a greater deterrent than other penalties. Broadcasting an execution, he warned, would intensify its brutality rather than contribute to public safety. He also linked the announcement to the recent controversy surrounding the attempted execution of Christa Pike in Tennessee, arguing that the latest developments further expose serious flaws in the US capital punishment system.

Turning an execution into a televised event risks making human suffering a public spectacle. Rather than promoting justice or making communities safer, such a practice raises deeper concerns about the value placed on human life and the limits of state power. The case also draws attention to the need to reconsider punishment methods that inflict irreversible harm while doing little to address the underlying causes of crime.

Protests Follow ICE Shooting of Man in Vehicle with Five-Year-Old

An immigration enforcement operation in New York turned violent on Thursday when a federal officer opened fire on a vehicle carrying a man and a five-year-old child, triggering protests and demands for accountability. The man, identified by New York police as 28-year-old Oscar Belgal, was wounded during the encounter in Marble Hill, a neighbourhood in the Bronx. Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said Belgal was parking his car when two federal officers, both in plain clothes, approached him. One reportedly had a gun drawn. As the vehicle began moving forward, an officer fired seven shots, striking Belgal near his left ear. Belgal remained conscious and was taken to hospital. The child inside the vehicle was not physically injured and was later placed with a relative.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said the officers were attempting to arrest Belgal, a Dominican national with a criminal conviction. It confirmed that an officer had fired a weapon but said the circumstances were still being investigated. The shooting prompted strong reactions from New York officials. Mayor Zohran Mamdani condemned the incident and called on President Donald Trump to stop ICE operations in the city. He accused the agency of creating fear in communities and acting without accountability, renewing his call for its abolition. Governor Kathy Hochul also raised the matter with Trump and Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin. She urged them to suspend immigration enforcement activities in New York and called for the release of any available body-camera recordings to help clarify what happened. The incident brought demonstrators onto the streets on Thursday evening. Protesters criticised the administration›s immigration policies, while some confrontations with police were reported. City Council member Carmen De La Rosa expressed anger and grief over the shooting.



Photo by Leo_Visions on Unsplash

The latest incident comes amid growing criticism of federal immigration agents, following the deaths of two US citizens during separate operations in Minneapolis in January. Their deaths triggered demonstrations across the country and renewed demands for investigations into the use of force by federal officers. The administration also faced criticism over its handling of the cases, including limiting local authorities› involvement in the investigations. ICE has expanded considerably under Trump›s second administration. Its workforce exceeded 22,000 agents by January, while a funding package signed by the president allocated approximately $75 billion to the agency over four years. With a target of deporting one million people annually, its expanding operations have become a major source of public concern.

The shooting raises serious concerns about how immigration enforcement is being carried out and whether enough safeguards exist to protect people during these operations. The presence of a five-year-old child makes the incident even more troubling. While authorities must investigate the circumstances and establish the facts, federal agents should not be beyond public scrutiny. People should not have to fear for their safety during encounters with law enforcement.

Funeral Gathering in Jordan Turns Deadly After Gunmen Attack Church

At least seven people were killed and 34 others injured when armed men attacked a church during a funeral in Jordan's Karak governorate on Friday, turning a religious gathering into a scene of violence and panic. The assault took place in Hmoud, where three suspected attackers reportedly arrived in a vehicle before entering the church and firing at those inside. They later escaped in a pickup truck. CCTV footage reviewed by the BBC appeared to capture three men carrying handguns as they approached the church. No organisation has so far claimed responsibility.

People attending the funeral described a desperate effort to escape the shooting. Some hid beneath church benches, while others tried to shield their children, assist injured worshippers or carry victims to safety. One attendee, Khalid al-Mdanat, told BBC Arabic that the gunfire continued for about 15 minutes, leaving people struggling to find somewhere to hide. Another witness initially thought the noise came from an electrical problem, only to discover people lying injured on the ground. A woman who was inside the church said the shooting began moments after prayers, with gunfire and breaking glass followed by screams. She later saw several bodies in the church courtyard.

Jordanian authorities have launched efforts to track down those responsible. Interior Minister Mazen al-Faraya described the attackers as extremists, while King Abdullah II vowed that those behind the incident would face severe punishment. Officials initially reported different casualty figures before confirming that seven people had died. The aftermath brought heavy security to nearby medical facilities as families gathered to look for relatives and mourn those killed. The attack also triggered anger among local residents, with some questioning whether enough had been done to prevent such violence. The shooting has caused particular concern in Jordan, where attacks on religious gatherings are uncommon. Karak is home to a significant Christian community in a predominantly Muslim country. Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun also denounced the assault, saying that

attacking mourners at a place of worship showed disregard for both human dignity and religious values.

A funeral should be a place where families come together to grieve and remember their loved ones, not somewhere they fear for their lives. This attack is particularly disturbing because it targeted people during a moment of mourning and in a place of worship. Beyond the lives lost, it has left families and the wider community facing fear and uncertainty. Those responsible must be brought to justice, and people should be able to practise their faith and gather peacefully without fear of violence.



Photo by Saj Shafique on Unsplash

Mass Protests Across Poland Call for Greater Access to Abortion



Photo by Colin Lloyd on Unsplash

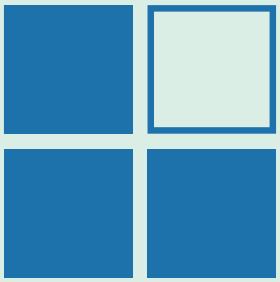
Thousands of people demonstrated across more than 20 locations in Poland on Thursday, urging authorities to guarantee women the right to obtain safe, legal and affordable abortions. The protests coincided with the sixth anniversary of a landmark court ruling that sharply restricted abortion access in the country. Polish law now allows the procedure only in cases involving rape or incest, or when pregnancy puts a woman's life or health at risk. A further tightening of the rules came in 2020, when the Constitutional Tribunal removed foetal abnormalities as a legal ground for abortion. The demonstrations also reflected growing frustration with Prime Minister Donald Tusk's government. Although his coalition pledged to change abortion legislation before taking office in 2023, disagreements among its members have prevented major reform. Parliament has recently backed two proposals intended to loosen the restrictions, but conservative President Karol Nawrocki is expected to block them.

Reproductive rights campaigners questioned the timing and purpose of the latest legislative moves. Zofia Marcinek of the Abortion Dream Team argued that the government was presenting proposals it knew were unlikely to become law, creating an appearance of progress ahead of next year's parliamentary elections. In Warsaw, approximately 1,000 people gathered outside parliament despite the rain. Emilia Niemiec, head of the AboTak abortion support centre, said women were still facing largely unchanged circumstances six years after the restrictions were introduced. Abortion remains a common practice despite the legal barriers, with many women obtaining medication from abroad and managing the process outside hospitals. While women themselves are not criminally prosecuted for

ending their pregnancies, people who assist them, including doctors and relatives, may face legal consequences.

Official figures indicate that Polish hospitals recorded 573 abortions in the first half of 2026, compared with 452 during the whole of 2022. Campaigners say these numbers represent only a small portion of the procedures taking place, estimating that tens of thousands occur outside medical facilities each year. Activists have also challenged the government›s claims that access to abortion has improved. Marcinek warned that public assurances can give women a misleading impression of the support available, leaving some to discover only after seeking medical help that the process remains difficult, expensive and complicated.

The protests reflect the frustration of many women who feel their reproductive rights have been overlooked despite repeated political promises of reform. Restrictive laws do not necessarily stop abortions; they can instead make the process more difficult, costly and unsafe, particularly for women with limited resources. Women should have access to reliable medical care and the freedom to make decisions about their own health without facing unnecessary barriers.



SECTION–3

Multimedia Update: Voices Against Authoritarianism

Write-up by an International Human Rights Certificate Program Participant

This November, we are pleased to share the work of a graduate from the International Human Rights Certificate Program. This article examines the oppression of Indigenous Lumad communities in the Philippines, highlighting how extractive industries, environmental destruction, and the suppression of Indigenous voices have threatened their ancestral lands, human rights, cultural identities, and access to education.

Oppression of the Lumads in a Self-Destructive Society By Nathanael V. Navarro

In this thought-provoking article, Nathanael V. Navarro, a graduate of the International Human Rights Certificate Program, explores the connection between environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and the marginalization of Indigenous Lumad communities in the Philippines. The article examines how logging, mining, and large-scale agricultural plantations have damaged ancestral lands, disrupted traditional livelihoods, and exposed Indigenous communities to environmental and health risks. It also highlights the human rights violations faced by Indigenous and environmental defenders, including killings, forced displacement, red-tagging, and gender-based violence. Furthermore, the author discusses how attacks on Indigenous schools and the displacement of Lumad children have undermined their educational opportunities and cultural preservation.

To learn more about the challenges facing Indigenous communities in the Philippines and the importance of protecting their rights, cultural heritage, and environment, read the full article on our website.

Recent Infographics

This month, we published two new infographics examining the Balochistan Liberation Army and restrictions on civil liberties in Vietnam.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA): Origins, Insurgency, and Major Attacks

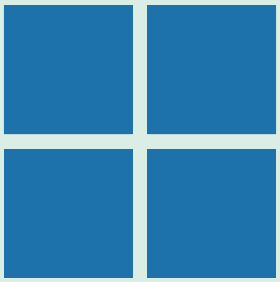
This infographic examines the origins, objectives, leadership, and activities of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a Baloch separatist militant organization operating primarily in southwestern Pakistan. It explores the group's major attacks, reported tactics and funding sources, international terrorist designations, and the broader security context surrounding the insurgency.

Explore the infographic on the WAEN website.

Vietnam Under the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV): Political Control, Restrictions on Civil Liberties, and Suppression of Dissent

This infographic examines Vietnam's one-party system which limits political competition and places restrictions on independent journalism, religious groups, peaceful assembly, and online expression. The infographic also highlights political imprisonment, surveillance, prosecution of critics, and documented cases involving activists, journalists, and dissidents.

Explore the infographic on the WAEN website.



SECTION–4

Updates corner

Successful Completion of the International Advocacy Seminar 2026

The International Advocacy Seminar 2026, held on October 4 at the University of Toronto, brought together 42 emerging leaders from eight countries under the theme "Empowering Diaspora Voices for Effective Advocacy." Organized by the World Anti-Extremism Network in partnership with the Global Girls Movement at the University of Toronto, with support from the Atlas Network, the full-day seminar featured discussions on freedom, disinformation, data-driven civic action, and human rights advocacy. Through expert sessions, interactive activities, advocacy planning, and elevator pitches, participants explored ways to strengthen diaspora engagement, address foreign interference and transnational repression, and advance freedom and human rights.

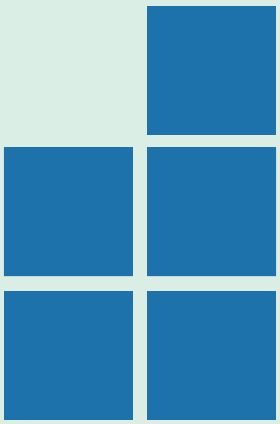
Explore the full event report and seminar highlights here.

Upcoming Program: 8th Edition of International Human Rights Certificate for Young Leaders, IHRC

In October, WAEN announced the upcoming 8th Edition of the International Human Rights Certificate for Young Leaders (IHRC), an international online program for students, young professionals, journalists, activists, and emerging leaders.

Through expert-led sessions and interactive discussions, participants will explore contemporary human rights issues and exchange perspectives with peers from around the world. Participants will also write an article on a human rights topic of their choice, with outstanding submissions considered for publication through WAEN platforms. A limited number of merit-based scholarships will be available.

Learn more about the IHRC program on WAEN Website:



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