



Human Rights Watch 2024 World Report on human rights

The 2024 report by the international NGO Human Rights Watch is an annual review of human rights worldwide for the year 2023.

The 2024 report by the international NGO Human Rights Watch characterizes this year as marked by a double standard in the selective defense of human rights. Many governments condemned specific and highly publicized crimes, such as those committed by Israel in Gaza or Russia in Ukraine, while minimizing or ignoring other atrocities, such as China's actions against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the crisis in Sudan, and many other countries across Africa. This inconsistency, or "myopia," as described in the report, undermines trust in the universality of human rights and weakens the legitimacy of international laws designed to protect them.

Furthermore, governments have prioritized short-term trade and security agreements over human rights principles, sacrificing the lives and freedoms of vulnerable populations. A clear example of this is the sale and transfer of combat weaponry not only in Israel but also in other regions plagued by instability and violence, perpetuating injustices and strengthening authoritarian regimes.

This scenario weakens key institutions for the protection of human rights, such as independent courts and media, whose role is to ensure compliance with international agreements and treaties and to demand accountability. Governments, driven by self-interest, have shown blatant disregard for these institutions, as evidenced by the refusal to comply with arrest warrants issued by the ICC against leaders like Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu for their crimes. Additionally, the Security Council has proven ineffective, paralyzed by the veto power wielded by major powers.

However, amidst conflict and violence, significant progress was made in protecting human rights. Eighty-three countries, including six of the eight largest arms exporters (such as the U.S., France, and Germany), adopted a political declaration aimed at reducing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas—a crucial step toward minimizing civilian casualties. Progress was also achieved in rights for the

LGBTI community and persons with disabilities. In this regard, Japan passed its first law against LGTBI discrimination, Nepal recognized same-sex marriages, and Mexico advanced legal capacity for persons with disabilities while decriminalizing abortion at the federal level.

Technology as a Tool of Repression

Digital platforms, originally designed as spaces for freedom, have been repurposed by authoritarian regimes as tools for censorship and surveillance. Governments are leveraging vague laws to criminalize dissenting opinions and restrict access to critical information.

In Saudi Arabia, Muhammad al-Ghamdi was sentenced to death for posting critical opinions on social media, highlighting the extreme use of anti-terrorism laws to suppress freedom of expression. In Turkey, ahead of the 2023 elections, Erdogan's government strengthened laws that restrict social media, making it more difficult to share information opposing the official narrative.

Afghanistan

The human rights situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate under Taliban rule, with severe violations primarily targeting women and girls. Afghanistan remains the only country where women are banned from accessing secondary and higher education, as well as most forms of employment. They also face harsh restrictions on their freedom of movement and expression.

According to Human Rights Watch, these systematic abuses amount to crimes against humanity for gender persecution. Additionally, the regime has intensified its repression of journalists, human rights defenders, and activists through arbitrary detentions, torture, and extrajudicial executions, as reported by the United Nations.



Afghanistan is also facing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with over 28 million people in need of assistance, including 4 million suffering from acute malnutrition. The withdrawal of most foreign aid, prolonged droughts exacerbated by climate change, and the ban on women working have worsened the situation, complicating the delivery of humanitarian aid.

China

Over the past year, repression in China has continued to intensify. The "Sinicization" of religions and strict social control have severely impacted fundamental freedoms. In Xinjiang, widespread abuses against Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims persist, classified as crimes against humanity. Meanwhile, in Tibet and Hong



Kong, harsh restrictions have been imposed on cultural, religious, and political expressions.



Censorship, enforced through laws, technology, and platform control, has reached alarming levels. According to the report, the government targets human rights defenders, activists, and journalists with imprisonment, harassment, and enforced disappearances. In the realm of religious freedoms, authorities have intensified state control by shutting down mosques, suppressing unofficial congregations, and promoting ideologically aligned versions of Christianity and Islam that conform to Communist Party narratives.

Meanwhile, freedom of expression remains heavily restricted, with journalists and protesters facing imprisonment or censorship for challenging official narratives. Against this backdrop, an economic slowdown and strict social control have fueled growing discontent, which, despite being suppressed, continues to signal resistance.

United States

In 2023, the United States faced numerous human rights challenges. Domestically, issues of racism, economic inequality, and criminal justice persisted. Poverty levels rose following

the end of a tax credit program, while the racial wealth gap remained significant, disproportionately affecting communities of color and Hispanics. The incarceration rate also increased, with people of color overrepresented in prisons.

Access to abortion and LGBT rights were further restricted in many states, while immigration policies heightened risks for asylum seekers, imposing harsher conditions on those seeking refuge.



Unequal access to healthcare remained a significant issue, particularly for women of color. On the other hand, democracy faced both challenges and progress, with efforts to protect voting rights and key judicial rulings against racial discrimination in elections. However, state laws restricting school debates and complicating voting processes weakened civic participation.

In foreign policy, the U.S. imposed sanctions for human rights violations and supported Ukraine but contradicted its principles by providing military assistance to states committing abuses, such as Israel's actions against Palestine. On climate issues, despite efforts to incorporate environmental justice

into its policies, the U.S. remains the largest producer of oil and gas, exacerbating the climate crisis and its disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities.

Italy

Italy intensified restrictive migration policies, hindering Mediterranean rescues and limiting asylum rights through new laws that tightened humanitarian protection and increased pre-deportation detention. Agreements with countries like Libya and Albania, criticized by international organizations, reinforced the outsourcing of migration control. Meanwhile, overcrowding in reception centers revealed flaws in managing arrivals, which doubled compared to 2022. These policies challenged compliance with human rights standards and faced legal objections domestically and internationally.

Structural racism and discrimination against vulnerable communities, particularly Roma and individuals of African descent, remained pervasive. Absolute poverty increased, disproportionately affecting immigrants, as the elimination of key social assistance programs worsened inequality. Women faced high levels of gender-based violence, with state responses deemed insufficient. Regarding LGBTI+ rights, Italy regressed in recognizing same-sex families and ranked low in European respect for these rights. Additionally, prison overcrowding and restrictions on civil organizations raised concerns about the rule of law and fundamental rights protection.

Nicaragua

Daniel Ortega's government continued to suppress dissent and isolate Nicaragua internationally. Measures such as the closure of media outlets, NGOs, and universities have severely restricted freedoms of expression, association, and education. Persecution of government critics persisted, with 81 individuals detained and opposition figures stripped of their nationality, rendering them stateless.



Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities continue to face discrimination and violence, particularly from illegal settlers invading their territories, leading to forced displacements and killings. The government maintains impunity for the repression of the 2018 protests, which resulted in over 300 deaths and hundreds of cases of torture. Women's rights remain severely restricted, with a total ban on abortion and rising gender-based violence, while the government provides no official data on femicides. Over 260,000 Nicaraguans have been forced to emigrate due to political persecution and lack of opportunities.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Armed conflicts continue to severely impact civilians, especially in the Ituri and North



Kivu provinces, where violence by armed groups like the M23 has worsened the humanitarian crisis. Over 7 million people have been displaced internally, the highest number of internally displaced persons in Africa. Government forces have also been implicated in abuses against civilians, including executions and violent repression of protests. Despite President Félix Tshisekedi's efforts to promote reforms, significant progress has not been made to curb the violence, corruption, and impunity that have plagued the country for decades.



The repression on journalists, activists, and opposition members has intensified, with numerous political leaders and party members arrested. Peaceful protests have been met with violent repression, leading to the deaths of dozens, such as in Goma in August 2023.

On the international stage, the United States and the European Union have sanctioned several individuals implicated in financing abusive armed groups. Meanwhile, the Congolese government has called for an accelerated withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO), criticizing its ineffectiveness in addressing armed conflicts.

Conclusions

More than 75 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the principles it upholds remain fundamental to building more just and inclusive societies. However, its implementation faces significant challenges worldwide, hindered by government inaction and the politicization of key issues.

Every time these principles are disregarded, the most vulnerable bear the consequences, suffering losses in freedom, health, and even their lives. Despite criticisms of this framework for human rights protection, it remains a vital tool for addressing global challenges and paving the way for a more equitable future.

The international community must act with urgency and consistency to protect human rights and ensure justice for all individuals whose rights have been violated, regardless of their origin, gender, or circumstances. This responsibility lies not only with governments but with the entire international society, which must work together to ensure that human rights and human dignity are respected and defended at all times. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a commitment that must be renewed and strengthened in the face of ongoing challenges in various parts of the world.

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