

# PROTECT THE PROTEST!

Why we must  
save our right  
to protest



PROTECT  
THE PROTEST



**Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We are independent of any interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and individual donations. We believe that acting in solidarity and compassion with people everywhere can change our societies for the better.**

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Cover Photo: Pro-democracy protesters hold inflatable yellow ducks during an anti-government demonstration in Bangkok, Thailand on 27 November 2020. © Anadolu Agency via Getty Images



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# 1. Introduction

Peaceful protest is a dynamic and public way of exercising our human rights. Throughout history, protests have enabled individuals and groups to express dissent, opinions and ideas, expose injustice and abuse, and demand accountability from those in power. With collective mobilization, creativity and defiance, people who protest are a thorn in the side of the powerful. Helping to shake up rigid and unaccountable power dynamics and structures, protesting has been a vehicle for advancing human rights. In a world with increasing inequality and persisting discrimination, armed conflict, authoritarianism and crises of governance, as well as mounting global threats on livelihoods and the planet, protests are widespread and on the rise.

Instead of addressing pressing concerns and promoting dialogue to find solutions to injustice, abuses and discrimination, states often respond by stigmatizing and cracking down on peaceful protesters. In all regions of the world, Amnesty International has documented a wide array of undue restrictions on protest in ordinary and emergency legislation, criminalization of protesters, and the unlawful use of force to disperse protesters and to intimidate and deter others from joining these mobilizations. As digital technologies enable new ways to mobilize and express dissent, those seeking to deter protests are also developing new methods to obstruct this

right, ranging from intrusive digital surveillance to shutting down the internet and digital communication networks.

There are further barriers to protest: people who face inequality and discrimination, whether based on race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, disability, occupation, or social, economic, migratory or other status are more likely to be affected by restrictions and repression, and less able to participate in protests. Yet, many advances in human rights around the world have been due to the courage of people who dared to fight for a more inclusive and equal society despite the risks and challenges they faced. It is therefore crucial that everyone is able to protest safely and without discrimination.

Amnesty International has long worked to protect and expand the power of protest in defending and promoting human rights. For decades, we have stood with protest movements and taken part in collective actions as part of our human rights campaigns. We are here to remind those in power that peaceful protest is a right, not a privilege, and one which states have a duty to respect, protect and facilitate. This is why Amnesty International is embarking on a global campaign that challenges the widespread assault on the ability to protest, standing by all those who dare to stand up and make their voices heard.



## 2. We have the right to protest

### 2.1 IS THERE A RIGHT TO PROTEST?

In short: yes, there is! International human rights law protects the right to protest through a number of provisions enshrined in various international and regional treaties which, taken together, provide protesters with comprehensive protection. Even though the right to protest is not given as a separate right in human rights treaties, when people engage in protests, whether individually or collectively, they are exercising a variety of rights, which can include the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Other rights are also essential in enabling people to protest peacefully, including the rights to life, privacy, freedom of association, freedom from torture and other ill-treatment or punishment, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, for example. Other key enabling rights may also include the right to be free from discrimination, the respect of labour rights, and other economic, social and cultural rights.

In particular, protests are protected by the interaction of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of expression. Protests are one common way for people to express their views and opinions and can contribute to the protection of many other rights. Without the ability to freely express opinions, public assemblies are simply mass gatherings without a message. Without the ability to freely assemble, people's opinions may lack the force of numbers to have their message properly heard.

It is important to note that exercising the right to protest has historically enabled people to claim and promote all sorts of human rights. Protests are protected by international human rights law

irrespective of the issue people are protesting about, and whether or not the motivation is a human rights issue. They are an important way for people to come together and create a forum for public debate and political engagement. Mass demonstrations of various kinds are some of the most accessible means for people to assert their views and are particularly effective for those whose human rights have been violated or who lack the platforms to make their voices heard. Through protest, those who have been silenced and disenfranchised can claim their voice and their political power, and gain strength from being part of a bigger group or movement. Protests also create opportunities to advance and defend the rights of others and to foster rights-respecting societies.

Although an assembly is generally understood to be a physical gathering of people, today the boundaries between the digital and physical worlds are increasingly blurred. The internet plays an important role in facilitating physical assemblies and has itself become a venue for collective gatherings. Virtual protests, strikes and demonstrations are sprouting everywhere that people have access to the internet, and when people do take to the streets, much of the coordination and preparation happens online. All these activities deserve the same respect, protection and facilitation as physical assemblies. This has been repeatedly asserted by human rights mechanisms, including by the UN Human Rights Committee which has called on states to ensure they protect peaceful demonstrations wherever they take place: outdoors, indoors and online; in public and private spaces; or a combination thereof.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General Comment 37: The Right to Peaceful Assembly (Art. 21), 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 6.

## 2.2 DUTY TO FACILITATE PEACEFUL PROTESTS

Based on the protections that international human rights law affords to protests, particularly the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, state authorities have a duty to respect, protect and facilitate peaceful protest. This means to refrain from unduly interfering with the exercise of this right, to protect protesters from violence, to provide services (such as traffic management or toilets, if necessary), and to communicate with those organizing or participating in a protest to ensure its peaceful conduct.

A large group of people congregating in one place to express a common message is by its nature likely to be disruptive. So, authorities and societies should generally tolerate this disruption, since peaceful protests are a legitimate use of public space, and often private space as well. For example, the right to hold assemblies and demonstrations on public roads has been upheld consistently by regional and international human rights bodies, which have established that urban space is not only an area for circulation but also a space for participation. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and association has stipulated that “the free flow of traffic should not automatically take precedence over freedom of peaceful assembly”.<sup>2</sup>

Generally, authorities should presume protests to be peaceful – in the sense that they are non-violent – and the authorities’ overall approach should be driven by communication, seeking to prevent conflicts from occurring through dialogue and mediation, as well as to de-escalate and peacefully settle any conflicts that may occur.

Protesters also have a right to be kept safe during protests. This applies, for instance, to demonstrations by LGBTI people who often face hostility by onlookers and counter-protesters. For example, in the last few years, Pride marches have started to become safer in **Ukraine**.<sup>3</sup> In 2019, police in Kyiv prevented a group of counter-demonstrators from attacking LGBTI people participating in a Pride march, while

still allowing peaceful counter-demonstrators to stay in the area and voice their views. Also in 2019, despite widespread counter-protests and threats of violence, several thousand people were able to hold their first Pride march in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** under heavy police protection. Concrete blocks and fences, and more than 1,000 policemen, including a sniper unit, secured the main route in the centre of the capital city, Sarajevo, enabling the long-delayed march to take place without incident.<sup>4</sup>

However, police still fail on many occasions in this duty to protect. In **Georgia** in 2021, the planned Tbilisi Pride March had to be cancelled after violent counter-protesters assembled in the city centre and climbed onto the balcony of the office of Tbilisi Pride, tearing a rainbow flag apart and breaking the windows before ransacking the building and forcing the Pride organizers to evacuate. Police were reportedly present in small numbers and failed to intervene effectively. Dozens of journalists who were planning to cover the Pride march and became witnesses were also attacked by the homophobic mob.<sup>5</sup> And in the **USA**, where thousands of peaceful anti-racism and political protests took place following the racist killing of George Floyd by police in 2020, Amnesty International found that police forces frequently failed to take preventive measures to avoid peaceful assemblies being disrupted and failed to protect protesters from violent attacks.<sup>6</sup>

The right to protest also requires that those organizing and participating in a demonstration have a real opportunity to peacefully convey their message to their intended audience. Therefore, respecting the chosen manner, time and location of a protest is important. Restrictions are sometimes justified (see further below) but blanket bans on the permissible time, manner or location of a protest are never acceptable because they prevent the authorities from engaging in a case-by-case assessment of the restrictions or evaluating specific circumstances and assess their necessity and proportionality. In cases where certain restrictions to the time, place or manner of an assembly may be legitimately imposed, the authorities should always try to facilitate such an assembly by offering reasonable alternatives.

<sup>2</sup>UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Report, 21 May 2012, UN Doc. A/HRC/20/27, para. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Amnesty International, *Human Rights in Eastern Europe and Central Asia – Review of 2019* (Index: EUR 01/1355/2020), 16 April 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/1355/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/1355/2020/en/)

<sup>4</sup>NBC News, “Bosnians march in first Gay Pride under tight police protection”, 9 September 2019, [nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/bosnians-march-first-gay-pride-under-tight-police-protection-n1051421](https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/bosnians-march-first-gay-pride-under-tight-police-protection-n1051421)

<sup>5</sup>Amnesty International, “Georgia: The authorities’ failure to protect Tbilisi Pride once again encourages violence-2/”, 5 July 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/georgia-the-authorities-failure-to-protect-tbilisi-pride-once-again-encourages-violence-2/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/georgia-the-authorities-failure-to-protect-tbilisi-pride-once-again-encourages-violence-2/)

<sup>6</sup>From May to September 2020, Amnesty International documented and verified violent confrontations between protests and counter-protests in approximately 75% of all US states, and in about half of all US states it confirmed cases of police forces failing to protect peaceful assemblies and guarantee the safety of the participants, see Amnesty International, *USA: Losing the peace: U.S. police failures to protect protesters from violence* (Index: AMR 51/3238/2020), 6 November 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/3238/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/3238/2020/en/)

## DUTY TO FACILITATE: GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR AUTHORITIES WHEN POLICING PROTESTS

- Act neutrally and avoid taking sides against or in favour of the protest.
- Enable protesters to be heard and seen by their audience: public officials, the general public, corporations, photographers and the media, counter-protesters, etc.
- Presume the peacefulness of a protest and engage with organizers and participants in good faith.
- Seek to carry out the policing of assemblies in a manner that ensures the best possible and effective enjoyment of human rights.
- Do not limit the planning to the anticipation of problems and how to respond to any outbreaks of violence. Instead, seek ways to better enable the protest and de-escalate tensions.
- The physical appearance (equipment, numbers) and attitude displayed by the police should be non-threatening to avoid fuelling tensions.
- In case of violence, force should only be used where provided for by law, necessary, and always in a proportionate way. This includes a requirement that only the minimum amount of force necessary should ever be used.
- When only a minority engages in violence, use of force should be contained and targeted so that those who are protesting peacefully may continue to do so.
- The duty to facilitate also applies in cases of spontaneous protests: even if there are laws requiring organizers to give notification in advance of an assembly, when people decide to demonstrate spontaneously the police should facilitate such protests as long as they are peaceful.
- The collection and processing of personal information through recording devices, closed-circuit television, undercover policing, or mass surveillance must be conducted in compliance with the right to privacy.

Protest against gender-based violence in the context of International Women's Day 2021, Toluca, Mexico.

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## 2.3 CAN PROTESTS BE RESTRICTED?

Human rights law allows states to impose restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in limited circumstances. According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), any restrictions on this right are only permissible if they meet all elements of the “three-part test”: legality, necessity and proportionality, and pursuance of a legitimate aim.

### LEGALITY

All restrictions imposed must be provided by a clearly defined law that allows people to regulate their conduct accordingly, that must itself be in compliance with international human rights law and which may not be applied arbitrarily.

### NECESSITY AND PROPORTIONALITY

Authorities must make sure that they use the least intrusive means possible, and the restriction must do more good than harm.

### PURSUANCE OF A LEGITIMATE AIM

Restrictions can only be imposed in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, for the protection of public health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

During the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the impact and the spread of the disease was particularly unpredictable, a raft of restrictions was imposed worldwide on the right to protest. While many of these restrictions may have been legitimate, even in a pandemic or any other emergency situation, the three-part test always applies and should be reassessed as circumstances change. For example, a blanket ban was imposed on protests in **Cyprus**,<sup>7</sup> while countries such as **Russia** banned protests but not other types of assemblies.<sup>8</sup>

Some governments, after learning more about the behaviour of the virus, imposed more proportionate restrictions, for example by requiring protesters to maintain physical distance or to wear face masks to prevent the spread of the disease. Yet, many countries have yet to lift restrictions on protests imposed as a response to Covid-19 despite clear evidence that the situation has improved.

### Peaceful vs non-peaceful assembly

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly applies to peaceful (that is non-violent) protests. According to the UN Human Rights Committee, “a ‘peaceful’ assembly stands in contradistinction to one characterized by widespread and serious violence”. As proposed by the Committee, the terms “peaceful” and “non-violent” can thus be used interchangeably. The Committee also explains that ‘violence’ in the context of the right to peaceful assembly typically entails “the use by participants of physical force against others that is likely to result in injury or death, or serious damage to property”. As clarified by the Committee, mere pushing and shoving or the disruption of vehicular or pedestrian movement or daily activities do not amount to violence.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore important to highlight that the UN Human Rights Committee and other human rights mechanisms have called on states to ensure that the definition of conduct that constitutes or causes violence in the context of demonstrations is narrowly construed, and they have set a high threshold for considering pursuing cases of damage to property only when these are “serious”.<sup>10</sup>

If a small group of participants engages in violent acts during a protest, those protesters who continue to behave peacefully still have a right to go about their protest.<sup>11</sup> Sporadic acts of violence or crimes committed by some participants in a protest must not be attributed to others whose behaviour is peaceful. This means that any person who is protesting peacefully does not cease to enjoy their right to protest when some other participant engages in violence. In this case, authorities should ensure that those who are protesting peacefully are able to continue to do so, and not use the violent acts of a few as a pretext to restrict or impede the rights of the others.

For a protest to be considered outside of the protection of the right to peaceful assembly, there must be compelling and demonstrable evidence of resorting to violence, or to incitement to violence, hostility or discrimination by a significant number of the participants.

It is common for states to try to impose restrictions on protests based on arguments for the protection of national security or public order. But respect for human rights is part of national security and public order, and the right to protest is protected under international human rights law. Even if protests seem

<sup>7</sup>Amnesty International, “Cyprus: Police violence must be investigated and blanket ban on protest lifted”, 24 February 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/cyprus-police-violence-must-be-investigated-and-blanket-ban-on-protest-lifted/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/cyprus-police-violence-must-be-investigated-and-blanket-ban-on-protest-lifted/)

<sup>8</sup>Amnesty International, *Russia: activists detained under absurd “sanitary” charges for social media posts in support of public protest* (Index: EUR 46/4027/2021), 23 April 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4027/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4027/2021/en/)

<sup>9</sup>HRC, General Comment 37 (previously cited), para. 15.

<sup>10</sup>HRC, General Comment 37 (previously cited), para. 15.

<sup>11</sup>See Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association and the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Joint Report on the Proper Management of Assemblies*, 4 February 2016, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/66, para. 5; HRC, General Comment 37 (previously cited), para. 17.

to have a disorderly, chaotic or disruptive manner, they should be allowed to go on if they remain peaceful. The presumption of peacefulness, discussed above, means that authorities cannot ban in advance a protest simply because there is a risk of violence. Rather, for such a ban to be necessary and proportionate, there would need to be strong evidence of widespread violence, or incitement to violence or discrimination.

Protesters who engage in acts of violence are not protected by the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and, consequently, the authorities could impose legitimate and proportionate sanctions. However, even those engaged in acts of violence maintain all their other rights, such as the rights to life, to security of person, to physical integrity and to be free from torture and other ill-treatment. Hence, law enforcement officials must respond to acts of violence in full compliance with their obligation to respect all these rights.

### **Advocacy of hatred**

In accordance with the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, authorities can never prohibit a protest based on what people are protesting about. Just like the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly protects the ability of people to protest collectively even if the message they are conveying might be considered offensive, shocking or disturbing.

But we must remember that the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are not absolute, and they can be restricted for the protection of the rights of others. This exception includes the need to enforce the prohibition of advocacy of hatred that incites violence, hostility or discrimination. Advocacy of hatred, also commonly known as “hate speech”, threatens the rights of others, particularly their right to equality and non-discrimination, so it is legitimate for states to impose restrictions on protests that may be spreading such hate. For these restrictions to be legitimate, advocacy of hatred needs to be more than just the expression of ideas or opinions that are hateful towards members of a particular group. To be considered as advocacy of hatred, the expression requires a clear showing of intent to incite others to discriminate, be hostile toward, or commit violence against the group or individuals in question.<sup>12</sup> Restrictions must also take into consideration whether such ideas or opinions are expressed by the entire or at least a large majority of the assembly, or only by a few individuals.

### **Authorization vs notification**

Since organizing and participating in public protests is one way to exercise the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the authorities must treat protests as a right, not a privilege. Accordingly, the authorities should not require those wishing to organize or participate in a protest to request prior authorization for a protest to take place. Various human rights mechanisms have stressed that the organization of protests should not be subject to authorization or other excessive requirements that make it difficult to carry out protests.<sup>13</sup>

At most, states can impose a simple notification procedure through which those organizing a protest inform the authorities of their plans with the purpose of allowing the police to facilitate the demonstration and enable them to comply with their duties to protect the rights of protesters and those affected by protests. However, notification regimes should not be used as another way of controlling and creating obstacles to protests.

A notification procedure differs from an authorization regime in that the person notifying the authorities is not seeking their permission, but merely informing them that a protest will be taking place. Accordingly, any lack of previous notification or failure to meet other administrative requirements should not render an assembly unlawful nor should be used as a basis to disperse an assembly or arrest its participants.

### **Spontaneous protests**

Spontaneous assemblies are generally regarded as those organized in response to some occurrence and where the organizer is unable to meet the deadline for prior notification, or where there is no organizer at all.<sup>14</sup> Even in these cases, people still have a right to peacefully assemble and protest.

Numerous regional and international bodies have stressed that spontaneous assemblies must be equally protected. Human rights mechanisms have recommended that states ensure the protection of spontaneous assemblies, including by explicitly providing for an exception from the requirement of prior notification when this is impracticable due to the spontaneous character of the demonstration.<sup>15</sup> In short, failure to notify authorities of the intention to assemble should never render an otherwise peaceful assembly unlawful and should never justify the dispersal of protesters.

<sup>12</sup>UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, 11 January 2013, UN Doc. A/HRC/22/17/Add.4.

<sup>13</sup>UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Report, 21 May 2012, UN Doc. A/HRC/20/27, para. 28: “Such a notification should be subject to a proportionality assessment, not unduly bureaucratic and be required a maximum of, for example, 48 hours prior to the day the assembly is planned to take place”; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report: *Effective measures and best practices to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests*, 21 January 2013, UN Doc. A/HRC/22/28.

<sup>14</sup>OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission, *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly*, 2010, para. 126, [osce.org/files/f/documents/4/0/73405.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/0/73405.pdf)

<sup>15</sup>OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission, *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly*, 2010, para. 4.2, [osce.org/files/f/documents/4/0/73405.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/0/73405.pdf); HRC, General Comment 37 (previously cited), para. 14.



## **3. Why we must protect the protest**

### **3.1 THE ROLE OF PROTEST IN ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS**

Protest is a form of non-violent direct action that provides an avenue to express grievances and demands in the public domain, especially at times when existing political, social, economic or cultural systems preclude or systematically ignore those demands. Protests are a form of engagement in the civic space that has been instrumental in attaining a range of human rights throughout history, whether through individual and collective actions such as strikes, marches, sit-ins, vigils, rallies, boycotts, street closures, pot-banging sessions, cultural or religious events, as well as a range of acts of civil disobedience. These techniques have been used in countless liberation and justice movements during the past century, and continue to grow in variety, creativity and impact.

Famous for their lasting legacy are protests such as the Salt March in India in 1930, protesting against British colonial rule; the 1950 National Day of Protest in South Africa against apartheid; the March on Washington in 1963 for civil and economic rights of Black Americans; the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York and subsequent Pride marches to demand rights for LGBTI people; the student protests against corruption and for democratic reform in Tiananmen Square and elsewhere in China in 1989; the weekly protests of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s; and the Arab Spring uprisings beginning in Tunisia in 2010, among many, many more. Recent years have seen an explosion of protests that have crossed national boundaries in response to deep injustices and inequalities, including the Black Lives Matter demonstrations that started in the USA and spread around the world to protest against entrenched racism, the #MeToo and #MareaVerde protests to demand sexual and

reproductive rights and gender equality, and the Fridays for Future protests organized by children and young people to demand prompt action against climate change.

Clearly change doesn't often happen overnight or as a result of a few people protesting: meaningful change often requires strong social movements with clear demands and strategies, and significant engagement and participation over time. Some protests may appear to be counterproductive when they are snuffed out by violent repression, seeming to entrench unaccountable power structures. Yet even in those cases where the authorities attempt to suppress protests, their influence and legacy may become apparent years or even decades later in changing social norms and laws.

But if we look at history, change often happens by taking 'two steps forward and one step back'. The key to understanding the contribution of protests and the social movements behind them is to look at how they gradually gain legitimacy (and with it, power), how they expose abuse and injustice, and how movements learn from each other. Their power lies in highlighting from the bottom up the lack of legitimacy of repressive, unaccountable power, and in contributing to raising awareness, shifting public debates, and changing language, minds and behaviours until there is a tipping point. Over time, these processes have led to improvements on a diverse range of issues such as better governance, labour conditions and social protections, increased gender equality and recognition of sexual and reproductive rights, justice for past human rights violations, and action on issues such as racism and discrimination, environmental destruction and climate change, to name a few.

## ARGENTINA: A GREEN WAVE OF PROTESTS TO SECURE THE RIGHT TO ABORTION

In 2018, hundreds of thousands of girls, women and their allies came together to urge Argentina's lawmakers to decriminalize and ensure safe access to abortion. They created a mass movement which included spectacular street protests with dancing, singing and much waving of green bandanas, a colour now synonymous with the campaign for safe and legal abortion in Argentina and beyond. These protests are part of long-standing work carried out by feminist activists throughout Latin America in favour of sexual and reproductive health and rights, but the mass protests gave a powerful signal to decision makers and the wider public about the urgency of the campaign and that the tide of public opinion was starting to turn.

While the Argentine parliament failed to legalize abortion in 2018, the persistence of peaceful protesters finally led to the legalization of abortion in 2020. Argentina is now one of a handful of countries in Latin America that allow elective terminations in the early stages of pregnancy. Campaigners throughout the region now feel energized and hopeful as the movement to secure the right to abortion gains momentum across the region and beyond.<sup>16</sup>

## NIGERIA: #ENDSARS PROTESTS AGAINST ABUSES BY THE POLICE

The abuses perpetrated by the Nigerian police's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) gave rise in 2017 to a protest movement which began with a Twitter campaign using the #EndSars hashtag. SARS was known for its abusive policing that included extortion, rape, torture and killings.<sup>17</sup> Videos showing serious incidents of abuse perpetrated by SARS officials emerged in 2020 and caused widespread protests across Nigeria, primarily conducted by younger men (some of the main targets of abuse) and were largely peaceful.

After years of broken promises to rein in SARS, protests finally led to SARS being disbanded by the government in October 2020, which was hailed by the movement as a significant victory. However, the backlash against protesters was brutal and at least 56 were killed by police and the military with impunity.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Amnesty International, "Argentina: Legalization of abortion is a historic victory", 30 December 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/argentina-legalization-abortion-historic-victory/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/argentina-legalization-abortion-historic-victory/); Amnesty International, "The green wave: Marching towards legal abortion in Argentina", August 2019, [amnesty.org/en/latest/impact/2019/08/the-green-wave/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/impact/2019/08/the-green-wave/)

<sup>17</sup>Amnesty International, *Nigeria: Time to end impunity: Torture and other human rights violations by special anti-robbery squad (SARS)* (Index: AFR 44/9505/2020), 26 June 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/9505/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/9505/2020/en/)

<sup>18</sup>Amnesty International, "Nigeria: No justice for victims of police brutality one year after #EndSARS protests", 20 October 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/nigeria-no-justice-for-victims-of-police-brutality-one-year-after-endsars-protests/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/nigeria-no-justice-for-victims-of-police-brutality-one-year-after-endsars-protests/)

## 3.2 A GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR A GLOBAL PROBLEM

Over the past decade, states and others in power have increasingly imposed obstacles to make peaceful protests harder. As those in power have become more aware of the influence of protests and their potential to challenge and transform the status quo, they have relied on more brazen and ruthless means to suppress them. Extreme inequality and low standards of living, entrenched discrimination, racism and xenophobia, repression and abuse, corruption and increased barriers to public participation, and the environmental crisis are all issues that continue to drive many to protest.

Yet the conditions necessary for debate, such as civic engagement and political participation, transparency and access to trustworthy information, have been increasingly eroded. Today's protesters face a potent mix of setbacks on the civic space, including a growing number of laws and other repressive measures intended to restrict the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association; the misuse of force by those who police protests; the expansion of unlawful mass and targeted surveillance, internet shutdowns and online abuse.

Those who raise their voice or criticize the authorities, from dissidents and political activists to human rights defenders, journalists and social media users, risk being silenced, harassed and criminalized through the misuse of criminal, civil and administrative laws. Authorities deter protesters with the threat of beatings, arbitrary detention and multiple violations of the right to a fair trial. Those who expose abusive companies and other powerful private actors are silenced through the use of vexatious defamation suits and other claims that seek unfounded or disproportionate damages. Others are prevented from joining protests because they experience marginalization and discrimination, are restricted by social norms or because their own identity is criminalized. They include women who are disproportionately burdened with unpaid caregiving responsibilities, migrants and refugees who fear deportation, people with disabilities who lack facilities to access demonstrations, and others who are poor, marginalized, isolated or have no access to information.<sup>19</sup>

Peaceful protests are under threat all over the world: from **Russia** to **France**, from **Iran** to **Morocco**, from **China** to **Thailand** and **Sri Lanka**, from the **USA** to **Nicaragua** and **Chile**, from **Senegal** to **Zimbabwe**.<sup>20</sup>

Amnesty International is launching a global campaign called "Protect the protest", which will challenge global and widespread attacks on peaceful protest, stand with peaceful protesters and support the causes of social movements pushing for human rights. **Our goal is for all people to be able to take peaceful action and make their voice heard safely and without repercussions.**

We will campaign to amend overly restrictive legislation that shrinks the civic space, particularly where it unlawfully restricts the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

We will challenge arbitrary detentions, the criminalization of protesters, the use of unlawful force by police, the misuse of less-lethal weapons and the use of tools that have no place in policing. As a first step, we will work toward a new international instrument prohibiting inherently abusive equipment and controlling the trade in law enforcement equipment to prevent its transfer to those likely to misuse it for the commission of torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

We will demand an end to unlawful mass and targeted surveillance and call on private companies to uphold their responsibility to respect the right to protest, including by opposing online censorship and internet shutdowns.

We will support those whose voices have been drowned out and who are most at risk of discrimination and exclusion.

<sup>19</sup>On the interplay between civic space, poverty and exclusion see Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Report: *Civic space, poverty and exclusion*, 11 September 2019, UN Doc. A/74/349.

<sup>20</sup>See "Further reading" section below for a selection of reports dealing with violations of the right to protest in all regions of the world.



# 4. Global trends in people's mobilization

## 4.1 THE SPREAD OF PROTESTS

Recent years have seen some of the biggest protest mobilizations for decades. One wide ranging study, analysing data on almost 3,000 protest events from 2006 to 2020, found that protests took place in all regions of the world and steadily grew during that time – quadrupling during the 14-year period.<sup>21</sup> Peaks in activity included the 2008 global financial crisis, the introduction of austerity measures after 2010, and an escalation of protests after 2016 against multiple economic, social, political and justice issues, up until the Covid-19 pandemic started to unfold. Another study based on a different dataset confirmed a similar trend, suggesting that mass protests grew 11.5% annually from 2009 to 2019, across all regions of the world.<sup>22</sup> In 2020, despite an initial lull as a result of the uncertainty about Covid-19 and the new restrictions, new anti-government protests started to rise again,<sup>23</sup> and by the end of 2021 roughly two thirds of all countries globally registered at least one major anti-government protest between 2017 and 2021 according to data collected by the Global Protest Tracker.<sup>24</sup>

Amnesty International's own publications reflect these observations. For example, our annual report on *The State of the World's Human Rights*, which monitors human rights in around 160 countries, regularly reports attacks on protests in roughly half of all countries investigated. Our latest 2021/2022 annual report raised concerns over the use of unnecessary and/or excessive force against demonstrators in at least 85 of the 154 countries covered.<sup>25</sup>

There are several interpretations for what is driving this new age of mass protest. One study has tried to explain the rise of protests around four macro areas:

- 1. Failure of the political system**, including protesting against a lack of real democracy, lack of access to justice, for transparency and accountability, and against abuse of power and corruption, coups, military interests and war;
- 2. Economic justice and anti-austerity**, including issues around employment, wages and labour conditions; reform of public services; corporate influence, deregulation and privatization; inequality; low living standards and high energy prices; agrarian and land reform; housing; and high food prices;
- 3. Civil rights**, including protests to claim the rights of ethnic, Indigenous and racial minorities; to demand access to public goods, such as digital, land, cultural and atmospheric commons; and to claim the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, women and girls' rights, labour rights, LGBTI+ rights, migrant rights, personal freedoms, and prisoners' rights; and concerns over religious issues;
- 4. Global justice**, including protests about environmental and climate justice; against multilateral institutions, imperialism and colonialism, or against free trade and economic grievances.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Isabel Ortiz, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada & Hernán Saenz Cortés, *World Protests: A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century*, 2022.

<sup>22</sup>Samuel Brannen, Christian Stirling Haigh & Katherine Schmidt, *The Age of Mass Protest: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend*, 2020.

<sup>23</sup>Benjamin Press & Thomas Carothers, *Worldwide Protests in 2020: A Year in Review*, 21 December 2020, [carnegieendowment.org/2020/12/21/worldwide-protests-in-2020-year-in-review-pub-83445](https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/12/21/worldwide-protests-in-2020-year-in-review-pub-83445)

<sup>24</sup>Benjamin Press & Thomas Carothers, *The Four Dynamics that Drove Protests in 2021*, 13 January 2021, [carnegieendowment.org/2022/01/13/four-dynamics-that-drove-protests-in-2021-pub-86185](https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/01/13/four-dynamics-that-drove-protests-in-2021-pub-86185)

<sup>25</sup>Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2021/2022: The State of the World's Human Rights* (Index: POL 10/4870/2022), 29 March 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/)

<sup>26</sup>Isabel Ortiz, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada & Hernán Saenz Cortés, *World Protests: A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century*, 2022.

A different study found similar themes behind multiple protests, including economic distress, poor governance, inequality, corruption, insufficient state services, repression and denial of rights, but also suggests that a number of conditions have accelerated mass protests, namely increased access to internet, social media and instant messaging technologies, which facilitate the organization of protests and the creation of online networks and increased access to information. Added to this, the study found that high levels of global unemployment and casualization, especially amongst young people; extreme inequality, a lack of opportunity and the perception of pervasive corruption, as well as growing urbanization, increasing literacy and environmental stresses have all contributed to successive waves of protests that are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.<sup>27</sup>

Amnesty International's own analysis also shows that the demand for fairness, justice, freedom and opportunity will continue to drive protest. We continue to see people across the world standing up not only for their own rights but in solidarity with the rights of others. They continue to rise up, even in the face of cruel repression from the authorities. Yet people seem not to be deterred from making their voices heard. According to Amnesty International's latest monitoring, mass protests took place in more than 80 countries in 2021 and 2022.<sup>28</sup>

## 4.2 HOW ARE PEOPLE PROTESTING?

Peaceful protests cover a wide spectrum of activities, from letter writing and organizing petitions, to pickets, rallies, marches and strikes. They include colourful and noisy mass demonstrations, and silent vigils, sit-ins, flash mobs and media stunts. They also include Twitter storms and online organizing to share similar slogans and messages, as well as hunger strikes, banner drops and street art. They can be individual or collective, and can take place online or offline. All these and other forms of protest are protected under the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and sometimes other human rights as well.

Sometimes protests start when individuals take a stand publicly against injustice: these protests can be very powerful and symbolic even though just one individual is involved. Yet protests gain a special strength, resilience and impact when they become collective and are part of a wider movement. Rosa Parks started her Montgomery bus boycott against racial segregation in the USA by herself, but her action of civil disobedience was part of a wider history of resistance that helped energize an existing civil rights protest movement. Greta Thunberg began her climate protest alone in Sweden, as did Licypriya Kangujam in India, but their individual protests attracted the world's attention when more young people joined to demand climate action in all regions of the world. In addition, when protests are collective, the power in numbers can encourage and facilitate the participation of people who previously felt they could not express views in such a public way by themselves. In mass demonstrations, people who are discriminated against and whose rights have been abused can benefit from the strength of solidarity and fellowship with other protesters.

Whether to circumvent restrictions, to attract more attention from the targets of protests, or simply thanks to the creativity of participants, protests have been carried out in myriad ways over the years, including by using various forms of civil disobedience to get their message across. For example, Indigenous peoples and rural communities in many parts of the world, particularly Latin America, have often resorted to blocking roads or hampering access to the entrances of mines when extractive companies have been involved in human rights abuses, polluting activities, or operating without communities' free, prior and informed consent. In **Honduras**, the "Guapinol camp" was organized by a community group to protest against a mining company they believed was endangering their right to water. The camp remained along a public access road to the mine for several months in 2018 until its occupants were violently evicted and several individuals were subjected to arbitrary detention and an unfounded prosecution.<sup>29</sup> Although their protest ended in violence and human rights abuses by the authorities, the protesters' creative methods helped bring the mining company's activities to international attention. The fight for justice for those detained continues, as does the community's opposition to the mine.

<sup>27</sup>Samuel Brannen, Christian Stirling Haigh & Katherine Schmidt, *The Age of Mass Protest: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend*, 2020.

<sup>28</sup>Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2021/2022: The State of the World's Human Rights* (Index: POL 10/4870/2022), 29 March 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/)

<sup>29</sup>Amnesty International, "Honduras: Prisoners of conscience face trial" (Index: AMR 37/5165/2022), 2022, [amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/prisoners-conscience-face-trial](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/prisoners-conscience-face-trial)

# CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Civil disobedience is a form of protest through non-violent direct action that has traditionally been used to challenge unjust laws or situations. It may include engaging in the premeditated violation of laws which purposefully restrict the exercise of a human right, restrict expression of particular beliefs, or that are similarly in conflict with international human rights law and standards. These include, for example, regulations that impose a blanket ban on protests or a law that criminalizes holding a demonstration without the authorities' prior authorization.

Other acts of civil disobedience may involve breaking an ordinary law that contains a prohibition or another form of restriction not in conflict with international human rights law (such as trespass or obstructing roads). Such activities may be carried out for reasons of conscience or because it is perceived to be the most effective way to protest or express dissent, to get the attention of the general public and contribute to political debate, or to stop or prevent human rights abuses.

When faced with civil disobedience, states sometimes respond by charging those involved with vague and overly broad crimes or unjustified serious criminal offences such as terrorism, treason or rebellion.<sup>30</sup> This response by the authorities can have a powerful effect, deterring others from taking similar action, or even simply exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.

Law enforcement and judicial authorities should therefore be able to consider the different elements of an act of civil disobedience on a case-by-case basis, including its intent (for example, to protest or express political or social dissent, to get the attention of the general public and contribute to the political debate, or to stop or prevent human rights abuses) and its overall disruptive impact (causing temporary damage as opposed to permanent negative consequences for the general public, or the extent of harm to other people's rights and property) when considering sanctions or other restrictions for people who have broken an ordinary law in an act of civil disobedience.

<sup>30</sup>See, for example, the case of the "Stansted 15" in the UK: Amnesty International, "Stansted 15 verdicts show UK authorities have used a sledgehammer to crack a nut", 11 December 2018, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/stansted-15-verdicts-show-uk-authorities-have-used-a-sledgehammer-to-crack-a-nut/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/stansted-15-verdicts-show-uk-authorities-have-used-a-sledgehammer-to-crack-a-nut/); and Hong Kong's pro-democracy Umbrella Movement: Amnesty International, *Umbrella Movement: End Politically Motivated Prosecutions in Hong Kong* (Index: ASA 17/9379/2018), 16 November 2018, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/9379/2018/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/9379/2018/en/)

Undue restrictions by the authorities and other constraints have forced protesters to be flexible, creative and innovative. In **Russia**, protesters initially attempted to circumvent legislation outlawing unauthorized demonstrations by staging one-person pickets.<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, artists and other protesters used creative tactics to express their opposition to the war, such as stamping banknotes and adding anti-war slogans to price tags.<sup>32</sup> In **Myanmar**, after large gatherings against the military coup in 2021 were violently repressed, peaceful protesters organized smaller, shorter flash mobs and silent strikes, where shops were shuttered and busy streets were deserted in defiance of the military government.<sup>33</sup>

Both the digital revolution and the Covid-19 pandemic have accelerated the use of online spaces and popularized virtual protests around a wide variety of initiatives.<sup>34</sup> In **Indonesia**, a protest which had taken place every Thursday since 2007 in front of the presidential palace to demand justice for victims of past abuses<sup>35</sup> was moved online during the pandemic, with organizers asking participants to post messages on social media using the hashtag #kamsianonline. This change in tactics led to increased engagement from the public.<sup>36</sup> In Shanghai, **China**, people who were under a prolonged and strict Covid-19 lockdown in 2022 began banging pots and shouting from their apartments, and sharing videos and messages online, evading censorship by finding creative ways around bans on words, hashtags and even using lyrics from the national anthem.<sup>37</sup>

## 4.3 HOW DISCRIMINATION AFFECTS PROTESTERS

People participating in protests do not all face the same barriers. Women, LGBTI people and gender-non-conforming people face specific challenges to participation in protests and more generally in the civic space, as their rights are restricted by societies that use different types of violence, marginalization, social norms and sometimes even legislation to repress them and to maintain a status quo dominated by patriarchy and heteronormativity. In **Afghanistan**, women are simply banned from taking parts in protests.<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere, women who take to the streets are a prime target for misogyny, sexism and gender-based violence, both by law enforcement agents and non-state actors, affecting the way in which they can participate in protests.

### ZIMBABWE: ACTIVISTS FORCIBLY DISAPPEARED AND SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

Political activists Cecillia Chimbiri, Joanah Mamombe and Netsai Marova were arrested in May 2020 at a police roadblock in Harare, **Zimbabwe's** capital, for leading an anti-government protest over the authorities' response to the Covid-19 pandemic and widespread hunger in the country.

On the same day, the three women were forcibly disappeared while in police custody. During their abduction, they were tortured, including through sexual violence. They were found days later abandoned 87km from Harare and requiring hospital treatment. They were then charged with "publishing or communicating falsehood prejudicial to the state" and "gathering with intent to promote public violence" and were facing trial at the time of writing. Two years later, no investigation has been initiated into their enforced disappearance and torture.

<sup>31</sup>However, legislation has been tightened repeatedly and even solitary protesters have been arrested and prosecuted, see: Amnesty International, *Russia: No Place for Protest* (Index: EUR 46/4328/2021), 12 August 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4328/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4328/2021/en/)

<sup>32</sup>Aleksandra Skochilenko, an activist who replaced price tags in supermarkets with anti-war slogans, was put into pre-trial detention amid a wider clampdown on a network of feminist-led anti-war activists. She is charged with "discrediting the Russian Armed Forces" and faces up to 10 years in jail, see: Amnesty International, "Russia: Artist detained amid clampdown on anti-war feminists", 13 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/russia-artist-detained-amid-clampdown-on-anti-war-feminists/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/russia-artist-detained-amid-clampdown-on-anti-war-feminists/)

<sup>33</sup>Amnesty International, "Myanmar: International community must do more to protect brave protesters", 22 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/myanmar-coup-peaceful-protest/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/myanmar-coup-peaceful-protest/)

<sup>34</sup>Amnesty International, "Activism in times of COVID-19: A time for change?", 29 May 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/05/activism-in-times-of-covid-19/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/05/activism-in-times-of-covid-19/)

<sup>35</sup>UNESCO and Centro Internacional para la promoción de los derechos humanos, "Kamsian (Thursday protest)" [cipdh.gob.ar/memorias-situadas/en/lugar-de-memoria/kamsian-la-protesta-del-jueves-2/pandemic.html](https://cipdh.gob.ar/memorias-situadas/en/lugar-de-memoria/kamsian-la-protesta-del-jueves-2/pandemic.html)

<sup>36</sup>CNN, "Voices of April: China's internet erupts in protest against censorship of Shanghai lockdown video", 25 April 2022, [edition.cnn.com/2022/04/25/china/china-covid-beijing-shanghai-mic-intl-hnk/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/25/china/china-covid-beijing-shanghai-mic-intl-hnk/index.html); The Guardian, "China internet censors scramble as lockdown frustration sparks 'creative' wave of dissent", 20 April 2022, [theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/20/china-internet-censors-scramble-as-lockdown-frustration-sparks-creative-wave-of-dissent](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/20/china-internet-censors-scramble-as-lockdown-frustration-sparks-creative-wave-of-dissent)

<sup>37</sup>Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Suppression of protests at odds with Taliban's claims on human rights", 8 September 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/afghanistan-suppression-of-protests-at-odds-with-talibans-claims-on-human-rights/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/afghanistan-suppression-of-protests-at-odds-with-talibans-claims-on-human-rights/)

<sup>38</sup>Amnesty International, *Zimbabwe: Hospitalized Activists Risk Being Jailed* (Index: AFR 46/2339/2020), 8 June 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/af46/2339/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/af46/2339/2020/en/); Amnesty International, *Zimbabwe: Further Information: Opposition Activists Rearrested; One Charged* (Index: AFR 46/2906/2020), 21 August 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/af46/2906/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/af46/2906/2020/en/)

During peaceful protests in **Colombia** in 2021, women reported multiple incidents of gender-based violence and sexual violence by police,<sup>40</sup> and in **Sudan** in 2018 and 2019, women protesters were called “prostitutes”, threatened with rape and targeted with sexual assault by security forces.<sup>41</sup> In **Belarus**, women engaged in political activism and protests against the government have been the target of smear campaigns and suffered sexual violence in custody. Some have been threatened with losing custody of their children, in some cases even with the abduction of their children, for their participation in anti-government protests.<sup>42</sup> In **Egypt** between 2011 and 2014, women protesting were raped and otherwise sexually assaulted by groups of men, especially in and around Tahrir Square in the capital, Cairo; the epicentre of anti-government protests.<sup>43</sup> In **Mexico**, women protesters who have mobilized against alarming levels of violence against women have been stigmatized as “violent” and criticized for acting outside of gender stereotypes, making them more likely to be attacked both by police and private actors.<sup>44</sup> In **Poland** in 2017, 14 women who challenged the racial hatred spread by anti-human rights groups at the yearly Independence Day march came under attack. They were kicked, hit, spat at and verbally abused. One required medical assistance after losing consciousness. The authorities did not adequately investigate the attack and instead fined and prosecuted some of the women with “obstructing a lawful assembly”. The women were acquitted in 2019.<sup>45</sup>

In many parts of the world, LGBTI people’s very identity is denied or criminalized, and those who dare to protest or express their identity in public risk their lives and liberty, such as when Sarah Hegazy and others were arrested in 2017 simply for flying the rainbow flag at a concert in **Egypt**.<sup>46</sup> In other

countries, Pride marches are expressly banned, such as in **Türkiye**, where the Istanbul Pride Parade has been prohibited since 2015. Those who have defied the ban have been subjected to excessive use of force, arbitrary detention and prosecution.<sup>47</sup> Almost 100 local authorities in **Poland** have gone as far as declaring “LGBTI-free zones” in an attempt to deny all rights to LGBTI people,<sup>48</sup> while in **Paraguay**, actions reclaiming LGBTI rights have been restricted, such as banning a march on the grounds that it would be contrary to “public morality”.<sup>49</sup> Where same-sex conduct is criminalized, those participating in Pride marches or other LGBTI protests are seen as promoters of criminal behaviour and therefore at risk of other penalties. Where Pride marches are allowed, participants face the constant threat of homophobic attacks in places like **Bulgaria**, where the police do not adequately protect them from counter-demonstrators.<sup>50</sup> Even in countries that have laws to protect the rights of LGBTI people, like **Spain** for example,<sup>51</sup> protesting for LGBTI rights is not totally risk-free as homophobic and transphobic sentiment is on the rise.

Engaging in public protest can also trigger harsher repression for people who face other forms of discrimination – particularly so when these intersect – for example, if they are Indigenous or racialized people, people belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, people on the move, or people discriminated against on the basis of descent, caste or occupation. In June 2022, Indigenous Maasai people in **Tanzania** protested against the demarcation of their ancestral lands for use by a private company, which was being carried out without respecting their right to free, prior and informed consent. They were met with a violent crackdown by security forces, who used live ammunition and tear gas against protesters, injuring 30 people and detaining dozens without charge.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Amnesty International, “Colombia: Concerning reports of disappearances and sexual violence against protesters”, 7 May 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/colombia-preocupan-las-denuncias-de-desapariciones-y-violencia-sexual-contra-manifestantes/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/colombia-preocupan-las-denuncias-de-desapariciones-y-violencia-sexual-contra-manifestantes/)

<sup>41</sup>Amnesty International, *Sudan: ‘They Descended on Us Like Rain’: Justice for Victims of Protest Crackdown in Sudan* (Index: AFR 54/1893/2020), 10 March 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1893/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1893/2020/en/)

<sup>42</sup>Amnesty International, “Belarus: Misogyny and discrimination fuels vicious campaign against activists ahead of election”, 17 July 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/belarus-misogyny-and-discrimination-fuels-vicious-campaign-against-activists-ahead-of-election/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/belarus-misogyny-and-discrimination-fuels-vicious-campaign-against-activists-ahead-of-election/)

<sup>43</sup>Amnesty International, *Circles of Hell’: Domestic, Public and State Violence against Women in Egypt* (Index: MDE 12/004/2015), 21 January 2015, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/004/2015/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/004/2015/en/); Amnesty International, *Egypt: Gender-based Violence against Women around Tahrir Square* (Index: MDE 12/009/2013), 6 February 2013, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/009/2013/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/009/2013/en/)

<sup>44</sup>Amnesty International, *Mexico: The (R)age of Women: Stigma and Violence against Women Protesters* (Index: AMR 41/3724/2021), 3 March 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/3724/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/3724/2021/en/)

<sup>45</sup>Amnesty International, “Why we must support 14 women determined to fight hate in Poland”, 13 February 2019, [amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/02/14-women-fighting-hate-in-poland/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/02/14-women-fighting-hate-in-poland/); Amnesty International, “Beaten and prosecuted for standing up to hate”, 30 November 2018, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/beaten-and-prosecuted-for-standing-up-to-hate/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/beaten-and-prosecuted-for-standing-up-to-hate/); Amnesty International Ireland, “The day justice was finally served in Poland for vindicated anti-fascist campaigners”, 30 January 2020, [amnesty.ie/the-day-justice-was-finally-served-in-poland-for-vindicated-anti-fascist-campaigners/](https://www.amnesty.ie/the-day-justice-was-finally-served-in-poland-for-vindicated-anti-fascist-campaigners/)

<sup>46</sup>Amnesty International, “A rainbow coloured thread”, 26 June 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/a-rainbow-coloured-thread/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/a-rainbow-coloured-thread/)

<sup>47</sup>Amnesty International, *Turkey: Peaceful Pride Protestors in Istanbul Subjected to Police use of Unlawful Force* (Index: EUR 44/4362/2021), 29 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/4362/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/4362/2021/en/); Amnesty International, “Turkey: Activists in more than 40 countries demand acquittal of students facing three years in jail for celebrating Pride”, 6 October 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/turkey-activists-in-more-than-40-countries-demand-acquittal-of-students-facing-three-years-in-jail-for-celebrating-pride/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/turkey-activists-in-more-than-40-countries-demand-acquittal-of-students-facing-three-years-in-jail-for-celebrating-pride/); Amnesty International, “Turkey: Welcome acquittal of all Pride participants ‘a victory that should never have been necessary’”, 8 October 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/turkey-welcome-acquittal-of-all-pride-participants-a-victory-that-should-never-have-been-necessary/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/turkey-welcome-acquittal-of-all-pride-participants-a-victory-that-should-never-have-been-necessary/)

<sup>48</sup>Balkan Insight, “A third of Poland declared ‘LGBT free zone’”, 25 February 2020, [balkaninsight.com/2020/02/25/a-third-of-poland-declared-lgbt-free-zone/](https://www.balkaninsight.com/2020/02/25/a-third-of-poland-declared-lgbt-free-zone/)

<sup>49</sup>Amnesty International, “Paraguay: Amnesty International brings unconstitutionality proceedings against resolutions that discriminate against LGBTI people”, 14 October 2019, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/paraguay-resoluciones-discriminatorias-contra-personas-lgbti-2/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/paraguay-resoluciones-discriminatorias-contra-personas-lgbti-2/); Amnesty International, *Paraguay: Acción de Inconstitucionalidad contra Resoluciones 036 y 3076 de 2019* (Index: AMR 46/1203/2019), 14 October 2019, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr46/1203/2019/es/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr46/1203/2019/es/)

<sup>50</sup>See Bulgaria entry in Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2021/2022. The state of the world’s human rights* (Index: POL 10/4870/2022), 29 March 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/)

<sup>51</sup>El Diario, “La paradoja LGTBI en España: líder en avances sociales pero escenario de crueles agresiones homofobas”, 7 September 2021, [eldiario.es/sociedad/paradoja-lgtbi-espana-lider-avances-sociales-esenario-cruels-agresiones-homofobas\\_1\\_8280429.html](https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/paradoja-lgtbi-espana-lider-avances-sociales-esenario-cruels-agresiones-homofobas_1_8280429.html)

<sup>52</sup>Amnesty International, “Tanzania: Halt brutal security operation in Loliondo”, 15 June 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/tanzania-halt-brutal-security-operation-in-loliondo/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/tanzania-halt-brutal-security-operation-in-loliondo/)

## FRANCE: MUSLIM WOMEN FOOTBALLERS BANNED FROM PROTESTING

In February 2022, representatives from the collective of Muslim women footballers called Les Hijabeuses notified the police authorities (*Préfecture*) of a protest due to take place near the French Parliament. They planned to mobilize against a proposed amendment that would reinforce in law an existing French Football Federation discriminatory policy that prohibits women who choose to wear headscarves from participating in competitive matches.

The day before the protest, the *Préfecture* banned the protest, citing concerns over public order and the safety of women protesters. The decision unfairly characterized the women's campaign as part of a dispute between proponents of 'political Islam' and religious patriarchy versus those who respect the values of the French Republic, including equality between the sexes. It also conflated the women's mobilization with social disorder and violence.

The reasons the authorities offered to justify the ban were not necessary, proportionate or legitimate with respect to the government's obligation to protect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and were based on stigmatizing stereotypes. An administrative tribunal reversed the decision of the police, but by then the protests had been called off.<sup>53</sup>

Often the authorities label protesters "terrorists", "rioters", "troublemakers" or "criminals". Such stigmatization delegitimizes protesters and their demands and facilitates violent repression by security forces and attacks from members of the public. For example, words like "thugs" have historically been used to demonize Black people protesting against racism in the **USA** by characterizing them as violent.<sup>54</sup> Palestinians taking part in protests have been arrested for insulting a police officer or "taking part in an illegal gathering" in an attempt to silence those who speak out to condemn **Israel's** institutionalized discrimination and systemic oppression that amounts to apartheid.<sup>55</sup>

Many people who face discrimination because they live in poverty or otherwise face social and economic exclusion are also unable to join protests. They include people living in poverty or who are in precarious employment, those who carry the burden of unpaid care work or who simply don't have the means to go to meeting places, and people without the means to access information about joining protests. It is important to always be aware that some voices are absent from protests because systemic discrimination and marginalization are powerful barriers.

<sup>53</sup>Amnesty International, *France: Prefecture of Police Tries to Suppress Women Footballers' Protest against Lawmakers' Latest Attempt to Undermine Muslim Women in Sport* (Index: EUR 21/5226/2022), 10 February 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/5226/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/5226/2022/en/)

<sup>54</sup>In some countries, these epithets are used in racist attacks against Black people and those demonstrating against racism: NBC News, "'Not by accident': False 'thug' narratives have long been used to discredit civil rights movements", 27 September 2020, [nbcnews.com/news/us-news/not-accident-false-thug-narratives-have-long-been-used-discredit-n1240509](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/not-accident-false-thug-narratives-have-long-been-used-discredit-n1240509)

<sup>55</sup>Amnesty International, "Israeli police targeted Palestinians with discriminatory arrests, torture and unlawful force", 24 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/israeli-police-targeted-palestinians-with-discriminatory-arrests-torture-and-unlawful-force/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/israeli-police-targeted-palestinians-with-discriminatory-arrests-torture-and-unlawful-force/); Amnesty International, *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity* (MDE 15/5141/2022), 1 February 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/)

## 5. Protests under attack



For years, Amnesty International<sup>56</sup> and many other organizations<sup>57</sup> have denounced the fact that the necessary safe and enabling space for civil society is under threat and being progressively reduced worldwide. Governments, armed groups, companies and other powerful entities who believe their interests are threatened have developed and sharpened their range of tactics and tools to silence and repress those who protest and dissent, especially human rights defenders and other critical voices. Various measures have been used, but some of the most damaging include legislation restricting the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly; violent attacks on individuals and groups that exercise their rights; threats, smear campaigns and stigmatization; criminalization; and surveillance; all of which are aggravated by systemic discrimination and exclusion.

The outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020 complicated the trends shrinking the space for civil society, and was used by many governments as a pretext to introduce new restrictions on civic space and to entrench their power and muzzle critical voices.<sup>58</sup>

As people's movements have protested against increasing inequality, corruption, environmental degradation or impunity, governments have reacted with increased levels of force and repression. Many countries continue to require protest organizers gain prior authorization, and often deny it. Restrictions on the time, place and manner of demonstrations have continuously been placed on groups wanting to protest. Covid-19 restrictions have been applied discriminatorily to

stem protest movements. Human rights defenders are facing a higher level of threat in the context of peaceful assemblies, both as organizers and participants.

Tactics to police demonstrations continue to be one of the main threats to the safe and free exercise of the right to peaceful assembly, with many governments relying on unlawful force, intimidation and arbitrary arrests. Security forces have increased the amount of force they use to repress protests, and regularly misuse firearms and less-lethal weapons, including tear gas and rubber bullets, unlawfully killing hundreds and injuring many more. There has also been a trend towards the militarization of state responses to protests, including the use of armed forces and military equipment and tactics to police demonstrations.

The use of new technologies to police demonstrations, including the use of facial recognition and other forms of surveillance, is also having a chilling effect around the world.<sup>59</sup> As more people rely on digital tools and the internet to organize protests and exercise their human rights, technology companies increasingly play a crucial role in enabling people to meet, organize and protest, both offline and online. Yet some of these companies have also been involved in situations that curtail these rights through their role in the creation and use of targeted surveillance technologies and spyware, by allowing online harassment and hate speech to proliferate, and by cooperating with governments to implement internet shutdowns and censorship that prevent people from mobilizing or sharing information about abuses during protests.

<sup>56</sup>For example: Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2021/2022. The state of the world's human rights*, (Index: POL 10/4870/2022), 29 March 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/) as well as previous annual reports; Amnesty International, *Human Rights Defenders Under Threat – a Shrinking Space for Civil Society* (Index: ACT 30/6011/2017), 16 May 2017, [amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/6011/2017/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/6011/2017/en/); Amnesty International, *Laws Designed to Silence: The Global Crackdown on Civil Society Organizations* (Index: ACT 30/9647/2019), 21 February 2019, [amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/9647/2019/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/9647/2019/en/); Amnesty International, *Silenced and Misinformed: Freedom of Expression in Danger during Covid-19* (Index: POL 30/4751/2021), 19 October 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/4751/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/4751/2021/en/)

<sup>57</sup>For example: Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Report: *Protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests during crisis situations*, 16 May 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/50/42; the **Civicus Monitor**, the **ICNL Civic Freedom Monitor**, and many more.

<sup>58</sup>Amnesty International, *Daring to Stand up for Human Rights in a Pandemic* (Index: ACT 30/2765/2020), 6 August 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/2765/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/2765/2020/en/)

<sup>59</sup>See Amnesty International **#Banthescan** campaign.

## 5.1 TRENDS IN REPRESSION OF PROTESTS AND THE USE OF FORCE

### SECURITIZATION

Public security imperatives are one of the main justifications used by governments to curtail peaceful protests. Authorities often contend that protests are a threat to public order, can be used to overthrow a government, or even pose a “terrorist” threat. This delegitimizes peaceful protesters by painting them as a threat to others. In turn, this can justify a zero-tolerance approach and facilitates the introduction of draconian security legislation, or laws that are broad and vague and can be easily

misused against protesters. This narrative that characterizes protests as a threat to security has also led to heavy handed policing, for example by using unlawful force and arbitrary arrests, or by deploying police forces with a threatening appearance, both in numbers and equipment. It has also justified pre-emptive and deterrent measures, such as the denial of authorization to protest, stop-and-search tactics, predictive policing, pre-emptive arrests and surveillance.

### HONG KONG: NATIONAL SECURITY LAW USED AGAINST COMMEMORATION OF THE 1989 TIANANMEN CRACKDOWN

The currently detained human rights lawyer and labour rights advocate Chow Hang-tung was charged for “inciting subversion” under the new National Security Law in September 2021 and faces a prison sentence of up to 10 years. She, together with other core members of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China (the Alliance), was targeted simply for peacefully commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest crackdown.

The Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (NSL) was passed and enacted in Hong Kong in June 2020. The impact of the NSL has been immediate and sweeping. The law’s expansive definition of “national security”, which follows that of the Chinese central authorities, lacks clarity and legal predictability and has been used arbitrarily as a pretext to restrict the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, among others, and to repress dissent and political opposition.

By accusing political parties, academics, civil society organizations and basically any individual actually or perceived to be critical of the present government and political system in Hong Kong of threatening national security, the authorities have sought to justify censorship, harassment, arrests and prosecutions that violate human rights. The overly broad definitions of the National Security Law have given the authorities free rein to silence dissent and crack down on civil society organizations.

The Hong Kong government is increasingly criminalizing the work of civil society organizations, accusing local and overseas activists and groups who form international partnerships or conduct peaceful international activism of “colluding with foreign forces”.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup>Amnesty International, *Hong Kong: Further Information: Imprisoned June 4 Vigil Organizer Faces Further Charges: Chow Hang-tung* (Index: ASA 17/5555/2022), 3 May 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/5555/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/5555/2022/en/)

The securitization of protests is often aggravated by discriminatory laws and practices affecting some people more than others, including women, LGBTI people, racialized people, discriminated minorities, migrants and others. For example, in **France**, quantitative studies demonstrate that men and boys perceived to be Black or of Arab descent are disproportionately targeted for stop-and-frisk actions, while qualitative reports document the devastating impact of discriminatory

policing, including on children as young as 12.<sup>61</sup> In **Colombia** in 2021, stigmatizing messages from government authorities contributed to the disproportionate and violent response by police forces in Cali against unarmed youth, mostly Afro-descendant and from low-income families, and against Indigenous peoples – groups that have historically been disproportionately impacted by the consequences of the armed conflict and the lack of protection from the state.<sup>62</sup>

### INDIA: DRACONIAN LAWS USED AGAINST PEACEFUL PROTESTERS

Draconian laws, particularly the counterterror Unlawful Prevention (Activities) Act (UAPA)<sup>63</sup> and the crime of sedition, have been used repeatedly against peaceful protesters, journalists and human rights defenders in India. The slow investigative processes and extremely stringent bail provisions under these laws mean that human rights defenders and others who speak out may face many years behind bars unjustly while their trial is ongoing.

Some of those arrested under UAPA in the last few years and who were unable to access bail for prolonged periods of time include 11 activists advocating for the rights of Dalit and

Adivasi communities who were accused of inciting the Bhima Koregaon riots,<sup>64</sup> people who protested against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act,<sup>65</sup> and human rights defenders who exposed human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, such as Khurram Parvez, who has been in detention since November 2021.<sup>66</sup>

In 2021, Disha Ravi, a young environmental and climate activist, was arrested under the colonial era crime of “sedition” simply for sharing a Google document intended to help farmers protest against new agricultural reform laws in India.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup>As a result Amnesty International and other organizations have filed a class action lawsuit against the French state which has failed to take steps to prevent and remedy ethnic profiling: Amnesty International, “France: Class action lawsuit against ethnic profiling filed over systemic racial discrimination”, 22 July 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/france-class-action-lawsuit-against-ethnic-profiling-filed-over-systemic-racial-discrimination-2/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/france-class-action-lawsuit-against-ethnic-profiling-filed-over-systemic-racial-discrimination-2/)

<sup>62</sup>Amnesty International, *Colombia: Cali: In the Epicenter of Repression: Human Rights Violations during the 2021 National Strike in Cali, Colombia* (Index: AMR 23/4405/2021), 30 July 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/4405/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/4405/2021/en/)

<sup>63</sup>See concerns raised in an Amnesty International letter to UN Independent Experts on 6 May 2020.

<sup>64</sup>Amnesty International, *India: Crackdown on Dissent Continues during Covid-19* (Index: ASA/20/2174/2020), 20 April 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/2174/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/2174/2020/en/)

<sup>65</sup>Amnesty International, *India: Protestors Arrested for Opposing Bigoted Law* (Index: ASA 20/2269/2020), 5 May 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/2269/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/2269/2020/en/)

<sup>66</sup>Amnesty International and Civicus, Joint statement: “India: Human rights defender Khurram Parvez marks 150 days arbitrarily detained on baseless charges”, 25 April 2022, [bit.ly/3bZ9Twp](https://www.bit.ly/3bZ9Twp)

<sup>67</sup>BBC, “Disha Ravi: the jailed Indian activist linked to Greta Thunberg”, 15 February 2021, [bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-56068522](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-56068522)

## MILITARIZATION

Since the early 2000s, Amnesty International has documented an increased militarization of law enforcement and how this has been applied to protest situations. In many circumstances, governments have deployed the armed forces to police demonstrations. In other cases, police officers are dressed in full riot gear backed by an arsenal of military-like equipment, including armoured vehicles, military-grade aircraft, surveillance drones, guns and assault weapons, stun grenades and sound cannons.

### MEXICO: MILITARIZATION OF PUBLIC SECURITY

Mexico embarked on a bloody “war on drugs” in 2006, which included deploying members of the armed forces to combat organized crime and carry out other policing tasks that should normally be in the hands of civilian police forces. Over the years, Mexico has seen over 200,000 people killed, thousands of people forcibly disappeared, and widespread human rights abuses including torture and other ill-treatment. Impunity for perpetrators remains the norm.

In 2019, the government created a new highly militarized police force called the National Guard while maintaining the deployment of the military in the streets. As of July 2020, the National Guard comprised approximately 90,000 troops, of whom more than 60,000 had transferred from the Army and the Navy.<sup>69</sup> While the authorities have tried to present the National Guard as a new civilian force in charge of public security, many doubts remain due to their training, tactics and equipment.

The militarization of policing is the predictable consequence of the trend in securitization, as police cultures across the world appear to be increasingly defined by an ‘us versus them’ mentality. Protesters are depicted as “public enemies”, “rioters”, “terrorists”, and more broadly as national security threats who ‘deserve’ harsh treatment. The militarization of policing is antagonizing and sends an intimidating message of fear, stokes tensions with the protesters, creates conflict, and leads to more violent and aggressive policing of protests. Marginalized groups are particularly exposed to the militarization of policing, for example in Brazil, where favela dwellers, particularly young Black men, have borne the brunt of harsh military-style policing for years.<sup>68</sup>

The National Guard has been involved in the violent dispersal of protests and is currently the security force in Mexico that faces the most human rights complaints.<sup>70</sup> For example, in September 2020, thousands of agricultural workers protested at La Boquilla, a dam in the northern state of Chihuahua, to defend their right to water. National Guard officers fired tear gas at the demonstrators, who were armed with bats, poles and rocks. Undeterred, the protesters managed to seize control of the dam, forcing the soldiers to retreat. Later that day, Jessica Silva and Jaime Torres, who had joined the protest, were driving home when members of the National Guard opened fire on their vehicle. Jessica Silva was killed instantly and Jaime Torres was seriously wounded.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup>Amnesty International, *Brazil: You Killed My Son: Homicides by Military Police in the City of Rio de Janeiro* (Index: AMR 19/2068/2015), 3 August 2015, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr19/2068/2015/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr19/2068/2015/en/)

<sup>69</sup>Amnesty International, “Mexico’s new National Guard is breaking its vow to respect human rights”, 8 November 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/mexicos-national-guard-breaking-vow-respect-human-rights/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/mexicos-national-guard-breaking-vow-respect-human-rights/)

<sup>70</sup>See Mexico entry in: Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2021/2022: The State of the World’s Human Rights* (Index: POL 10/4870/2022), 29 March 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/)

<sup>71</sup>Amnesty International, “Mexico’s new National Guard is breaking its vow to respect human rights”, 8 November 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/mexicos-national-guard-breaking-vow-respect-human-rights/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/mexicos-national-guard-breaking-vow-respect-human-rights/)

The problem goes beyond the militarization of existing police forces. Often, states resort to the direct use of armed forces to carry out policing tasks, both because they are seen as a tougher, more intimidating force, and because in some countries they are presented as less corrupt and more effective than police. But armies are organized, trained and equipped primarily for defence or war, not for service and law enforcement among the population where mediation and de-escalation tactics are essential. The equipment employed by the armed forces when policing demonstrations is often inappropriate and disproportionate, and can include firearms, explosive weapons and tanks.

In **Kazakhstan**, people took part in mass protests in early 2022 against the rise in fuel prices and against corruption, political stagnation and widespread injustice. Authorities responded harshly towards protesters, targeting and silencing journalists and activists, and suppressing the right to freedom of expression and the free flow of independent information. The army was deployed to deal with protesters. As damage to property and the number of casualties grew, troops in the streets were instructed to open fire without warning, leading to scores of deaths.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, protesters are sometimes tried in military courts, contrary to international standards, while soldiers accused of abuses against protesters have been protected by military courts that lack independence and impartiality. In **Cameroon**, supporters of the main opposition party, human rights defenders, protesters from the anglophone region and members of social movements have been repressed simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. In some cases, protesters have been handed down heavy sentences by military courts, such

as in the case of Dorgelesse Nguessan who was arrested at her first ever protest in September 2020. The protest had gone ahead despite a ban by the authorities but was peaceful. Even so, the security forces used tear gas and water cannons to disperse protesters and arrested more than 500 people. Dorgelesse Nguessan was sentenced to five years in prison for “insurrection”, “rebellion” and “endangering state security”.<sup>73</sup>

Geopolitics and economic interests are also contributing to the increased militarization of police forces, having a profound impact on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. With the growing influence of the private sector seeking new markets and greater sales in equipment and weapons, many countries have continued to allow the transfer of militarized equipment and of less-lethal weapons to countries where these instruments are used to repress protests and violate human rights.

Following the 2021 military coup in **Myanmar**, the military used lethal force against peaceful protesters unlawfully. More than 1,700 people were killed and more than 13,000 arrested in the aftermath of the coup. Activists and human rights defenders witnessed or experienced abuses by military forces while demonstrating peacefully. These abuses included shootings, beatings and attempts to ram vehicles into protesters.<sup>74</sup> In June 2021, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on all member states to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar, after strongly condemning the worsening crackdown on peaceful protesters and civil society.<sup>75</sup> While Myanmar’s brave activists are still pursuing peaceful protests despite grave danger, the international community has thus far failed to implement a global arms embargo to stop the Myanmar military from using weapons of warfare to kill peaceful protesters.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Amnesty International, “The calm in Kazakhstan is restored, but the pressing questions on multiple human rights violations remain unanswered”, 25 January 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2022/01/the-calm-in-kazakhstan-is-restored-but-the-pressing-questions-on-multiple-human-rights-violations-remain-unanswered/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2022/01/the-calm-in-kazakhstan-is-restored-but-the-pressing-questions-on-multiple-human-rights-violations-remain-unanswered/)

<sup>73</sup>Amnesty International, “Cameroon: More than a hundred detainees from Anglophone regions and opposition party languishing in jail for speaking out”, 24 January 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/01/cameroon-more-than-a-hundred-detainees-from-anglophone/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/01/cameroon-more-than-a-hundred-detainees-from-anglophone/)

<sup>74</sup>Amnesty International, “Myanmar: International community must do more to protect brave protesters”, 22 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/myanmar-coup-peaceful-protest/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/myanmar-coup-peaceful-protest/)

<sup>75</sup>Amnesty International, “UN: New resolution against violence in Myanmar must prompt global arms embargo”, 18 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/un-new-resolution-against-violence-in-myanmar-must-prompt-global-arms-embargo-2/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/un-new-resolution-against-violence-in-myanmar-must-prompt-global-arms-embargo-2/)

<sup>76</sup>Amnesty International, “Myanmar: International community must do more to protect brave protesters”, 22 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/myanmar-coup-peaceful-protest/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/myanmar-coup-peaceful-protest/)

## USE OF FORCE, INCLUDING LESS-LETHAL WEAPONS

Law enforcement officers have a duty to minimize harm and injury, preserve human life and exercise restraint in the use of force. They should always use the least intrusive means and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved.<sup>77</sup> In addition, they have a duty to enable protests, tolerate disruption to a large degree, and protect protesters from violence and other interference with their rights.

Yet Amnesty International and civil society organizations around the world continue to document the use of unlawful force, including in the violent repression and dispersal of peaceful protests. Securitization and militarization of policing are contributing to the deepening violence and repression, feeding into narratives that depict protesters as violent and dangerous and the increased polarization of public discourse. The involvement of the military, the indiscriminate use of firearms by security forces, and the misuse of less-lethal weapons have all contributed to increasing numbers of protesters being seriously injured and killed. Moreover, the international community's failure to regulate the trade and availability of lethal and less-lethal weapons and equipment that are used to suppress protests is further fuelling the abuses committed by security forces while policing demonstrations.

International standards on the use of force also regulate the way in which security forces are supposed to use firearms and less-lethal weapons. In accordance with the primary legal obligation to facilitate protests, law enforcement agencies should deploy a range of non-violent means while actively avoiding the use of force or any means capable of causing injury or death to protesters.<sup>78</sup> For the same purpose, law enforcement officials deployed must be suitably equipped with protective devices to minimize the need to use weapons.

Firearms may only be used against individuals presenting an imminent threat of death or serious

injury.<sup>79</sup> They must be carefully targeted, taking all available precautions to prevent people who are not presenting such a threat being injured, and their use must be preceded by a warning. Indiscriminate firing into a crowd and the use of firearms as a means to disperse an assembly are unlawful under international human rights law and a violation of the right to life.

In **Mali**, between May 2020 and the military coup in August of that same year, several demonstrations, both spontaneous and authorized, occurred in several cities. The demonstrations took place against the backdrop of contested parliamentary elections, restrictions to freedom of movement and peaceful assembly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and a host of security and social grievances against the government. Amnesty International documented several instances of the use of force and firearms by security forces leading to the deaths of at least 18 people, with dozens more injured, including with gunshot wounds. Many were hit or wounded in the chest or back, and the injured included bystanders, demonstrating that the security forces were not shooting in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury.<sup>80</sup> In **Guinea** at least 50 people were killed and nearly 200 injured between October 2019 and July 2020 during demonstrations against constitutional reforms, the lack of electricity and the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the killings and injuries were caused by firearms used by security forces. These violations represented a continuation of the pattern of military involvement in policing and excessive use of force during demonstrations with subsequent impunity.<sup>81</sup>

In **Nicaragua**, people who protested in 2018 against government reforms of the social security system were met with violent repression. Security forces used excessive, disproportionate and often indiscriminate force, and conducted several cases of possible extrajudicial executions. Security forces also made widespread use of assault rifles and military-grade weapons.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup>See for example, UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials; also Amnesty International Netherlands, *Use of Force: Guidelines for Implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials*, August 2015, [policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2015/01/ainl\\_guidelines\\_use\\_of\\_force\\_0.pdf?x19059](https://www.policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2015/01/ainl_guidelines_use_of_force_0.pdf?x19059)

<sup>78</sup>Amnesty International Netherlands, *Use of Force: Guidelines for Implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials*, August 2015, §7.1 [policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2015/01/ainl\\_guidelines\\_use\\_of\\_force\\_0.pdf?x19059](https://www.policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2015/01/ainl_guidelines_use_of_force_0.pdf?x19059); UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, para. 2.

<sup>79</sup>UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, No. 9.

<sup>80</sup>Amnesty International, *Killed, Wounded and Forgotten? Accountability for Excessive Use of Force during Protests in Mali* (Index: AFR 37/3748/2021), 23 April 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr37/3748/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr37/3748/2021/en/)

<sup>81</sup>Amnesty International, *Marching to Their Death: The Urgent Need of Justice for the Victims of Guinea's Crackdown on Demonstrations* (Index: AFR 29/2937/2020), 1 October 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr29/2937/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr29/2937/2020/en/)

<sup>82</sup>Amnesty International, *Instilling Terror: From Lethal Force to Persecution in Nicaragua* (Index: AMR 43/9213/2018), 18 October 2018, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr43/9213/2018/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr43/9213/2018/en/); Amnesty International, *Shoot to Kill: Nicaragua's Strategy to Repress Protest* (Index: AMR 43/8470/2018), 29 May 2018, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr43/8470/2018/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr43/8470/2018/en/)

## LESS-LETHAL WEAPONS

Less-lethal weapons (such as batons, pepper spray, tear gas, stun grenades, water cannons and rubber bullets) are intended to allow law enforcement officers to use the minimum level of force for the circumstances and avoid using lethal force when facing a particular threat. Some less-lethal weapons can have a legitimate use in law enforcement if employed correctly and in line with international standards on the use of force. Yet such equipment is open to abuse and may even have unintended lethal effects if not used in compliance with human rights standards.

Certain less-lethal weapons have no place in law enforcement because they are inherently abusive (such as sting ball grenades) and their use and trade should be outlawed. Many other types of less-lethal weapons are readily misused in a manner that constitutes torture or other ill-treatment, so their use and trade must be controlled.

Among the most frequently used and misused weapons in the context of protests are police batons, which have been used to beat protesters

to intimidate and punish them, including when people are already restrained, to choke people in neck holds, and even to commit sexual violence.<sup>83</sup>

Another very common less-lethal weapon used in the policing of demonstrations is tear gas. The availability of tear gas can prevent police having to resort to more harmful weapons. But, in practice, police forces around the world have used tear gas in ways that it is not intended to be used, often in large quantities against largely peaceful protesters or by firing canisters directly at people.<sup>84</sup>

The widespread abuse of less-lethal weapons raises questions about the lack of regulations around appropriate use, the questionable decision-making of those in control of police operations, and the lack of training of many police officers deploying them. In many countries, the use of and trade in less-lethal weapons is poorly regulated and police are inadequately trained and enjoy widespread impunity.

Less-lethal weapons have been used in the context of protests in countries in all regions of the world and have resulted in a very high number of human rights violations, including permanent injuries causing disability and death. The use of these weapons, either indiscriminately or targeted to inflict serious injury, has become a widespread practice in the context of social protests. In recent years the repression of social protest through less-lethal weapons has been reported in **Bolivia, Chile, China, Colombia, Greece, Mexico, Nicaragua, Spain, Türkiye** and **Venezuela**, among other countries. During peaceful pro-democracy protests in **Thailand** in 2020 and 2021, police used excessive force and unlawfully used their batons against protesters on several occasions. They also used rubber bullets and water cannons combined with chemical irritants, with water jets aimed at close range at protesters,

observers and journalists who were often so tightly crowded together that they were unable to move or find cover.<sup>85</sup> In **France** in recent years, hundreds of protesters and law enforcement officials have suffered injuries during demonstrations, including, although not limited to, the so-called 'Yellow Vests' protests. Many of the injuries were sustained from inherently abusive less-lethal weapons (such as sting ball grenades and explosive GM2L grenades)<sup>86</sup> or the misuse of kinetic impact projectiles (rubber bullets) and tear gas grenades<sup>87</sup> against people attending or observing protests and even bystanders. In 2018, 80-year-old Zineb Redouane died after being hit by a tear gas grenade that was fired through her fourth-floor apartment window by French police.<sup>88</sup> The same year, police in France used unnecessary and excessive force against school children protesting against education reforms.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Amnesty International, "Blunt force: Investigating the misuse of police batons and related equipment", September 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2021/09/blunt-force/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2021/09/blunt-force/); Amnesty International Netherlands, "Batons and other handheld kinetic impact weapons: An Amnesty International position paper", March 2022, [amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2022/06/Position-paper-striking-weapons-final.pdf](https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2022/06/Position-paper-striking-weapons-final.pdf); Amnesty International Netherlands, "20 rules for the use of batons and other handheld kinetic impact weapons in law enforcement", June 2022, [amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2022/06/20-rules-striking-weapons\\_web.pdf](https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2022/06/20-rules-striking-weapons_web.pdf)

<sup>84</sup>Amnesty International, "Choking dissent: How tear gas is used to crush dissent", 2020, <https://teargas.amnesty.org/#introduction>

<sup>85</sup>Amnesty International, Thailand: 'My Face Burned as if on Fire': Unlawful Use of Force by Thailand's Police During Public Assemblies (Index: ASA 39/4356/2021), 2 July 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/4356/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/4356/2021/en/)

<sup>86</sup>Amnesty International, "France: Abusive and illegal use of force by police at Redon rave highlights need for accountability", 14 September 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/france-abusive-and-illegal-use-of-force-by-police-at-redon-rave-highlights-need-for-accountability/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/france-abusive-and-illegal-use-of-force-by-police-at-redon-rave-highlights-need-for-accountability/)

<sup>87</sup>Amnesty International, France: Call for Suspending the Use of Rubber Bullets Fired with the LBD40 and for Banning Grenades GLI-F4 in the Context of Policing Protests (Index: EUR 21/0304/2019), 3 May 2019, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/0304/2019/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/0304/2019/en/)

<sup>88</sup>Libération, "Mort de Zineb Redouane : le CRS mis en cause échappe à la sanction administrative", 30 October 2021, [liberation.fr/societe/police-justice/mort-de-zineb-redouane-le-crs-mis-en-cause-echappe-a-la-sanction-administrative-20211030\\_SZRGS2FSUVHHPD2PPNEB4M3JQE/](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/police-justice/mort-de-zineb-redouane-le-crs-mis-en-cause-echappe-a-la-sanction-administrative-20211030_SZRGS2FSUVHHPD2PPNEB4M3JQE/)

<sup>89</sup>Amnesty International, "Police must end use of excessive force against protesters and high-school children in France", 14 December 2018, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/police-must-end-use-of-excessive-force-against-protesters-and-high-school-children-in-france-2/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/police-must-end-use-of-excessive-force-against-protesters-and-high-school-children-in-france-2/)

## CHILE: DELIBERATELY INFLECTING INJURY ON PROTESTERS

In 2019, Chile witnessed mass protests demanding greater equality and human rights. The authorities responded with violent repression and criminalization of protesters, excessive use of force, and discriminatory and disproportionate use of pre-trial detention.

As a result of the excessive force employed by the military police (*Carabineros*) in just over five months of protests, at least one person was killed and hundreds were seriously injured, including 347 who sustained eye injuries. Most of these injuries were from the impact of rubberized buckshot from riot-control shotguns loaded with multiple kinetic impact projectile ammunition, used in a virtually uncontrolled and indiscriminate manner. During those five months, almost 150,000 rounds were fired, each with 12 pellets.

On numerous occasions this ammunition was used against protesters who did not pose a risk to the life of police officers.

*Carabinero* officers also fired at parts of the body where there was a high risk that impact could cause serious injury and prove fatal, such as the head and chest. This deliberate practice, tacitly ordered or at a minimum tolerated by *Carabineros* commanders, was recognized in the case of Gustavo Gatica, who lost his sight as a result.<sup>90</sup> The police also used tear gas disproportionately, fired from grenade launchers, to disperse people. On multiple occasions, canisters were fired directly at people's bodies to cause injury, and not as a dispersal tool.<sup>91</sup> Fabiola Campillai was shot in the face with a tear gas canister, losing her vision permanently in both eyes, as well as her sense of smell and taste.<sup>92</sup>

## TÜRKIYE: WATER CANNONS USED AGAINST THE 'SATURDAY MOTHERS/PEOPLE'

In Türkiye, police used tear gas and water cannons in August 2018 to disperse a peaceful gathering of hundreds of people, including relatives of victims of enforced disappearance, some in their 80s, known as 'Saturday Mothers/People'. The Mothers, other relatives and their supporters, inspired by Argentina's Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, have been holding peaceful weekly vigils in Istanbul since 1995 to protest against the enforced disappearance of their relatives and to demand truth and justice.

In August 2018, a larger-than-usual crowd gathered to mark their 700th weekly vigil. Ahead of the vigil, the authorities banned the gathering from Galatasaray Square, which is a significant place of memory and human rights struggle in central Istanbul. Dozens were detained on the day. Forty-six people are currently on trial for their participation in the vigil after being unjustly indicted for attending an "unlawful protest" under

the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations (Law No. 2911). Along with several relatives of the disappeared, those on trial include human rights defenders, political activists and journalists. If found guilty, they face sentences of between six months and three years in prison. The trial is expected to last until 2023.<sup>93</sup>

After the authorities imposed their unlawful ban on the Saturday Mothers/People, the group held their vigils outside the office of the Human Rights Association near Taksim Square, Istanbul, in a narrow street, as a temporary solution while they continued to demand that the ban on using Galatasaray Square be lifted. During the Covid-19 pandemic, they held symbolic online vigils every Saturday, keeping their longstanding protest alive. In June 2022, riot police prevented their 900th peaceful vigil from going ahead in Galatasaray Square by detaining 16 participants, including well-known human rights defenders and relatives of the disappeared.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup>Amnesty International, *Gustavo Gatica, Chile: Blinded by Police for Demanding Dignity and Equality* (Index: POL 32/2887/2020), 30 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol32/2887/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol32/2887/2020/en/)

<sup>91</sup>Amnesty International, *Eyes on Chile: Police Violence and Command Responsibility During the Period of Social Unrest* (Index: AMR 22/3133/2020, 14 October 2020, [amr22/3133/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr22/3133/2020/en/))

<sup>92</sup>Amnesty International, *Eyes on Chile: Police Violence and Command Responsibility During the Period of Social Unrest* (Index: AMR 22/3133/2020, 14 October 2020, [amr22/3133/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr22/3133/2020/en/))

<sup>93</sup>Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch & Front Line Defenders, "Turkey: Joint Statement: Authorities should seek acquittal of all in the Saturday Mothers/People trial" (Index: EUR 44/3890/2021), 24 March 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/3890/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/3890/2021/en/)

<sup>94</sup>Amnesty International, "Turkey: Police detain human rights defenders and relatives of disappeared people on Saturday Mothers/People 900th vigil", 25 June 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/turkey-police-detain-human-rights-defenders-and-relatives-of-disappeared-people-on-saturday-mothers-people-900th-vigil/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/turkey-police-detain-human-rights-defenders-and-relatives-of-disappeared-people-on-saturday-mothers-people-900th-vigil/)

In some cases, protests have been handled very differently by the same authorities depending on the identity and demands of the protesters. In **Canada**, a highly disruptive protest throughout February 2022 against government-imposed Covid-19 measures saw protesters using large trucks to block the downtown area of the capital city, Ottawa. The protest was initially tolerated by police authorities despite deeply troubling reports of violence, harassment, intimidation and hate speech, including Nazi flags, Confederate flags, and other symbols of racism and hate being used by protesters.<sup>95</sup> The treatment of these protests stood in clear contradiction to

the way the Canadian police have cracked down on Indigenous people defending their lands from unwanted fossil fuel expansion projects, such as the TransMountain and Coastal GasLink pipelines, and environmental defenders trying to stop old growth logging on Vancouver Island. In 2017 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police established a special unit specifically to deal with protests against pipelines and other industrial developments. While enforcing injunctions to remove peaceful land defenders, police have used drones, dogs, assault weapons, chainsaws, axes, bear spray, and snipers against Indigenous peoples.<sup>96</sup>

## 5.2 USING THE LAW TO REPRESS PROTESTS

### ORDINARY LEGISLATION RESTRICTING PROTEST

Many governments are increasingly trying to control and suppress dissent by introducing or failing to repeal ordinary legislation that imposes illegitimate restrictions on protests, such as requiring protest organizers to apply for authorization prior to assemblies. These authorization regimes continue to be in place in many countries because authorities fail to understand that assembling to protest is a right rather than a privilege. Although authorities might rightfully request prior notification for the purpose of preparing to facilitate the assembly, for example by diverting traffic or ensuring protection from counter-demonstrators, in some cases the requirement for notification has been used as a form of authorization.

Where authorization regimes are in place, authorities have denied permission citing unreasonable concerns about the place, time and manner of the protest, flouting the right of protesters to assemble peacefully within sight and sound of their intended audience and to freely determine the content of their protest without censorship. Often, there is a lack of meaningful and swift judicial recourse to

challenge these bans. For example, in **Senegal** a ban on all political demonstrations in the centre of the capital, Dakar, has been in place since 2011, leading to the exclusion of protests near government buildings. This ban was ruled unlawful by the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice in March 2022.<sup>97</sup>

In some cases, governments have put in place measures such as blanket bans on the time, place and manner of protests. For example, **Egypt**, where the repeated use of lethal force with impunity, mass arrests and criminalization of protests since 2013 has effectively eradicated protests, authorities announced that they will only allow activists to voice their opinions and hold protests at a specific designated area during the next annual UN climate change conference (COP27) to be held in November 2022 in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm al-Sheikh.<sup>98</sup> These undue restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly have been facilitated by anti-rights narratives citing imperatives and concerns such as public security, terrorism and public health, and laws criminalizing specific behaviours, decisions and identities, such as the criminalization of abortion, same-sex conduct, use of drugs or sex work.

<sup>95</sup>Amnesty International Canada, "Statement on 'freedom convoy' blockade", 11 February 2022, [amnesty.ca/news/ottawa-protests-statement-11-feb-2022/](https://www.amnesty.ca/news/ottawa-protests-statement-11-feb-2022/)

<sup>96</sup>Amnesty International, *Canada: Indigenous Land Defenders at Risk* (Index: AMR 20/5745/2022), 22 June 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/5745/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/5745/2022/en/)

<sup>97</sup>Amnesty International, "Sénégal: La Cour de Justice de la CEDEAO ordonne l'abrogation de l'arrêté interdisant les manifestations politiques au centre-ville de Dakar", 13 May 2022, [amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2022/05/senegal-la-cour-de-justice-de-la-cedeao-ordonne-labrogation-de-larrete-interdisant-les-manifestations-politiques-au-centre-ville-de-dakar/](https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2022/05/senegal-la-cour-de-justice-de-la-cedeao-ordonne-labrogation-de-larrete-interdisant-les-manifestations-politiques-au-centre-ville-de-dakar/)

<sup>98</sup>Amnesty International, "Egypt: Statements on COP27 imply restricting activism", 12 July 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/egypt-statements-on-cop27-imply-restricting-activism/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/egypt-statements-on-cop27-imply-restricting-activism/)

## RUSSIA: NO PLACE FOR PROTEST

In **Russia** the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are restricted to such a degree that the ability to protest is under serious threat, particularly if protests are aimed at the authorities.

The 2004 Federal Law on Assemblies, Rallies, Demonstrations, Marches and Pickets (Law on Assemblies) placed illegitimate restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Since then, legislation has been tightened numerous times, particularly in the context of crackdowns on anti-government protests. The law imposes restrictions on who can organize protests, for example banning foreigners and minors; it stipulates a strict authorization process which often leads to denial of permission, and it does not include provisions for spontaneous protests.

Authorities can also deny protests based on the proposed location, or force protesters to gather in specially designated sites, often in hard-to-reach places. Moreover, the Russian authorities are employing ever harsher and unlawful police tactics and increasing the list and severity of sanctions against protesters.<sup>99</sup>

Covid-19 has given further impetus to this process and most recently new legislation has introduced heavy penalties for anyone who might dare to protest against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>100</sup>

Numerous countries in **Europe** have taken steps to place illegitimate restrictions on protests. For example in 2020, **Greece** introduced detrimental legislative reforms regulating demonstrations, with concerning provisions on dispersal and prohibition of assemblies, the regulation of spontaneous assemblies, and notification requirements. In early 2021, the Greek government also introduced guidelines in relation to the use of force which appear to be overly broad regarding the situations where police may be permitted to resort to force. The guidelines are silent on the threshold of risk for which different means, methods and weapons can be used. In addition, the authorities introduced three disproportionate blanket bans on protests citing concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic. These restrictions led to fines, arbitrary arrests and criminalization of human rights lawyers, women's rights defenders, trade unionists and members of political parties who were arbitrarily detained for allegedly breaching public health regulations. People interviewed by Amnesty International between November 2020 and March 2021 described how police resorted to the unnecessary and excessive use of water cannon and chemical irritants against peaceful protesters. Some spoke of police hitting them with batons on their heads and using stun grenades in a way that could cause considerable injury, including hearing problems.<sup>101</sup>

In **France**, large protests have taken place since 2018 with millions of people demanding social and economic justice. In response, law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities have weaponized criminal law and resorted to broad and vague laws which do not comply with international human rights law to crackdown on peaceful protesters. Protesters have faced fines, arrests and prosecutions for peaceful conduct that should not be punished, such as organizing a protest without complying with notification requirements, failure to disperse, participating in a protest wearing goggles, helmets, dust masks or other protective equipment against rubber bullets and tear gas or other face-coverings (even during Covid-19 pandemic), and voicing criticism against law enforcement officials. Hundreds of peaceful protesters have been arrested and prosecuted for "participating in a group with a view to preparing acts of violence", a provision introduced to address the problem of organized violence. However, the vague formulation of the provision enabled the authorities to use it against protesters both before and during demonstrations, place them in pre-charge detention, and prosecute them on flimsy grounds. Judicial authorities also imposed bail conditions that prohibited people from participating in protests or restricted their freedom of movement with a similar effect, pending trial.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup>Amnesty International, *Russia: No Place for Protest* (Index: EUR 46/4328/2021), 12 August 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4328/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4328/2021/en/)

<sup>100</sup>Amnesty International, *Russian Federation: End Censorship on Voices against the War* (Index: EUR 46/5345/2022), 14 March 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/5345/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/5345/2022/en/)

<sup>101</sup>Amnesty International, *Greece: Freedom of Assembly at Risk and Unlawful Use of Force in the Era of Covid-19* (Index: EUR 25/4399/2021), 14 July 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/4399/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/4399/2021/en/)

<sup>102</sup>Amnesty International, *France: Arrested for Protest: Weaponizing the Law to Crack Down on Peaceful Protesters in France* (Index: EUR 21/1791/2020), 29 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/1791/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/1791/2020/en/); Amnesty International, *France: 'Climate of total insecurity': Arbitrary Arrests of Peaceful Protesters in Paris on 12 December 2020*, (Index: EUR21/3650/2021), 8 February 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/3650/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/3650/2021/en/); Amnesty International, "Thousands of protesters wrongly punished under draconian laws in pre and post Covid-19 crackdown", 29 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/france-thousands-of-protesters-wrongly-punished-under-draconian-laws-in-pre-and-post-covid19-crackdown-2/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/france-thousands-of-protesters-wrongly-punished-under-draconian-laws-in-pre-and-post-covid19-crackdown-2/)

The **United Kingdom's** Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, which was passed in April 2022, contains numerous provisions that widen the range of situations in which police officers can place conditions on protests, including being able to ban vaguely defined “noisy protests”.<sup>103</sup> Some of the more controversial powers proposed were eventually removed from the bill, although the government has now repurposed many of them as part of a draft Public Order Bill, for example by criminalizing the obstruction of major transport infrastructure works and making “locking on” or carrying “locking on” equipment an offence.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the draft Public Order Bill introduces “serious disruption prevention orders”, which could be used to seek out and target people whom the police perceive to be key organizers and to potentially ban them from attending, organizing, or promoting protests seen as disruptive, even if they have never been convicted of a crime.<sup>105</sup>

### EMERGENCY POWERS USED TO REPRESS THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Governments of all kinds have increasingly used emergency powers as a pretext to control dissent and stay in power. Even in cases where emergency powers can be seen as a legitimate instrument to overcome a crisis – such as during the Covid-19 pandemic – governments have often extended their powers way beyond what is strictly necessary and proportionate.<sup>106</sup> For example, in **Thailand**, which has a history of using emergency laws to censor and undermine the right to freedom of expression during periods of political unrest, emergency powers ostensibly to control Covid-19 were misused against political activists and human rights defenders to undermine their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, and to initiate criminal proceedings against protesters even when they took precautions and complied with public health restrictions by putting in place measures such as physical distancing and wearing masks during gatherings.<sup>107</sup>

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is often one of the first rights to be restricted when emergency powers are invoked. In many instances, these powers are used without judicial oversight in a discretionary and non-transparent manner and have particular impacts on groups facing discrimination.<sup>108</sup>

For example, Amnesty International has documented how discrimination against Muslims in **European** counterterrorism efforts has helped to create an environment in which Muslims are more likely to be the subject of abuse.<sup>109</sup>

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO: STATE OF SIEGE

Under the guise of protecting civilians in the context of a protracted armed conflict, the authorities in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** declared a state of siege that has been in place since May 2021 in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu. Ordinary courts have been replaced with military courts, and all local authorities have been replaced by military and police officers with wide powers to restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and movement. Despite tight restrictions on these rights, there has been no improvement in the security of locals.

Instead, activists have been widely repressed through this emergency legislation. La Fontaine Katsaruhande, an activist with youth rights group LUCHA, had to have his right leg amputated after he was shot by police in September 2021 during a peaceful demonstration to denounce persistent killings of civilians despite the state of siege.

Twelve LUCHA activists were arrested in November 2021 for participating in a peaceful protest against a further extension of the state of siege. They were held in pre-trial detention until April 2022, when a military court in the city of Beni sentenced each of them to one year in prison plus court fees for “provocation to disobey the laws”.<sup>110</sup>

International law allows states to derogate (opt out) from certain human rights provisions in times of emergency. However, the public emergency must be so significant that it “threatens the life of the nation”.<sup>111</sup> In other words, the emergency must be extremely severe. Even where this very high threshold is met, measures that are introduced under a state of emergency must be limited to the extent strictly required by the situation and must be repealed as soon as the emergency has abated.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>103</sup>Amnesty International UK, “Dark day for civil liberties as ‘deeply-authoritarian’ Policing Bill passed by Lords”, 27 April 2022, [amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-dark-day-civil-liberties-deeply-authoritarian-policing-bill-passed-lords](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-dark-day-civil-liberties-deeply-authoritarian-policing-bill-passed-lords)

<sup>104</sup>“Locking on” is a form of protest which involves protesters attaching themselves to a building, a structure or other fixed object with chains, cement, glue or other material that is hard to remove. The safe removal of protesters can require skilled technicians and can be time-consuming.

<sup>105</sup>Netpol, “Explainer: The Public Order Bill 2022”, 17 May 2022, [netpol.org/2022/05/17/public-order-bill-2022/](https://www.netpol.org/2022/05/17/public-order-bill-2022/)

<sup>106</sup>Amnesty International, *Covid-19 Crackdowns: Police Abuse and the Global Pandemic* (Index: ACT 30/3443/2020), 17 December 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/3443/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/3443/2020/en/)

<sup>107</sup>Amnesty International, *Thailand: Covid-19 Measures Must Not be Used to Violate Individuals' Human Rights* (Index: ASA 39/2403/2020), 27 May 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/2403/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/2403/2020/en/)

<sup>108</sup>Amnesty International, *‘There Is No Help For Our Community’: The Impact of States’ Covid-19 Responses on Groups Affected by Unjust Criminalization* (Index: POL 30/5477/2022), 31 May 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/5477/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/5477/2022/en/)

<sup>109</sup>See examples in: Amnesty International, *Europe: A Human Rights Guide for Researching Racial and Religious Discrimination in Counter-terrorism* (Index: EUR 01/3606/2021), 3 February 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/3606/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/3606/2021/en/)

<sup>110</sup>Amnesty International, *Democratic Republic of the Congo: Justice and Freedoms Under Siege in North-Kivu and Ituri* (Index: AFR 62/5495/2022), 10 May 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/af62/5495/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/af62/5495/2022/en/)

<sup>111</sup>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 4; European Convention on Human Rights, Article 15.

<sup>112</sup>UN Human Rights Committee (HCR), General Comment 29: States of emergency; 31 August 2001, UN Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.11.

## SRI LANKA: COUNTRYWIDE CRACKDOWN ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROTESTS

Since the beginning of 2022, people in Sri Lanka have experienced a catastrophic economic crisis, with severe shortages in essential items and sky-high inflation that is deeply affecting socio-economic rights. Thousands have gone out on the streets in protest, demanding the resignation of the president and the prime minister.

In response, the Sri Lankan government has used unlawful force against peaceful protesters and journalists, stifled dissent and restricted the right to freedom of expression through arbitrary detention and torture, placed restrictions on movement, and facilitated a social media outage. Under the pretext of protecting public order and maintaining essential services, the president declared a state of emergency in April 2022 and another one in May. This was followed by nationwide curfews and a social media blackout.

New emergency regulations gave sweeping powers to the police and the armed forces to search and arrest “suspects” without due process safeguards. The restrictions imposed on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and movement are disproportionate and unnecessary to the situation.<sup>113</sup> In May 2022, police employed heavy-handed tactics against protesters in front of the Presidential Secretariat, including tear gas and water cannons. Days later, police did little to protect the same protesters from violent attacks by pro-government supporters. In addition, the armed forces have been given the order to open fire at anyone looting public property or causing harm to others, which could be interpreted as a licence to kill in a country with a history of human rights violations perpetrated by the military.<sup>114</sup>

## CRIMINALIZATION OF PROTESTERS

Peaceful protests often have an element of disruption, whether it is slowing down or blocking traffic, making noise, or even trespassing on private spaces. However, when peaceful protesters are called criminals and troublemakers, or when they are sued for ruinous damages, or accused of very serious crimes such as “terrorism” or “sedition”, something more disturbing is at play. When protesters are criminalized, this not only silences individuals, it also delegitimizes specific groups of protesters and their causes. This process of stigmatization and criminalization of protesters is an attempt to deter them and others from joining in or sympathizing with their actions and their calls. Arresting, detaining and prosecuting peaceful protesters are also tactics used by governments to ‘make an example’ of them, and thus silence dissent and instil fear in the wider population to deter them from joining further protests or direct actions.

In **Cuba**, mass protests took place in July 2021 when thousands of people took to the streets in a manner not seen in decades in the country. The authorities arbitrarily detained, imprisoned and sentenced peaceful protesters to up to 30 years’

imprisonment after trials held behind closed doors. Two artists who took part in peaceful protest activities such as singing protest songs and wearing the national flag, were sentenced to five and nine years in prison respectively after being prosecuted for crimes including “public disorder”, “contempt” and “insulting national symbols”.<sup>115</sup>

In **Morocco**, Nasser Zefzafi is one of the emblematic figures of the socio-economic protest movement known as Hirak El-rif, which started in 2017. An eloquent orator, he gave moving speeches about corruption and prevalent injustice that resonated with youth of his region, and he became a leader and organizer of their protest movement. Nasser Zefzafi was arrested in May 2017 for his activism. In June 2018, a court in the city of Casablanca convicted him to 20 years in prison on charges of undermining public order and threatening national unity. He has been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and his health has significantly deteriorated since his arrest.<sup>116</sup> The way in which Nasser Zefzafi and other protesters have been treated by the Moroccan authorities has deterred others from continuing the protests, afraid that they will suffer the same fate.

<sup>113</sup>Amnesty International, *Sri Lanka: From Bad to Worse: Rights Under Attack During Sri Lanka’s Economic Crisis* (Index: ASA 37/5564/2022), 6 May 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/5564/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/5564/2022/en/); Amnesty International, “Sri Lanka: Drop all charges against peaceful protesters”, 4 May 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/sri-lanka-drop-all-charges-against-peaceful-protesters/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/sri-lanka-drop-all-charges-against-peaceful-protesters/); “Sri Lanka: Authorities must respect people’s right to protest”, 1 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/sri-lanka-authorities-must-respect-peoples-right-to-protest/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/sri-lanka-authorities-must-respect-peoples-right-to-protest/)

<sup>114</sup>Amnesty International, “Sri Lanka: New emergency regulations and shooting orders threaten human rights”, 11 May 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/sri-lanka-new-emergency-regulations-and-shooting-orders-threaten-human-rights/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/sri-lanka-new-emergency-regulations-and-shooting-orders-threaten-human-rights/)

<sup>115</sup>Amnesty International, “Cuba: Amnesty International condemns sentences of Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and Maykel ‘Osorbo’ Castillo”, 24 June 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/cuba-amnesty-condemns-sentences-luis-manuel-otero-alcantara-maykel-osorbo-castillo/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/cuba-amnesty-condemns-sentences-luis-manuel-otero-alcantara-maykel-osorbo-castillo/); Amnesty International, “Cuba: Release imprisoned artists”, 26 May 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/cuba-release-imprisoned-artists/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/cuba-release-imprisoned-artists/)

<sup>116</sup>Amnesty International, “Morocco: Guilty verdicts returned in unfair Hirak trials must be overturned”, 27 June 2018, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/morocco-guilty-verdicts-returned-in-unfair-hirak-trials-must-be-overturned/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/morocco-guilty-verdicts-returned-in-unfair-hirak-trials-must-be-overturned/)

## CAMBODIA: CRIMINALIZATION TO DETER SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNERS

Mother Nature Cambodia is a prominent campaign group in Cambodia which has won several major environmental victories. Using a combination of community mobilization, direct action and public awareness raising, in 2015 they successfully convinced the authorities to drop plans to build a major hydroelectric dam which had gravely threatened local Indigenous communities.

In 2016, their work to expose widespread environmental destruction and human rights abuses linked to the mining and export of sand from coastal areas of Cambodia led to a total export ban on coastal sand. Due to this, activists with Mother Nature Cambodia have faced a litany

of repression with many activists charged and arbitrarily detained. Several activists have been imprisoned on baseless criminal charges of “incitement”.<sup>117</sup> The group has been accused of “causing chaos in society” and characterized as “illegal” by Cambodia’s Ministry of the Interior because it is not registered under the country’s highly restrictive NGO Law.

More recently, Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmeay and Thun Ratha, three young activists with Mother Nature Cambodia, were convicted to between 18 and 20 months in prison for seeking to protest against government plans to fill and privatize a major lake in the capital, Phnom Penh.<sup>118</sup>

Sometimes, legislation introduced for different purposes, such as counterterrorism or national security legislation, or other serious criminal charges such as treason or sedition, are used against peaceful protesters. When such laws are used, this enables the authorities to bring harsher penalties and protesters are stigmatized as serious offenders. In 2017, 15 human rights defenders managed to stop a plane which they believed would unlawfully remove people to Ghana and Nigeria during a non-violent act of civil disobedience at Stansted Airport in the **United Kingdom**. The government subsequently imposed charges against the protesters using counterterrorism legislation in what appeared to be an attempt to deter the group and others from taking similar actions in the future.<sup>119</sup> In **Indonesia**, the authorities have often used repressive measures against Papuan activists campaigning for the right to self-determination, such as blanket prohibitions on peaceful protest, mass arrests, prosecution

with serious criminal charges, and even unlawful killings by security forces. In August 2019, six political activists were charged with “rebellion” (*makar*) and spent eight months incarcerated.<sup>120</sup>

In other cases, criminal charges are simply based on false evidence and prosecutions are used to imprison, silence and deter other protesters. In **Guatemala**, Bernardo Caal, an Indigenous human rights defender who was involved in community organizing and protesting against a hydroelectric dam affecting his community, was sentenced to seven years in prison for unlawful deprivation of liberty and aggravated robbery, based on spurious evidence.<sup>121</sup> In **Nicaragua** the use of criminal charges such as extortion and drug trafficking has been a common tactic to repress, criminalize and stigmatize those engaging in the anti-government protests that started in 2018. Many politically motivated prisoners were accused of serious offences such as organized crime and terrorism.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>117</sup>Amnesty International, *Cambodia: Environmental Activists Arbitrarily Jailed* (Index: ASA 23/7635/2017), 22 December 2017, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa23/7635/2017/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa23/7635/2017/en/)

<sup>118</sup>Amnesty International, “Cambodia: Outrageous conviction of five environmental activists must be overturned”, 6 May 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/cambodia-outrageous-conviction-of-five-environmental-activists-must-be-overturned/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/cambodia-outrageous-conviction-of-five-environmental-activists-must-be-overturned/)

<sup>119</sup>Amnesty International, “Stansted 15 verdicts show UK authorities have used a sledgehammer to crack a nut”, 11 December 2018, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/stansted-15-verdicts-show-uk-authorities-have-used-a-sledgehammer-to-crack-a-nut/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/stansted-15-verdicts-show-uk-authorities-have-used-a-sledgehammer-to-crack-a-nut/); Amnesty International, *Umbrella Movement: End Politically Motivated Prosecutions in Hong Kong* (Index: ASA 17/9379/2018), 16 November 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/9379/2018/en/>

<sup>120</sup>Amnesty International, *Indonesia: Police Must Drop Makar (Rebellion) Charges against Six Papuan Activists* (Index: ASA 21/0970/2019), 3 September 2019, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa21/0970/2019/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa21/0970/2019/en/); Asia Pacific Report, “Jakarta Six activists for Papua freedom convicted of treason set free”, 30 May 2020, [asiapacificreport.org/2020/05/30/jakarta-six-activists-for-papua-freedom-convicted-of-treason-set-free/](https://www.asiapacificreport.org/2020/05/30/jakarta-six-activists-for-papua-freedom-convicted-of-treason-set-free/)

<sup>121</sup>Amnesty International, “The Mayan teacher locked up for defending a sacred river”, 15 November 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/mayan-teacher-locked-up-defending-sacred-river/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/mayan-teacher-locked-up-defending-sacred-river/)

<sup>122</sup>Amnesty International, *Nicaragua: Silence at Any Cost: State Tactics to Deepen the Repression in Nicaragua* (Index: AMR 43/3398/2021), 15 February 2021, [amr43/3398/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr43/3398/2021/en/)

As ordinary legislation is being tightened to outlaw previously permitted, legitimate protests, emergency legislation is increasingly being used without regard to necessity or proportion. Moreover, states are introducing or using laws to hold protesters criminally and civilly responsible for property damage or other costs relating to protests. In **Slovenia**, many individuals have been fined for participating in protests during a blanket ban imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic and have received exorbitant claims for compensation or to reimburse the cost of policing. Jaša Jenull, an activist and theatre director, received bills for more than 40,000 euros in relation to protests he organized in 2020 and 2021.<sup>123</sup> Overall, the Slovenian government that was in power until

April 2022 threatened to claim over 970,000 euros against protesters for policing services. Until May 2022, 28 claims totalling close to 270,000 euros for policing costs were processed. The new government in Slovenia, formally appointed in June 2022, promised to withdraw its consent for these lawsuits.<sup>124</sup> Exorbitant fines or financial claims for reimbursement of the costs for policing protests are a direct barrier to protesting and a significant deterrent for anyone wishing to protest.

Mass and arbitrary arrests are a further tactic designed not only to physically stop as many people as possible from taking part in protests, but also to instil a sense of fear that all participants in protest will be made to 'pay' for daring to take a stand.

### **IRAN: MASS ARRESTS, REPRESSION AND CRIMINALIZATION AFTER MASS PROTESTS**

Iran is experiencing an ongoing systemic crisis of impunity for crimes under international law and serious human rights violations in relation to the security forces' deadly response to successive nationwide protests in recent years. During the nationwide protests of December 2017 and January 2018 in which tens of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against poverty, corruption, repression and authoritarianism, at least 25 people were killed and thousands of others arbitrarily detained.<sup>125</sup> Vahid Afkari was among those arbitrarily detained following his peaceful participation in these protests. He was subjected to repeated physical and psychological torture aimed at obtaining forced "confessions", including beatings, insults and threats to imprison, kill or otherwise harm his family members. He has been sentenced to a total of 33 years and nine months' imprisonment, as well as 74 lashes, following grossly unfair trials. Two of Vahid Afkari's brothers – Navid Afkari and Habib Afkari – were also arrested in connection with their participation in the protests. In September 2020, Navid Afkari was executed in secret. Habib Afkari was released from prison in 2022, following sustained global campaigning by his family, Amnesty International and many activists around the world.<sup>126</sup>

The prevailing impunity afforded to security forces for the human rights violations and crimes under international law they committed during protests in 2017 and 2018, and the muted response of the international community, served to embolden the Iranian authorities to escalate their unlawful use of lethal force in the subsequent mass protests of November 2019, which resulted in the killings of hundreds of men, women and children during five days of protests which swept across the country.<sup>127</sup> Security forces used lethal force unlawfully against the vast majority of protesters and bystanders killed, shooting most in the head or torso, indicating intent to kill. To this day, no official has been held accountable for the unlawful killings. The deadly crackdown was accompanied by the authorities shutting down access to the internet for most of the population.

The Iranian authorities have continued their militarized response to protests in 2021 and 2022. Instead of bringing perpetrators to justice, the authorities continue their longstanding pattern of state cover-up and denial, praising security forces and propagating false narratives to deny and distort the truth about the nature and scale of human rights violations committed by security forces during protests.

<sup>123</sup>Amnesty International, *Slovenia: Withdraw Claims for Protesters to Cover Costs Associated with Policing Assemblies* (Index: EUR 68/5344/2022), 16 March 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur68/5344/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur68/5344/2022/en/)

<sup>124</sup>rtvslo.si, "Ministrstvo umaknilo soglasje za tožbe glede neprijavljenih protestnih shodov", 2 June 2022, [rtvslo.si/slovenija/ministrstvo-umaknilo-soglasje-za-tozbe-glede-neprijavljenih-protestnih-shodov/629619](https://www.rtvlo.si/slovenija/ministrstvo-umaknilo-soglasje-za-tozbe-glede-neprijavljenih-protestnih-shodov/629619)

<sup>125</sup>Amnesty International, *Iran: Release All Individuals Arrested Solely for Demonstrating Peacefully and Investigate Killing of Protester* (Index: MDE 13/8915/2018), 8 August 2018, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/8915/2018/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/8915/2018/en/)

<sup>126</sup>Amnesty International, *Iran: Tortured Protesters Jailed Unjustly: Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari* (Index: MDE 13/4250/2021), 7 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4250/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4250/2021/en/)

<sup>127</sup>Amnesty International, *Iran: International Action Needed to Break Authorities' Cycle of Protest Bloodshed*, (Index: MDE 13/3546/2021), 20 January 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3546/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3546/2021/en/); Amnesty International, *A Web of Impunity: The Killings Iran's Internet Shutdown Hid* (Index: MDE 13/3308/2020), 16 November 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3308/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3308/2020/en/); Amnesty International, *Iran: Details of 324 Deaths in Crackdown on November 2019 Protests* (Updated in November 2021 with New Information) (Index: MDE 13/2308/2020) 16 November 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2308/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2308/2020/en/); Amnesty International, *Trampling Humanity – Mass Arrests, Disappearances and Torture Since Iran's 2019 November Protests* (Index: MDE 13/2891/2020), 2 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2891/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2891/2020/en/)

In 2020, hundreds of thousands of people in **Belarus** took to the streets peacefully across the country to protest against disputed election results.<sup>128</sup> This led to mass arbitrary arrests, heavily penalized by legislation that imposes severe restrictions on assemblies, and hundreds were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. By mid-November, official and independent figures estimated that more than 25,000 people had been detained. Police, often plain-clothed and without identification, used unlawful and indiscriminate force, including rubber bullets fired at short-range into crowds, stun grenades, chemical irritants, water cannons, automatic firearms with blank cartridges, truncheons and other means to disperse peaceful crowds and apprehend individuals. At least four people were killed by government forces and several others died under suspicious circumstances. While

many protesters and bystanders were attacked indiscriminately and arbitrarily, others were targeted for their professional activity, including media workers documenting events or medics who voluntarily attended to the wounded. Others were singled out because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In September 2020, human rights defender Victoria Biran was detained on her way to a rally after being identified by police officers as an LGBTI activist and sentenced to 15 days' "administrative detention".<sup>129</sup> Currently, Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapyuk, members of the human rights organization Viasna, are facing trials which could lead to 20 years and eight years in detention respectively, including for organizing and working with an "extremist group", "damage to property", "hooliganism" and "inciting hatred", among other charges.<sup>130</sup>

### STRATEGIC LITIGATION AGAINST PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Private companies are also taking action to silence those who protest against their business practices, including by starting vexatious lawsuits to claim disproportionate and aggressive remedies or seek injunctions to stop people protesting in certain areas. Also known as SLAPPs (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation), these legal cases are brought with the intention of intimidating public participation, often targeting journalists, human rights defenders, civil society organizations or academics with the aim of silencing them and deterring other critical voices. The cost of fighting these legal actions can put extreme financial and other pressure on human rights activists, forcing them to repurpose the already limited funds and resources from their work to defending the lawsuit.

For example, in 2017 an energy company attempted to sue Greenpeace and other organizers of the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in the **USA** for USD 900 million. In 2020, an Austrian hydropower company filed hefty defamation lawsuits to silence two environmental activists in **Kosovo** who have spoken up about the environmental impact of hydropower management companies operating in the country's natural protected areas and the lack of necessary scrutiny by the authorities in the process of issuing operating licences for such plants.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>128</sup>Amnesty International, *Belarus: 'We Baptise You in the Name of Saint Alyksandr Lukashenka and the Riot Police'* (Index: EUR 49/4171/2021), 24 May 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/4171/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/4171/2021/en/); Amnesty International, *Belarus: 'You are not human beings': State-sponsored Impunity and Unprecedented Police Violence against Peaceful Protesters* (Index: EUR 49/3567/2021), 27 January 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3567/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3567/2021/en/); Amnesty International, *Belarus: A Year of Ongoing Brutal Reprisals, Fear and Solidarity* (Index: EUR 49/4562/2021), 9 August 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/4562/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/4562/2021/en/); Amnesty International, *Belarus: Armed Forces Have No business in Dealing with Protests* (Index: EUR 49/2823/2020), 31 July 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/2823/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/2823/2020/en/)

<sup>129</sup>Amnesty International, *Belarus: Free LGBT+ Activist Victoria Biran* (Index: EUR 49/3143/2020), 30 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3143/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3143/2020/en/)

<sup>130</sup>Amnesty International, "Belarus: Immediately release human rights defenders Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapyuk", 25 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/belarus-immediately-release-human-rights-defenders-marfa-rabkova-and-andrei-chapyuk/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/belarus-immediately-release-human-rights-defenders-marfa-rabkova-and-andrei-chapyuk/)

<sup>131</sup>Amnesty International, *Kosovo: SLAPP Suits Seeking to Silence Environmental Activists Must End* (Index: EUR 73/4350/2021), 28 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur73/4350/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur73/4350/2021/en/) The lawsuit was later dropped, also thanks to Amnesty International's campaigning. See: Amnesty International, "Kosovo: Baseless lawsuits against environmental activists dropped in victory for freedom of expression", 20 October 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/kosovo-baseless-lawsuits-against-environmental-activists-dropped-in-victory-for-freedom-of-expression/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/kosovo-baseless-lawsuits-against-environmental-activists-dropped-in-victory-for-freedom-of-expression/)

## 5.3 USING TECHNOLOGY TO HINDER THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Access to the internet, social media, instant messaging apps and other digital technologies are expanding the ability of people to protest both online and offline, enabling people to gain access to information, distribute details about an upcoming protest, organize, and enable virtual engagement in a wide variety of ways. At the same time, states and companies are putting these digital spaces under control, whether by imposing targeted censorship or by denying access to the internet or certain websites and messaging apps. For example, Amnesty International has documented the systematic repression of activists in **Viet Nam** who are engaged in online expression and protest. Tactics employed by the Vietnamese authorities include censorship, harassment and prosecution, often with the complicity of technology giants like Facebook and Google.<sup>132</sup>

Shutting or slowing down the internet has become an increasingly common tactic in recent years. Access Now, an organization working to protect digital rights, documented in 2021 at least 182 internet shutdowns across 34 countries. Internet shutdowns were reported in areas of armed conflict, including in India (in the Jammu and Kashmir region), **Ethiopia** (in the Tigray region) and **Myanmar**.<sup>133</sup> The organization also noted a marked increase in the use of mobile internet shutdowns during protests in countries including **Bangladesh, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cuba, Eswatini, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan,**

**Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Senegal, South Sudan, Sudan, Turkmenistan and Uganda.**<sup>134</sup>

States and companies are also increasingly using sophisticated targeted and mass digital tools to surveil protesters, invade their privacy and track them down after participating in a protest. Facial recognition technologies, often used with a lack of judicial oversight and an inadequate legislative framework, are increasingly being used by police and security forces to monitor public spaces, including during demonstrations. The use of new technologies, including CCTV, IMSI catchers which can track phones, and bodycams also pose new risks to the right to peaceful assembly, especially when such technologies are used in combination as part of existing state surveillance and data-retention powers.

The use of surveillance technologies, alone or in combination, gives rise to a risk not only of real-time violations of the right to peaceful assembly, but also to the deterrence of people from exercising their rights in the future. These technologies have a deep impact on racialized people and other groups facing discrimination. For example, China's indiscriminate mass surveillance programme includes technologies exported by European companies, with the risk that these are being used against Uyghurs and other ethnic groups facing discrimination throughout the country.<sup>135</sup>

### FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY TO TRACK PROTESTERS

In New York City, **USA**, facial recognition technology has been used at least 22,000 times since 2017. It can amplify racially discriminatory policing and threatens the right to protest, particularly of Black and minority communities who are at particular risk of being misidentified and falsely arrested. In some instances, facial recognition has been 95% inaccurate. Even when it 'works', it can exacerbate discriminatory policing and prevent the free and safe exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, by acting as a tool of mass surveillance. For example, in August 2020, New York Police Department officers attempted to arrest Black Lives Matter activist Derrick "Dwreck" Ingram by besieging his apartment for five hours, after seemingly using facial recognition technology to identify and locate him.<sup>136</sup>

In Hyderabad, India, the government has initiated the construction of a "command and control centre" (CCC), a building that connects the city's vast CCTV infrastructure in

real time. The CCC supports the processing of data from up to 600,000 cameras at once. These cameras can be used in combination with Hyderabad police's existing facial recognition cameras to track and identify individuals across space. Given that the Indian authorities have a record of using facial recognition tools in contexts where people's human rights are at stake, such as to enforce lockdown measures, to identify voters in municipal elections, and – in other states in India – to police protests, the CCC is a worrying development. There is currently no safeguarding legislation which would protect the privacy of the citizens of Hyderabad, nor a law which would regulate the use of remote biometric surveillance, which further exacerbates the danger these technologies present.<sup>137</sup>

Such technologies are a mode of mass surveillance and are a violation of the right to privacy. They can create a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and can also have a disproportionate impact on marginalized groups.

<sup>132</sup>Amnesty International, *Viet Nam: Let Us breathe! Censorship and Criminalization of Online Expression in Viet Nam* (Index: ASA 41/3243/2020), 30 November 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/asa41/3243/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa41/3243/2020/en/)

<sup>133</sup>Access Now, "The return of digital authoritarianism: Internet shutdowns in 2021", May 2022, [www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/05/2021-KIO-Report-May-24-2022.pdf](https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/05/2021-KIO-Report-May-24-2022.pdf)

<sup>134</sup>Access Now, "The return of digital authoritarianism: Internet shutdowns in 2021", May 2022, [www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/05/2021-KIO-Report-May-24-2022.pdf](https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/05/2021-KIO-Report-May-24-2022.pdf)

<sup>135</sup>Amnesty International, "EU companies selling surveillance tools to China's human rights abusers", 21 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/eu-surveillance-sales-china-human-rights-abusers-2/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/eu-surveillance-sales-china-human-rights-abusers-2/), Amnesty International, *Out of Control: Failing EU Laws for Digital Surveillance Export* (Index: EUR 01/2556/2020), 21 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/2556/2020/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/2556/2020/en/)

<sup>136</sup>See Amnesty International #Banthescan campaign, New York City story: <https://banthescan.amnesty.org/nyc/#stories>

<sup>137</sup>See Amnesty International #Banthescan campaign, Hyderabad story: <https://banthescan.amnesty.org/hyderabad/#stories>

## 6. What do we want?

# PROTECT THE PROTEST!

Injustice, corruption, extreme inequality, deepening threats to socio-economic rights, climate and environmental destruction, racism, discrimination, gender-based violence, increasing polarization in public discourse and erosion of civic space are some critical issues currently mobilizing the public. Yes, criticism and disruption can be uncomfortable to some, but it is a fair price to pay to ensure our societies are inclusive and allow for active public engagement beyond the ballot box, particularly for the most marginalized. Mass mobilization and protest have led to some of the most important advances in human rights.

Yet, the more people protest, the more those in authority tighten their grip as they are afraid of losing power and control. Over the past few years, states and others in authority have increasingly imposed obstacles to make peaceful protests harder. As those in power have become more aware of the strength of protests and their potential to challenge and transform the status quo, they have relied on more brazen and ruthless means to suppress them.

Protesters today face a potent mix of setbacks which are shrinking civic space. These include a growing number of laws and other repressive measures intended to restrict the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association; the misuse of force by those who police protests; and the expansion of unlawful mass and targeted surveillance, internet shutdowns and online abuse. This backlash is taking place in all parts of the world. Tighter restrictions on all forms of protest along with attacks on protesters contribute to

stigmatizing them and delegitimizing their causes. This vicious circle can and must be broken: but this can only happen if governments remove restrictions, facilitate the right to protest and see peaceful protests as a sign of a healthy society and part of the necessary process of dialogue to address issues and grievances, not as a nuisance or something to be crushed.

**Put simply, the goal of our “Protect the protest” campaign is for all people to be able to take peaceful action and make their voices heard safely and without repercussions. Amnesty International therefore calls on governments to send a clear signal that protesters should be protected in law and practice to ensure they are facilitated and not attacked. The authorities must take urgent measures to remove all of the barriers and undue restrictions that have been put in place to obstruct peaceful protests, before, during and after an assembly.**

# WE CALL ON GOVERNMENTS TO:

Stop all stigmatizing discourse portraying peaceful protesters as criminals, terrorists, threats to public order and security, or a nuisance to be crushed.

Repeal or amend all legislation that undermines the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and bring legislation in line with international human rights law and standards, including General Comment 37 of the UN Human Rights Committee.

Implement adequate legislation to ensure that people can organize and participate in protests without having to obtain prior authorization and are free to decide the location, time and manner of the protest.

Ensure that, where a notification regime is in place, prior notification requirements are treated only as a notice of the intent to protest, and not a request for permission. The notification process must be transparent, coherent, unbureaucratic and non-discriminatory. The lack of official notification must not be used as a ground to determine that an assembly is unlawful or to allow its dispersal.

Ensure that any restrictions on the time, place or manner of an assembly are necessary and proportionate to a legitimate aim, and do not fundamentally alter the character of an event. When restrictions are unavoidable, the authorities should always give preference to the least intrusive means and should try to facilitate such an assembly by offering reasonable alternatives.

Engage in a case-by-case assessment when considering restrictions on an assembly. Blanket bans on the permissible time or location of an assembly are impermissible restrictions because they necessarily prevent authorities from evaluating specific circumstances and assessing their proportionality.

Guarantee in law and in practice the protection and facilitation of spontaneous assemblies in the same way as other assemblies.

Stop misusing the criminal, civil and administrative legal systems to silence and deter protesters. Of particular concern is legislation that is designed for other purposes, such as counterterrorism legislation.

Prevent law enforcement officials from dispersing an assembly solely for failing to comply with a notification requirement or for otherwise considering it unlawful. A decision to disperse an assembly should be a last resort and only when violence is generalized and cannot be addressed by less restrictive means.

Ensure that restrictions on acts of civil disobedience are considered and assessed under domestic legislation in line with international law and standards related to the rights to freedom of conscience, expression and peaceful assembly. In particular, take the necessary measures to ensure that law enforcement and judicial authorities are able to consider the particular elements of an act of civil disobedience, including its intent and overall impact, to ensure no undue restriction on the rights to freedom of conscience, expression and peaceful assembly are imposed.

Ensure that derogations on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly imposed due to an exceptional situation of crisis are truly exceptional and temporary. Existing possibilities for restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly should generally be sufficient in situations of emergency, and therefore no further derogation would be justified by the exigencies of the situation.

Ensure law enforcement officials only use force where there is no other means of achieving their legitimate objectives, and when the use of force is necessary and proportionate to the situation they face. The misuse of force on protesters is a human rights violation.

Amend laws and regulations governing the use of force and firearms, including during assemblies, to ensure their compliance with international standards on the use of force, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

Ensure in law and in practice that all uniformed law enforcement officials display an easily recognizable and clearly visible form of personalized identification at all times and take all other necessary steps to ensure the full accountability of members of law enforcement agencies and their commanding officers for their actions.

Provide law enforcement officials with adequate training in the proper management of assemblies, intended to facilitate protests.

Refrain from deploying the armed forces and from using military techniques and equipment during the policing of assemblies.

Protect those monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses of others in the context of peaceful assemblies, including members of the press, lawyers and human rights defenders; and send a strict message to officers involved in the management of assemblies that unlawful use of force against monitors and members of the press and obstruction of such monitoring and reporting will not be tolerated.

Promptly investigate in an impartial, independent and effective manner all allegations of human rights violations by law enforcement officials during protests.

Ensure that devices that have indiscriminate effects and a high potential of harm, such as tear gas or water cannon, are only used in situations of generalized violence for the purpose of dispersing a crowd, and only when all other means have failed to contain the violence. They may not be used when people are in a confined space or where roads or other routes of escape are blocked.

Refrain from using weapons initially developed for military purposes in law enforcement unless they have been adapted and tested to ensure they are effective at achieving the law enforcement objective pursued and can appropriately be used in law enforcement.

Prohibit the manufacture and trade in inherently abusive law enforcement equipment that has no other practical use than for the commission of torture or other ill-treatment.

Control the trade in law enforcement equipment to prevent its transfer to those likely to misuse it for the commission of torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

Actively support the creation of a global, legally binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty prohibiting inherently abusive equipment and controlling trade in law enforcement equipment.

Ban facial recognition technologies and other intrusive surveillance technologies, including their development, sale and use, because these systems violate the right to privacy and threaten the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, expression, equality and non-discrimination.

# Further reading

## SELECTION OF RECENT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS

### COVERING ASPECTS OF THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

#### GLOBAL

Amnesty International Report 2021/2022: The State of the World's Human Rights, 2022

"There is No Help for Our Community": The Impact of States' Covid-19 Responses on Groups Affected by Unjust Criminalization, 2022

Blunt force: Investigating the Misuse of Police Batons and Related Equipment, 2021

Silenced and Misinformed: Freedom of Expression in Danger During Covid-19, 2021

Future Challenges to the Protection and Promotion of the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association: Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur, 2020

Covid-19 Crackdowns: Police Abuse and the Global Pandemic, 2020

Daring to Stand Up for Human Rights in a Pandemic, 2020

The Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly: Submission to the UN HRC on Draft General Comment No.37, 2020

Ending the Torture Trade: The Path to Global Controls on the 'Tools of Torture', 2020

Projectile electric-shock weapons: An Amnesty International position paper, 2019

Surveillance Giants: How the Business Model of Google and Facebook Threatens Human Rights, 2019

The Human Rights Impact of Less-lethal Weapons and Other Law Enforcement Equipment, 2015

Use of Force: Guidelines for Implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, 2015

#### REGIONAL

**Algeria:**  
Shutting Down Civic Space: Submission to the 41st Session of the UPR Working Group, 2022

Suppressing Free Speech and Assembly: The Targeting of Hirk Activists in Algeria, 2021

Criminal Charges, Arbitrary Detention, and Judicial Supervision for Carrying the Amazigh Flag, 2019

**Angola:**  
The Police Are Not on the Ground to Distribute Sweets: Security Forces' Violence in Angola, 2020

**Azerbaijan:** Latest Police Violence against Peaceful Protesters, 2021

Authorities Must Guarantee the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Immediately Release all Peaceful Demonstrators, 2019

**Bahrain:**  
Urgent Joint Call to Release Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja on his 60th Birthday and 10th Anniversary of his Detention, 2021

Free Imprisoned Rights Defenders and Activists, 2020

**Bangladesh:**  
No Space for Dissent – Bangladesh's Crackdown on Freedom of Expression Online, 2021

**Belarus:**  
"We Baptise You in the Name of Saint Alyksandr Lukashenka and the Riot Police", 2021

"You Are Not Human Beings": State-Sponsored Impunity and Unprecedented Police Violence against Peaceful Protesters, 2021

A Year of Ongoing Brutal Reprisals, Fear and Solidarity, 2021; Armed Forces Have No Business in Dealing with Protests, 2020

#### Bolivia:

Healing the Pandemic of Impunity: 20 Human Rights Recommendations for Candidates in the 2020 Presidential Elections in Bolivia, 2020

Bolivian Authorities Must Investigate Acts of Violence and Protect the Population, 2019

**Cambodia:**  
"Outrageous" Conviction of Five Environmental Activists Must Be Overturned, 2021

Youth Targeted in "Shocking" Wave of Arrests, 2020

**Cameroon:**  
More than a Hundred Detainees from Anglophone Regions and Opposition Party Languishing in Jail for Speaking Out, 2022

**Chad:**  
Un An Après la Mise en Place du Comité Militaire de Transition, la Liberté de Réunion Pacifique Reste Entravée, 2022

Opposition Members and human rights activists banned from freely protesting ahead of election, 2021

**Chile:** Eyes on Chile: Police Violence and Command Responsibility During the Period of Social Unrest, 2020

**China:** Hong Kong: In the Name of National Security, 2021

Hong Kong: Missing Truth, Missing Justice, 2020

How Not to Police a Protest: Unlawful Use of Force by Hong Kong Police, 2019

**Colombia:**  
Shoots on Sight: Eye Trauma in the Context of the National Strike, 2021

In the Epicentre of Repression: Human Rights Violations During the 2021 National Strike in Cali, Colombia, 2021

**Cuba:** Amnesty International Names Prisoners of Conscience amidst Crackdown on Protesters, 2021

**Democratic Republic of the Congo:** Justice and Freedoms under Siege in North-Kivu and Ituri, 2022

Dismissed! Victims of 2015-2018 Brutal Crackdowns in the Democratic Republic of Congo Denied Justice, 2020

**Egypt:**  
COP27 Should Not Overshadow Human Rights Crisis in the Country, 2022

Protests by Sudanese Migrants and Refugees over Brutal Killing of a Child Met with Violence and Arrests, 2020

**Europe:**  
Out of Control: Failing EU Laws for Digital Surveillance Export, 2020

Policing the Pandemic: Human Rights Violations in the Enforcement of Covid-19 Measures in Europe, 2020

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"Climate of Total Insecurity": Arbitrary Arrests of Peaceful Protesters in Paris on 12 December 2020, 2021

Authorities Must Quash the Conviction of the Briançon 7 as it Contravenes the Right to Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly, 2021

Class Action Lawsuit against Ethnic Profiling Filed over Systemic Racial Discrimination, 2021

Arrested for Protest: Weaponizing the Law to Crackdown on Peaceful Protesters in France, 2020

**Georgia:** Authorities Must Guarantee Safety of Tbilisi Pride Participants, 2019

**Greece:**  
Freedom of Assembly at Risk and Unlawful Use of Force in the Era of Covid-19, 2021

Blanket Ban on Public Assemblies Must be Urgently Revoked, 2020

**Guinea:**  
Marching to Their Death: The Urgent Need of Justice for the Victims of Guinea's Crackdown on Demonstrations, 2020

**India:**  
Crackdown on Dissent Continues During Covid-19, 2020

Persecution of Minorities and Shrinking Space for Dissent: Amnesty International: Submission to the 41st Session of the UPR Working Group, 2022

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End Wave of Digital Attacks on Students, Journalists, Activists, 2020

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International Action Needed to Break Authorities' Cycle of Protest Bloodshed, 2021

A Web of Impunity: The Killings Iran's Internet Shutdown Hid, 2020

Details of 324 Deaths in Crackdown on November 2019 Protests (Updated in November 2021 with New Information), 2021

Trampling Humanity – Mass Arrests, Disappearances and Torture Since Iran's 2019 November Protests, 2020

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Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Authorities Must End Protests-related Repression, 2021

End 'campaign of terror' targeting protesters, 2019

**Israel:**  
Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity, 2022

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The calm in Kazakhstan is restored, but the pressing questions on multiple human rights violations remain unanswered, 2022

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**Mali:**  
Killed, Wounded, and Forgotten? Accountability for the Killings during Demonstrations and the Coup in Mali, 2021

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The right to protest is under threat in Mexico, 2022

The (R)age of Women: Stigma and Violence against Women Protesters, 2021

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Morocco/Western Sahara: Investigate targeted assault on Sahrawi women activists, 2022

Drop charges against teachers who peacefully protested over workers' rights, 2021

**Myanmar:**  
International community must do more to protect brave protesters, 2022

Five-year-old among almost 100 killed by security forces, 2021

Vast arsenal and notorious troops deployed during nationwide 'killing spree' protest crackdown – new research, 2021

Signs of 'shoot to kill' strategy to quell opposition, 2021

Myanmar: Evidence police deployed sub-machine guns against peaceful protesters, despite denials, 2021

**Nicaragua:**  
Silence at Any Cost: State Tactics to Deepen the Repression in Nicaragua, 2021

Shoot to Kill: Nicaragua's Strategy to Repress Protest, 2018

Instilling Terror: From Lethal Force to Persecution in Nicaragua, 2018

**Niger:**  
Charges must be dropped following release of three activists, 2020

Human rights defenders still unjustly detained for more than six months, 2020

**Nigeria:**  
No justice for victims of police brutality one year after #EndSARS protests, 2021

Activists Beaten and Jailed for Protesting: Larry Emmanuel and Victor Anene Udoka, 2021

**Peru:**  
President Castillo Must Ensure Proportionate Use of Force in Response to Social Protests and Prevent Human Rights Violations, 2022

Amnesty International documents excessive use of force by National Police, 2020

**Poland:**  
The Extraordinary Wave of Protests across the Country Should Be Protected Not Attacked, 2020

Covid-19 is No Excuse to Crack Down on Protests, 2020

The Power of 'the Street': Protecting the Right to Peaceful Protest in Poland, 2018

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End Censorship on Voices against the War 2022

No Place for Protest, 2021

**Senegal:**  
Senegal will never forget March 2021, 2022

Restraint needed as country-wide protests planned after eight died last week, 2021

**Singapore:**  
Cease Investigation of Peaceful Activists and Respect Transgender Rights, 2021

**Slovenia:**  
Withdraw Claims for Protesters to Cover Costs Associated with Policing Assemblies, 2022

**South Sudan:**  
"We Are at Risk and on the Run": Security Agents Track Down Peaceful Protesters, 2019

**Sri Lanka:**  
From Bad to Worse: Rights under Attack During Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis, 2022

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"They Descended on Us Like Rain": Justice for Victims of Protest Crackdown in Sudan, 2020

**Thailand:**  
"My Face Burned as if on Fire": Unlawful Use of Force by Thailand's Police During Public Assemblies, 2021

Stop Penalising Peaceful Protest, 2020; Drop Charges against Peaceful Protesters, 2020

Drop Charges against Opposition Members and Activists Holding 'Flash Mobs', 2019

**Tunisia:**  
Amend Excessive Covid-19 Restrictions Banning All Public Gatherings, 2022

**Türkiye:**  
Authorities Should Seek Acquittal of All in the Saturday Mothers/ People Trial, 2021

Lift arbitrary ban and allow Istanbul Pride to take place peacefully, 2019

Turkey's State of Emergency Ended but the Crackdown on Human Rights Continues, 2019

Authorities Must Ensure Relatives of People Forcibly Disappeared Can Continue with Their Peaceful Weekly Vigil, 2018

**UK:**  
Dark Day For Civil Liberties as 'Deeply-Authoritarian' Policing Bill Passed by Lords, 2022

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Youth targeted in 'shocking' wave of arrests, 2020

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Ruling by Fear and Repression, 2021

**Zimbabwe:**  
Entrenched Repression: Amnesty International Submission for the UN UPR, 2021

'Open for Business', Closed for Dissent: Crackdown in Zimbabwe during the National Stay-away 14-16 January 2019, 2019



**The Salt March in India, the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo and #MareaVerde protests – these are only a few examples of protests that changed the course of history, claiming new realities, and paving the way to global social changes. Peaceful protest is one of society’s most powerful and creative tools for demanding human rights, yet today it is under threat in all corners of the world.**

**Public and dynamic in its nature, peaceful protest is feared by those in power who want to brush injustice and other pressing issues under the carpet. Instead of seeking solutions through dialogue, governments use state resources to crack down on protesters in a multitude of ways. In this report, Amnesty International documents how peaceful protesters are being stigmatized, detained, injured and even killed. To further stifle any possible dissent and give their actions a veneer of legitimacy, states impose undue restrictions, including through legislation. These attacks affect especially those individuals and communities that already face discrimination and marginalization.**

**This report launches Amnesty International’s new global campaign: Protect the protest. The campaign stands with peaceful protesters and supports the causes of social movements that demand human rights, so that everyone is able to take action and make their voice heard safely and without repercussions.**