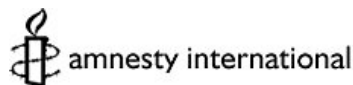


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Amnesty International Report 2016/17 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Jordan

The authorities continued to restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and detained and prosecuted critics and opponents under criminal defamation, blasphemy and anti-terrorism laws. Torture and other ill-treatment continued in detention centres. Trials before the State Security Court were unfair. Women faced discrimination in law and in practice and were inadequately protected against sexual and other violence. Migrant domestic workers were exploited and abused. Jordan hosted more than 655,000 refugees from Syria but sealed its borders to new arrivals in June. Courts continued to pass death sentences; there were no executions.

Background

Jordan remained part of the Saudi Arabia-led international coalition engaged in armed conflict in Yemen (see Yemen entry).

In March, the government submitted a national human rights plan to the King, intended to phase in human rights improvements over a 10-year period.

In May, Parliament approved constitutional amendments empowering the King to directly appoint senior judicial, army, gendarmerie and General Intelligence Department (GID) officials. Parliamentary elections held in September used a proportional representation system for the first time.

There was continued insecurity along the border with Syria. In June, a bomb attack killed several Jordanian soldiers near an inter-border area in which some 70,000 Syrian refugees remained stranded in extreme hardship. Following the attack, the government sealed border crossing points, denying entry to refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria. In December, an attack by armed men near Karak killed 10 people, including three civilians; the armed group Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility.

Torture and other ill-treatment

The government's 10-year national human rights plan listed objectives that included strengthening legal protections against torture and increasing prosecutions of and "sanctions" against perpetrators of torture, but it was not clear that any such reforms were made in 2016. Cases of police officers accused of torturing detainees continued to be handled by special police courts whose proceedings were neither independent nor transparent.

Deaths in custody

In January the Adaleh Centre for Human Rights Studies, an NGO based in the capital, Amman, reported that at least eight deaths in detention resulting from torture had occurred in the previous two months. In April the government's human rights co-ordinator said journalists and human rights activists would be permitted to attend some police court trials, including the trial of three officers accused of beating to death Omar al-Naser while he was in Criminal Investigation Department custody in September 2015. The trial was subject to lengthy adjournments without explanation and was not resolved by the end of 2016. Meanwhile, no information was made public about plans to prosecute police officers charged in connection with the beating to death in police custody of Abdullah Zu'bi in Irbid in 2015.

Unfair trials

The authorities continued to prosecute alleged supporters of IS and other armed groups, as well as journalists and opposition political activists, under anti-terrorism and other laws before the State Security Court (SSC), a quasi-military court whose procedures failed to meet international fair trial standards.

Those tried included Adam al-Natour, a Polish Jordanian who received a four-year prison sentence after the SSC convicted him of "joining an armed group and terrorist organization" on the basis of a "confession" that he said he was forced to make under torture by GID interrogators who beat and electrocuted him during three weeks of incommunicado detention. Following this detention, he was brought before the SSC Prosecutor and made to sign a statement in Arabic, a language he could not read or understand.

Administrative detention

The authorities held tens of thousands of individuals under the 1954 Crime Prevention Law, which allows detentions for up to one year without charge or trial or any means of legal remedy.

Freedoms of expression, association and assembly

The authorities restricted freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly and detained or prosecuted tens of journalists and critics under criminal defamation provisions of the Penal Code and anti-terrorism law provisions that criminalize criticism of foreign leaders or states. In July, the official National Centre for Human Rights reported an increase in arrests and SSC referrals of peaceful critics and protesters under these laws.

In May, the authorities released Dr Eyad Qunaibi, a university professor who had been sentenced to two years' imprisonment in December 2015 after the SSC convicted him of "undermining the political regime... or inciting opposition to it" for criticizing Jordan's relations with Israel in a Facebook post.

On 25 September, a gunman shot dead journalist Nahed Hattar outside the court in Amman where he was being tried for posting a satirical cartoon on Facebook that the authorities deemed offensive to Islam. He had been held for almost a month in pre-trial detention before a court allowed his release on bail. Jordan's official news agency said the alleged perpetrator was arrested at the scene of the killing; the case was later referred to the SSC on charges including murder.

Draft amendments to the Societies Law proposed in March, if implemented, would increase government powers to prevent the legal registration of NGOs or their operations on national security or public order grounds, and would deny them access to international funding without any justification. The amendments had not been enacted by the end of the year.

Women's rights

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice, and were inadequately protected against so-called honour crimes and other forms of gender-based violence.

In April, a parliamentary legal committee endorsed proposed amendments to Article 308 of the Penal Code that would end the provision allowing rapists to avoid prosecution if they marry their victims. However, it would keep the provision when the victim is aged between 15 and 18. At the end of the year, the amendments had still to be enacted.

In July the CEDAW Committee requested information from the government ahead of its scheduled 2017 review of Jordan. Among other things, they requested details of any government plans to amend the Citizenship Law to allow Jordanian women married to foreign spouses to pass their nationality to their children and husbands on the same basis as Jordanian men, and to allow their families increased access to medical care, education and other services. The Committee also requested information on government plans to amend Article 308 and other Penal Code provisions that allow rapists to escape prosecution and mitigate penalties for perpetrators of so-called honour crimes.

Migrant workers' rights

Migrant domestic workers continued to face exploitation and abuse. In February the Amman-based NGO Tamkeen reported that 80,000 women migrant domestic workers were excluded from the protection of labour laws and exposed to violence and other abuse by employers. The UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons reported during a visit to Jordan that migrant women employed as domestic workers who fled abusive employers were at risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The Special Rapporteur also reported that refugee women and girls from Syria were trafficked for sexual exploitation.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Jordan hosted more than 655,000 refugees from Syria, including 16,000 Palestinians, as well as almost 60,000 refugees from other countries including Iraq, Yemen and Somalia, and 2.1 million long-term Palestinian refugees.

By the end of the year, there were 75,000 Syrian refugees stranded in harsh conditions in the "berm" desert area between the Rukban and Hadalat border crossings with Syria. The government denied most of them entry into Jordan on security grounds but allowed around 12,000 to enter Jordan in May, confining them to Village 5, a fenced-off area of Azraq refugee camp. On 21 June the authorities sealed Jordan's border with Syria after a suicide bomb attack, thereby cutting off regular humanitarian access to refugees in the berm. Jordan has tightened border controls since 2012. The authorities also deported several refugees on alleged security grounds.

By July, Jordan had received only 45% of the funding it required from the international community, according to the UN, to meet the needs of refugees from Syria. Around 86% of Syrians in urban areas of Jordan were reported to be living below the poverty line with limited access to services.

Death penalty

Courts imposed death sentences; there were no executions. In February, a government spokesperson denied media reports that the authorities planned to execute 13 prisoners.

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