

Fragile Protection and Missing Justice

Human Rights Challenges
in Arab Countries 2023



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Development and Human Rights 2024



"Executive Summary"

Within the framework of Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights' interest in the situation of human rights in the Arab region, it issued its seventh annual report, which monitors and analyzes the human rights situation in the Arab region during the year 2023, indicating the changes and developments that have occurred in the human rights situation in all relevant fields and spaces, including what is included in legislation, laws, policies, practices and decisions taken that have an impact on the reality of human rights, whatever that impact is. This report is a reference document that diagnoses the human rights situation in the Arab world according to an objective, analytical, legal monitoring approach based on foundations and standards that are consistent with the provisions of national constitutions and international standards regulating rights contained in this report. This report, like previous reports, will be one of the tools for human rights evaluation. As usual in previous reports, the first section of this report addressing the position of Arab countries from the international human rights mechanisms during the year 2023, as this section provides a general overview and detailed observations on the international treaties to which Arab countries have joined, and the extent of these countries' cooperation with international human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism, treaty bodies, and special procedures. This section also sought to highlight the challenges facing Arab countries in cooperating with human rights mechanisms and provided an in-depth analysis of the efforts of Arab countries to address these challenges.

In the second section, the report discussing the position of the Arab countries on achieving the sustainable development goals, and provided a comprehensive analysis of the Arab countries' commitments to the sustainable development goals and the challenges they face in achieving them. It also sought to highlight the efforts made by the Arab countries to integrate sustainable development into their policies, programs and initiatives. In its third section, the report addressing the human rights situation in the Arab countries, provided an overview of the human rights violations that occurred in the Arab countries in 2023, and examining the efforts made by the Arab countries to address these violations. In the fourth and final section, the report focused on the impact of the fierce war launched by Israel on the Gaza Strip following Operation "Al-

Aqsa Flood” on October 7, 2023, on the human rights situation in the occupied territories in general and the residents of the Gaza Strip in particular.

Section One: The position of Arab countries regarding international mechanisms for protecting human rights:

This section of the report reviewed the position of Arab countries regarding international mechanisms for protecting human rights during the year 2023, and the extent to which there was cooperation and communication with these mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies, special procedures, and the universal periodic review mechanism, especially since the Arab region attracts the attention of these mechanisms due to its challenges and human rights violations, whether committed by local governments or committed by regional and international parties involved in their existing conflicts. The position of the Arab countries will also be analysed, during the year 2023, regarding the various international mechanisms concerned with the promotion and protection of human rights.

1. The position of the Arab countries from the Human Rights Council:

In the three regular sessions held by the Human Rights Council in 2023 (session: 52, 52, 54), the Human Rights Council adopted nearly 109 resolutions, Arab issues received only 11 of the total number of resolutions, and most of them were adopted during the work of the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council. The Arab countries also contributed to sponsoring and submitting 45 resolutions or amendments, other than the resolutions that were submitted on behalf of regional groups such as the Group of Arab States, the Group of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the African Union, or the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Algeria, Morocco, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, and Somalia were HRC members and allowed to vote on Council decisions, and as usual, the Arab countries did not adopt the same voting behavior on Council decisions, whether they were decisions related to Arab issues or in general. In this part of the report, the position of the Human Rights Council on Arab issues and the voting behavior of Arab countries on the Council’s decisions regarding these issues will be clarified. In addition to its participation in adopting and sponsoring Council decisions in general, all Arab countries have the right to present and sponsor Council decisions without having the right to vote.

Session	Number of adopted Resolutions
52	43
53	30
54	36 + Presidential Statement

These three sessions also witnessed a number of priorities and issues in Arab countries, as follows:

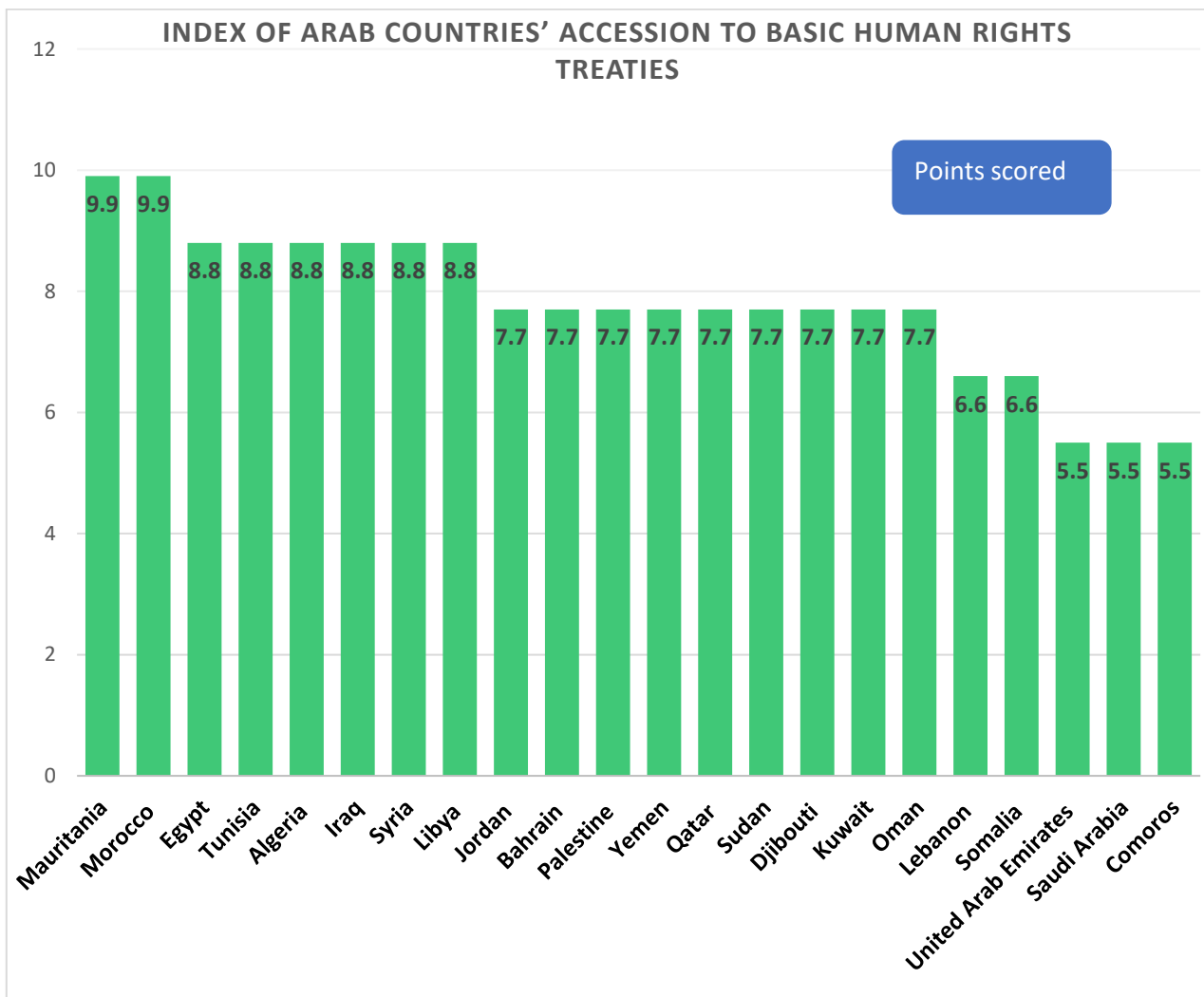
- Refusing to establish mechanisms for countries to monitor the human rights situation in them without the consent of the concerned state, most Arab countries called on member states to adhere to the principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity, and to eliminate double standards when considering human rights issues;
- Calling for special importance to be given to Item 10 of the HRC Agenda on technical assistance and capacity building. The majority of Arab countries participated in most of the interactive dialogues that took place within the framework of this item;
- Rejecting calls for national, racial, or religious hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence, and categorically, rejecting the incidents of burning the Holy Qur'an;
- Calling for reform of international financial institutions to take into account economic and social rights in developing countries; Calling on HRC and OHCHR to adopt the call for the importance of restructuring financial institutions;
- Emphasizing that economic, social and cultural rights are an integral part of the international human rights framework that contributes to achieving stable and comprehensive societies. These rights have not always suffered from a severe lack of funding;
- Focus on the negative effects of coercive unilateral measures on human rights to monitor the effects of these measures on the right to development;
- Emphasizing the importance of realizing the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people, and rejecting Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories;
- Emphasizing the importance of item 7 remaining on the agenda of the Human Rights Council;

➤ Emphasizing the refusal to impose any controversial concepts such as “sexual orientation and gender identity.” Most Arab countries pointed out that this concept has no legal basis in agreed upon international legal frameworks, and that attempts to impose one set of concepts and treat them as superior to other values undermine the cooperative and universal character of the international human rights system.

2. The position of Arab countries from Treaty Bodies:

During the year 2023, a number of Arab countries were reviewed before the United Nations treaty bodies in the context of discussing the national reports submitted by these countries, or in the framework of the pre-sessional working group, before submitting the countries’ national reports or after. During this subsection of the report, Maat seeks to focus on Arab countries’ compliance with international human rights treaties in 2023, which necessarily requires clarifying the position of these countries from the basic international human rights treaties.

Index of Arab Countries Joining Treaty Bodies



The index measures the party-states from the Arab countries to basic international human rights treaties, and the countries that have joined these treaties, which monitor the implementation of their provisions by the treaty bodies, take 1.1 on the index, while the non-party states detracts from the same previous percentage. The countries of Mauritania and Morocco come at the top of the index, as the two countries have signed all basic human rights treaties, while the Comoros come at the end of the index in partnership with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, as shown in the previous figure.

3. The position of Arab countries regarding special procedures:

During the year 2023, the Special Procedures submitted many urgent communications and appeals to most Arab countries with the aim of improving and promoting human rights in them. The Special Rapporteurs and independent experts sent 58 appeals to 17 Arab countries, in addition to the appeals directed to Israel as the occupying power in the occupied Palestinian territories, at a rate One report every 15 days. While the Arab countries provided responses to 25 communications out of the total communications received, representing 43% of the total communications. Both Algeria and Jordan showed real cooperation with the Special Procedures Mechanism, as Algeria received four appeals and Jordan received three appeals, all of which were responded to. Although the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia received the largest number of Communication, with about 10 communications, not to mention the numerous communications received by the companies working in the NEOM project, the Saudi oil companies, and the Saudi Public Investment Fund, the government of the Kingdom was one of the most cooperative Arab countries with the communications it received, as KSA responded to 7 of them. In contrast, Libya, Sudan, Kuwait, Oman, Syria, and the Israeli occupation authorities, in their capacity as the occupying authority in the occupied Palestinian territories, did not cooperate with the complaints and did not respond to any communications sent to them.

The communications and urgent appeals submitted by special procedures mandate holders consisted of 28 thematic issues that were repeated approximately 137 times in 58 appeals or communications. The most recurring thematic issues were freedom of opinion and expression, which appeared in 14 communications, followed by the protection of human rights defenders with approximately 12, and violence against women and girls 11 times, then terrorism

with the same statistic. While the issues of arbitrary detention, and execution were repeated about 10 times, while topics such as identity, sexual orientation, business, human rights, and the right to health were the lowest in the issues that were repeated in the communications of the special rapporteurs, with one time each, and in the table below are the issues and times that were mentioned in the communications received by Arab countries.

#	Issue	Number
1.	Terrorism	11
2.	Arbitrary Detention	10
3.	Enforced disappearance	7
4.	Freedom of Expression	14
5.	Freedom of assembly and association	8
6.	Protection of human rights defenders	12
7.	Disability	1
8.	Independence of judges and lawyers	9
9.	Privacy	5
10.	Execution	10
11.	Torture	5
12.	Gender Identity	1
13.	Truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition	5
14.	Minorities	3
15.	Education	3
16.	Violence against women and girls	11
17.	Migrants	5
18.	Slavery	4
19.	Trafficking	2
20.	Adequate housing	2
21.	Work under satisfactory conditions	1
22.	Climate change	1
23.	Environment	1
24.	Commercial Business	1
25.	Clean water	1
26.	Internal displacement	2
27.	Racism	1
28.	Health	1
Total of=		137

4. The position of the Arab countries regarding the universal periodic review mechanism:

During the year 2023, the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism considered two reports of two Arab countries, namely the United Arab Emirates at the 43rd session of UPR, which was held from May 1 to 12, 2023, in addition to the State of Djibouti at the 44th session of UPR, which was held during The period from 6 to 17 November 2023, while the United Arab Emirates announced its position on the recommendations it received in the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review. Djibouti, which received 259 recommendations in the fourth round, still has not expressed its final position on the recommendations that were referred to it by delegations during the dialogue with it. However, Djibouti announced that it will inform its position on the recommendations no later than the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, which will be held from February 26 to April 5, 2024.

Section Two: The position of Arab countries on implementing the sustainable development goals

This section of the report reviewed the situation of sustainable development in the Arab countries during the year 2023, focusing on the five development goals under review for the year 2023, which are: Access to water and sanitation for all (**Goal 6**), clean and renewable energy (**Goal 7**), supporting industry, innovation and infrastructure (**Goal 9**), Creating local and sustainable cities and communities (**Goal 11**), Establishing partnerships to achieve the Goals (**Goal 17**). While providing an analytical space to clarify the impact of global changes and the negative repercussions left by the transformations taking place in the international community and the impact of this on development systems, policies and steps in the Arab world.

Evaluative insights into sustainable development indicators during 2023

Goal \ Country	Goal 6	Goal 7	Goal 9	Goal 11	Goal 17
North Africa region					
Egypt	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Libya	↓	→	↑	↑	↑
Sudan	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑
Tunisia	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑
Morocco	→	↑	↑	↑	↑
Algeria	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Mauritania	→	↑	↑	↑	↑
East Africa Region					
Somalia	↓	↑	↑	→	↑
Djibouti	→	↑	↑	↑	↑
Comoros	→	↑	↑	→	↑
The Levant and Iraq countries region					
Syria	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑
Lebanon	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑
Jordan	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑
Palestine	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑
Iraq	→	↓	↑	→	↑
Arabian Gulf region					
Yemen	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑
Qatar	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Saudi Arabia	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
UAE	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Bahrain	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑
Kuwait	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Oman	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑

Figure No. (2): Arab countries' orientation abroad during 2023

The green arrow indicates a noticeable appearance, the red arrow indicates stability in performance, but the yellow arrow indicates stability in performance

The connotations and facts of the Arab region during the year 2023 reflect relentless efforts to accelerate sustainable development in all its dimensions: social, economic, and environmental, and its goals, indicators, and objectives estimated at 196, 240, and 17, respectively. Through monitoring and analysis of the reality of sustainable development, the facts of the Arab development region show the ability of 7 of its countries to have crossed 2/3 of their path to achieving sustainable development. These countries are: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates, and it points out the inability of 14 other countries to achieve a single one of its development goals, and claims that countries suffering from conflict and poverty are most at risk of falling behind, especially Syria and Yemen¹. It points out that most Arab countries are in the red on sustainable development indicators; as goal 5 is classified as the most challenging goal for the Arab region, and Goals 3, 6, 7, 9, 14, and 16 need growing efforts to mitigate and eliminate their challenges.

While the geographical reading of the facts of sustainable development monitors the extent to which the Arab countries located in the North African region suffer from many challenges that prevent them from achieving Goals: 2, 3, 5, 8, and 14, and the suffering of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries from the challenges of Goals: 5, 6, 12, and 13. ; Obesity, water scarcity, clean energy challenges, and air quality are widespread, and the challenges of Goals 5 and 8 are becoming more severe in the Levant countries².

¹ Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Release of the Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023, 7 December 2023, <https://www.unsdsn.org/release-of-the-arab-region-sdg-index-and-dashboards-report-2023>

² Al Masry alyoum, the Arab Development Report on Climate Change and Sustainable Development in the Arab Countries, November 6, 2023, received <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/3023724>

Sustainable development in the Arab region between challenges and coping mechanisms:

1. Sustainable development in the Arab region: an analytical vision of the existing challenges:

➤ Political and security challenges:

• Conflicts and armed conflicts:

The Arab environment is full of a number of very complex security variables, including conflicts and disputes that have caused about \$900 billion and economic losses for the period from 2011 to 2023 due to the intensification of the arena of conflicts in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Palestine, and behind increasing rates of displaced people and refugees, which has raised the ceiling of humanitarian needs to 60 million people, and 30 million displaced people, according to 2023 statistics, and 180 million neighboring countries were affected by these conflicts, and the impact of these conflicts is evident in Palestine, Syria, and Yemen. In the first, it caused a decline in development by a rate of 11:16 years in Palestine and a rate of 16:19 years in Gaza, depending on the severity of the conflict³. In Syria, poverty rates reached about 90% compared to 28% in 2021, and humanitarian needs rose to 15.3 million people, and it caused the loss of development efforts in Yemen for more than 30 years and raised poverty to 71%: 78%⁴.

• Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war:

The Russian-Ukrainian war had negative impacts on sustainable development. It caused the global economy losses estimated at about \$1.6 trillion, according to 2022 statistics, and the Arab region was not far from those repercussions. Varying impacts were observed, being less severe for energy-exporting countries and more severe for emerging market economies, middle-income economies, and low-income countries. These difficulties were particularly linked to rising food and energy prices, the cost of imports, and supply and production disruptions⁵.

Until mid-2022, the Middle Eastern countries that depend on importing an important group of their strategic goods from Russia and Ukraine had begun to be greatly

³ United Nations Development Programme, The poverty rate in the State of Palestine will rise by more than a third if the war continues for a second month, November 9, 2023, <https://shorter.me/uRaCE>

⁴ Arab Development Portal, Demography, dated December 16, 2023, <https://shorter.me/z-0cu>

⁵ Sky News Arabia, What are the economic repercussions of Ukraine's war on the Middle East?, February 23, 2023, <https://shorter.me/1X36z>

affected by the consequences of the war taking place inside Ukrainian territory, and Egypt came at the top of the countries most negatively affected by the results of the Ukrainian war, while Yemen was the least affected country in the Arab region⁶.

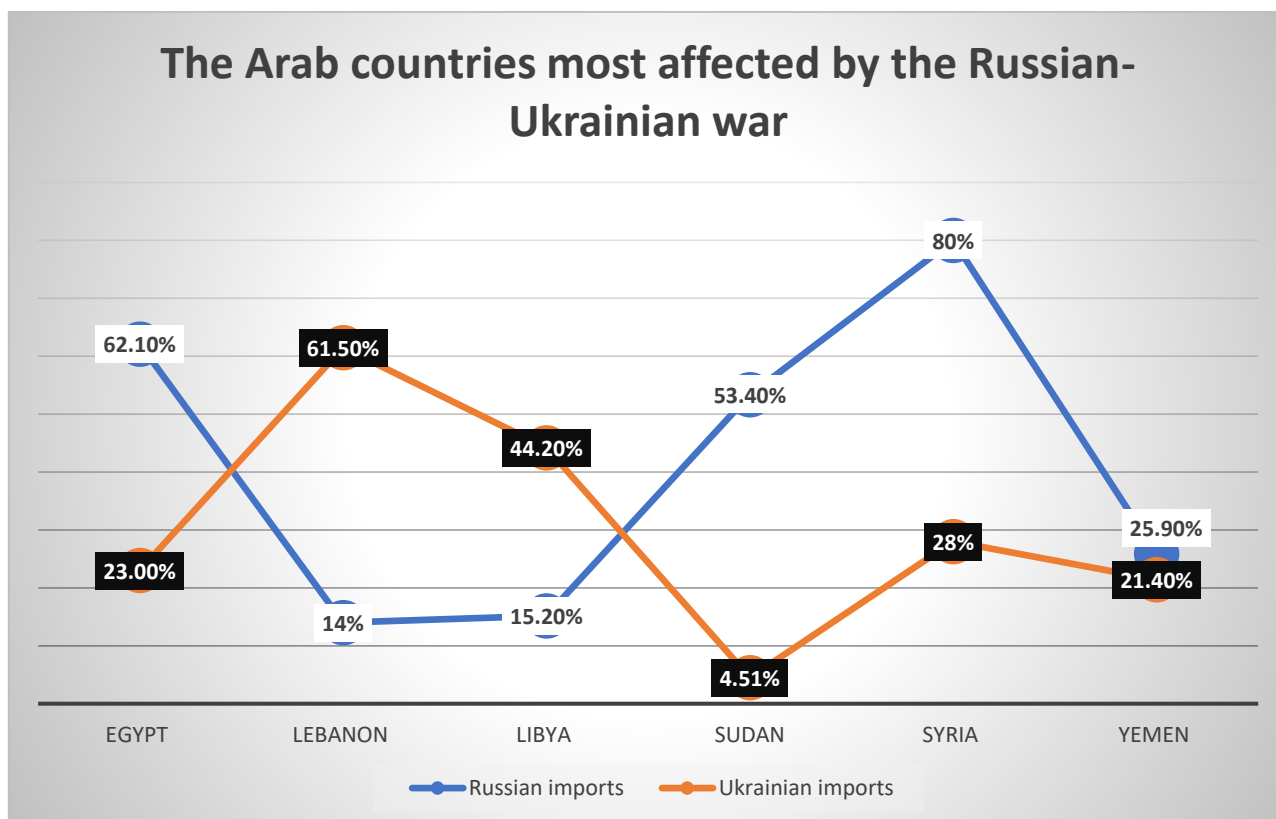


Figure (4): Percentages of how exports and imports were affected in a number of Arab countries due to the Russian-Ukrainian war

- **The phenomenon of migration and displacement:**

The phenomenon of migration is evident in the Arab regions as part of the international phenomenon estimated at about 214 million people, and reflects the extent of the decline in economic, political and security realities, the spread of corruption, social injustice and the lack of opportunities, which forces Arab youth, like other youth from developing countries, which are responsible for 1/3 of the immigrant population, to migrate outside the borders through legal and illegal means in search of favorable conditions and environment, with which their minds, ideas, and abilities migrate to their countries and are transformed into economic energies for the benefit of other countries, which affects development and economic growth in Arab countries. In this context, while the Arab countries hosted 41.4 million international migrants and refugees, representing about 15% of the international migrants and refugees in the world, the migration and displacement movement is still

⁶ How Russia's War in Ukraine is Impacting the MENA Region, The Tahrir Institute, <https://bit.ly/4aCdcUm>

constantly increasing in the Arab countries, as it reached about 32.8 million people in 2020.

- **The spread of organized crime and armed groups:**

The power vacuum resulting from regional unrest has led to an increasing presence of armed actors and criminal networks that compromise peaceful societies. The growth of transnational criminal networks is a worrying phenomenon, undermining the rule of law and conditions of security and economic stability necessary to achieve sustainable development, as well as depriving the government of revenues and facilitating corruption. Terrorism is still strongly present in the Arab region in its traditional and non-traditional forms and continues to have negative repercussions on the progress made for sustainable development by 2023. In the second quarter of 2023, the Arab region witnessed more than 230 terrorist operations, compared to only 35 operations in the first quarter. These operations led to the shedding of the blood of 3,387 victims⁷.

- **Economic challenges:**

- **Economic structural composition:**

The structural composition of Arab economies, which are highly focused on oil resources and non-renewable sources, as evidenced in the Saudi and Libyan economies, and the focus on capital-intensive industries, have led to increased exposure of Arab economies to external fluctuations, especially Covid-19, the Ukrainian-Russian war, and the accumulation of debt⁸.

- **Covid-19 pandemic:**

Since its spread in March 2020, the Corona pandemic has cast a shadow over the Arab region as a fertile and supportive environment for its spread. As all Arab countries recorded infections, causing economic losses estimated at about 42 billion dollars in gross domestic product in the Arab countries and raising the unemployment rate by 1.2%, meaning about 1.7 million jobs were lost according to 2020 statistics. Preliminary estimates, between January and March, business companies in the region recorded an estimated loss of \$420 billion, equivalent to 8% of the total wealth in the region, and the poverty rate increased by about an additional 10.5 million, besides 2.5 due to the Russian-Ukrainian war, according to statistics.

⁷ Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, Terrorism Index Report in the Arab Region (April-June) 2023, July 23, 2023, <https://shorter.me/rN2Ju>

⁸ The Arab Trader, the highest Arab countries in terms of debt in 2022, April 28, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3EQH0iC>

- **Low human capital:**

The challenges of youth and the capitalist power they represent are clearly evident in the decline in capital investment, youth's loss of work skills, and their unpreparedness for the labor market, in addition to high unemployment rates. Arab countries need to create approximately 60:100 million jobs by 2030 in order to reduce unemployment in Arab countries. Statistics indicate that 50% of Arab youth in primary and secondary schools do not learn and do not meet the minimum levels of reading and writing, and that there are more than 20 million Arab youth of school age who are out of school, and approximately 75 million are likely to drop out of primary and secondary schools before their graduation date⁹.

- **Debt crisis:**

Accumulating and rising debt imposes limited fiscal space for sustainable development. Total public debt has risen to a historic level of \$1.4 trillion, representing about 60 percent of the region's GDP in 2020. Even in the high-income Gulf Cooperation Council countries, total public debt has nearly quintupled from 2008 to reach \$576 billion dollars in 2020. Figures indicate that approximately half of the public debt in the Arab region falls on middle-income countries¹⁰.

According to data issued by the International Monetary Fund for the year 2023, Bahrain comes at the top of the countries in the Arab world with the largest rate of public debt compared to the country's gross domestic product at 4.2%, while Algeria comes with the lowest percentage of debt out of the country's gross domestic product at 0.1%.

⁹ Escwa, Inequality in the Arab Region: A Time Bomb, May 2022, <https://shorter.me/Qpajt>

¹⁰ United Nations, ESCWA: Public debt in the Arab region has risen to historic levels amounting to \$1.4 trillion in 2020, October 28, 2023, <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2021/10/1086092>

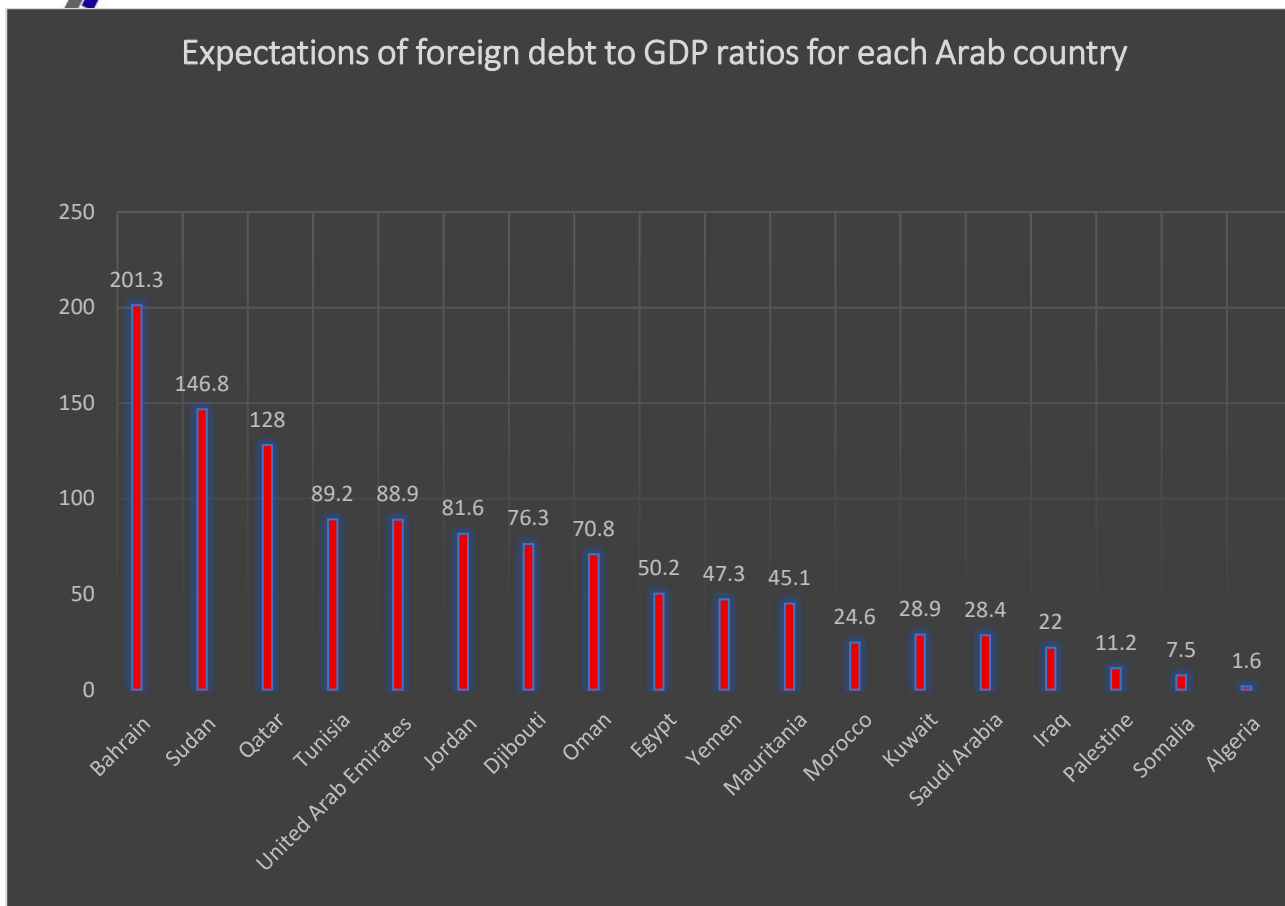


Figure (5): Expectations of the percentage impact of foreign debt on GDP in Arab countries

- **Brain drain:**

The phenomenon of brain drain from Arab countries has negative impacts and constitutes a concern among sustainable development decision-makers in the Arab region. Although this phenomenon began in the nineteenth century, its pace increased in the twentieth century, especially after the end of World War II, and it worsened in the 21st century, especially after the developments of what was known as the “Arab Spring.” As a result, the Arab region lost a third of its human capacity to immigration to European countries, Australia, and Canada. The Arab countries began to suffer from low human capital and lack of competencies, and incurred annual losses of about 200 billion dollars¹¹.

- **The informal economy:**

The informal economy has become a widespread phenomenon in Arab contexts, with major repercussions on efforts to achieve sustainable development. Nearly two out

¹¹ Shafaf, Iraq Fourth.. A mass brain drain from Arab countries abroad, April 13, 2023, <https://shorter.me/vBVJX>

of every three workers work in informal jobs in the Middle East and North Africa region, and they are widespread in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, at 26.5%, 77.3%, and 43.9%, respectively¹².

- **Illicit financial flows:**

The Arab region loses approximately 60.3 to 77.5 billion dollars in resources annually due to illicit financial flows. It lost about half a trillion dollars during the period from 2008 to 2015, equivalent to 482.7 billion dollars and equivalent to one-fifth of the Arab region's gross domestic product.

- **The fragility of the financial system:**

Arab governments lose about \$9 billion annually due to tax violations committed by multinational companies as a result of their harmful practices, such as shifting profits away from the countries in which they carry out their activities, in order to evade their tax responsibilities. The proportion of multinational companies that pay the proposed global minimum effective tax rate of 15% does not exceed one third of companies operating in the region¹³.

- **Financing challenges:**

The challenges of financing and mobilizing financial resources to achieve sustainable development occupy a large space and require several solidarities, coordination and participatory efforts. Sustainable development needs in the Arab region are estimated at about 230 billion dollars annually until 2030, and the gap in financing necessary to achieve sustainability goals in twelve Arab countries is estimated at about 660 billion dollars annually by 2030¹⁴. The Arab region needs to close the climate financing gap in the Arab region by about \$400 billion until 2030¹⁵.

➤ **Social challenges:**

- **Widening gender gap:**

The social gap widens within Arab countries when talking about gender equality, which takes more than 179 years to achieve compared to 142 years globally, despite

¹² World Bank Blogs, Informal Workers in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia: What Can We Learn to Promote Growth for All? November 6, 2023, <https://shorter.me/Jf-2x>

¹³ ESCWA, ESCWA: The Arab region annually loses approximately \$9 billion due to tax violations by multinational companies, May 10, 2023, <https://shorter.me/nGWGV>

¹⁴ CNN Economics, The private sector and sustainability in Arab countries...a gap between actions and goals, November 2023, https://shorter.me/_5hCi

¹⁵ Youm7, Planning: \$400 billion to bridge the climate financing gap in the Arab region, September 15, 2023, <https://shorter.me/iFH2z>

the successes achieved by countries in the region. The Arab region indicates that women allocate between 5.1 and 6.2 times more time than men to unpaid care work in the region, much higher than the global average of 3.2 times. The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments rose dramatically from 3.8% in 2000 to 18.7% in 2015, but is still lower than the global average of 22.5% in 2015¹⁶.

However, Arab efforts to reduce the gender gap pushed 10 Arab countries to be ranked on the index of the best countries in the world combating the crisis of gender inequality, as Bahrain came on the list of Arab countries as the Arab country making the most efforts to close the gender gap with a rate of 0.66, while Egypt came on the list with a rate of 0.62, and Algeria ranked last among the Arab countries working to confront the gender gap with a rate of 0.57¹⁷.

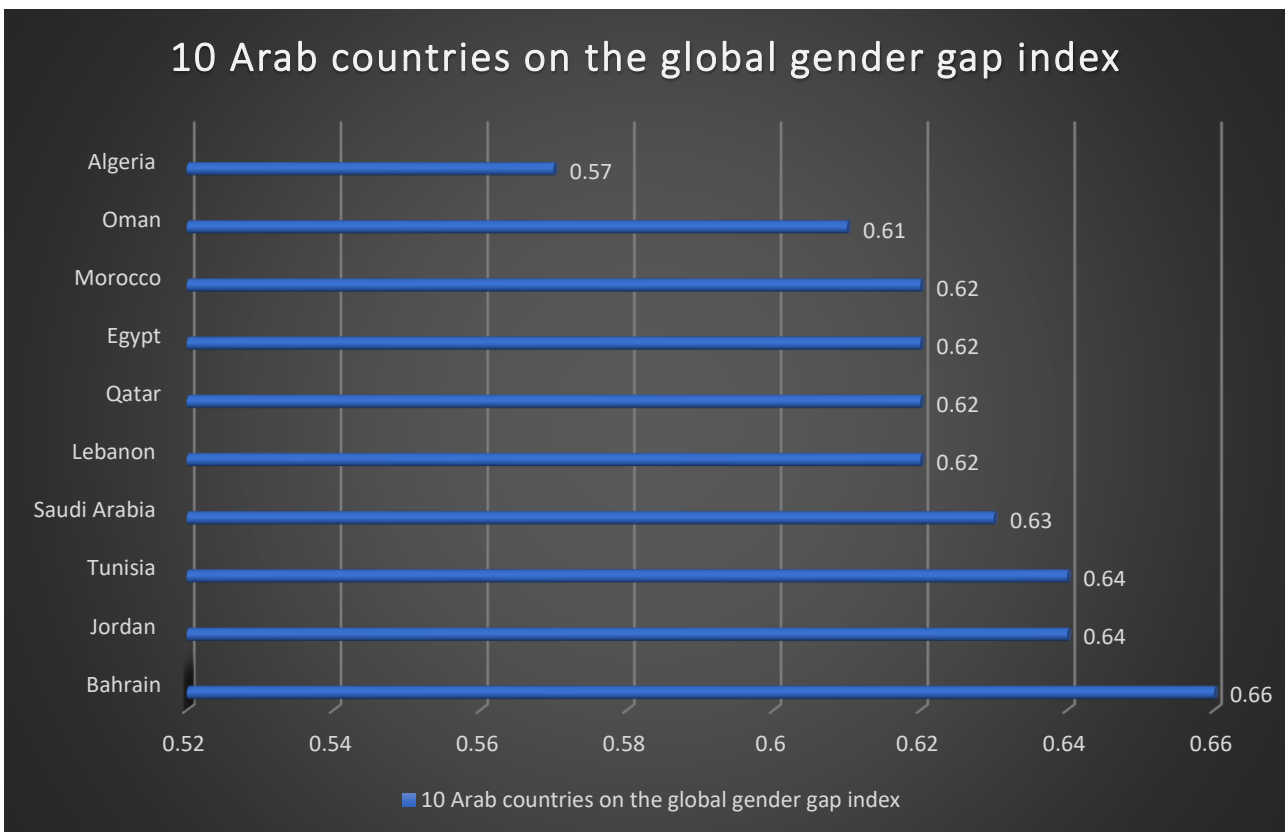


Figure (6): Percentages of combating the gender gap in a number of Arab countries according to the Global Gap Index

- **Increasing population growth:**

Population growth rates are constantly increasing and skyrocketing; It was recorded three times more than in 1971, and exceeded 436.4 in 2020, compared to 22.7 million

¹⁶ Arab Development Portal, Gender, accessed December 17, 2023, <https://shorter.me/zvQSC>

¹⁷ The global gender gap index 2023, Statista, <https://bit.ly/48vTzvT>

people in 1990. The Arab region now includes 5.6% of the world's population, and 80% of them live in only 8 countries: Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, and Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Syria, and despite the positive population indicators regarding life expectancy and mortality, at the national levels, it is observed that the mortality and fertility rates are high in general, especially in the Comoros, Iraq, Mauritania, Somalia, and Sudan, at a rate of 4 births per woman¹⁸.

The following graph includes a mathematical analysis of the population growth rate expected to be reached by some countries in the Arab world by the year 2050, so that the population in Egypt will reach 150 million people, as the Arab country that will witness the most population growth during the next 35 years, followed by Iraq with 84 million people, then Sudan with 80 million people, then Algeria with 56 million people, while the majority of other Arab countries will stand at the threshold of 50 million people by 2050¹⁹.

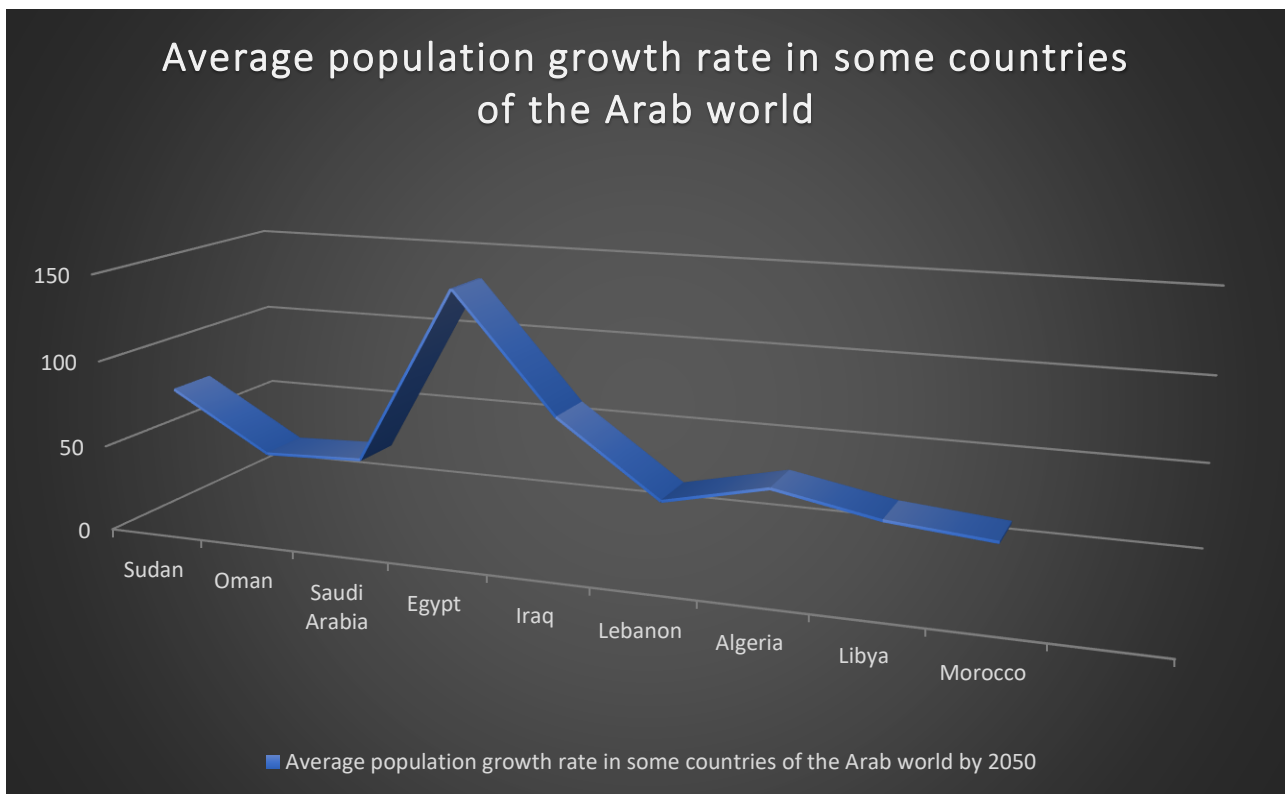


Figure (7): Population growth rates in a number of Arab countries by 2050

- **The phenomenon of violence against women and girls continues:**

Non-conflict-related violence against women and girls persists in the region; Whereas 37% of women in the Arab region have been exposed to some form of violence, and

¹⁸ Arab Development Portal, Demography, accessed December 2023, <https://shorter.me/i98uf>

¹⁹ Demographic Profile of the Arab Region: Realizing the Demographic Dividend, ESCWA, <https://bit.ly/3tAFT3d>

that 1 out of 3 married women has previously been exposed to physical violence from a partner, and 18% of Arab girls under the age of 18 are still married, and 3% are under the age of 15, and that more than 40 million Arab females were subjected to female genital mutilation; It is still ongoing in Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as other Arab countries such as Djibouti, Egypt, and Mauritania²⁰.

▪ **Fragility of the health structure:**

Despite the health progress of the Arab region, it can be said that the population of the Arab region lives 1:6 years less than its counterparts in the world, and non-communicable diseases still pose major health threats, traffic accidents, drug abuse and disorders are still on the rise, and the percentage of health spending dwindles to less than \$1.00 per capita in Mauritania, the Comoros, Sudan, and Djibouti, compared to \$1,000 per capita in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, not to mention the continued collapse of conflicts in the Arab region. In Syria, men lost 8 years of average work, and Syrian health facilities were completely and partially destroyed by 16% and 42% respectively, while in Libya, only 6% of its health facilities are functioning to provide basic services²¹.

➤ **Environmental challenges:**

The following graph indicates the climate changes expected to occur according to environmental studies during the next two and a half decades, which are expected to cause a wide range of risks that will strike water sources and agricultural environments within the societies of the Arab world in a varying manner, so that the rates of increase in temperatures in the region vary between two degrees up to 2.6 degrees, so that Algeria and Syria come at the top of the list with a rate of warming that will rise by 2.6 degrees, and Bahrain comes as the lowest country with a rate of 2 degrees²².

²⁰ Arab Development Portal, Youth, accessed December 17, 2023, <https://shorter.me/StwGM>

²¹ Arab Development Portal, Health, accessed December 17, 2023, <https://arabdevelopmentportal.com/ar/indicator/health>

²² Climate Change in the Arab World Requires More Holistic Reforms, Carnegie Europe, <https://bitly.ws/38fN5>

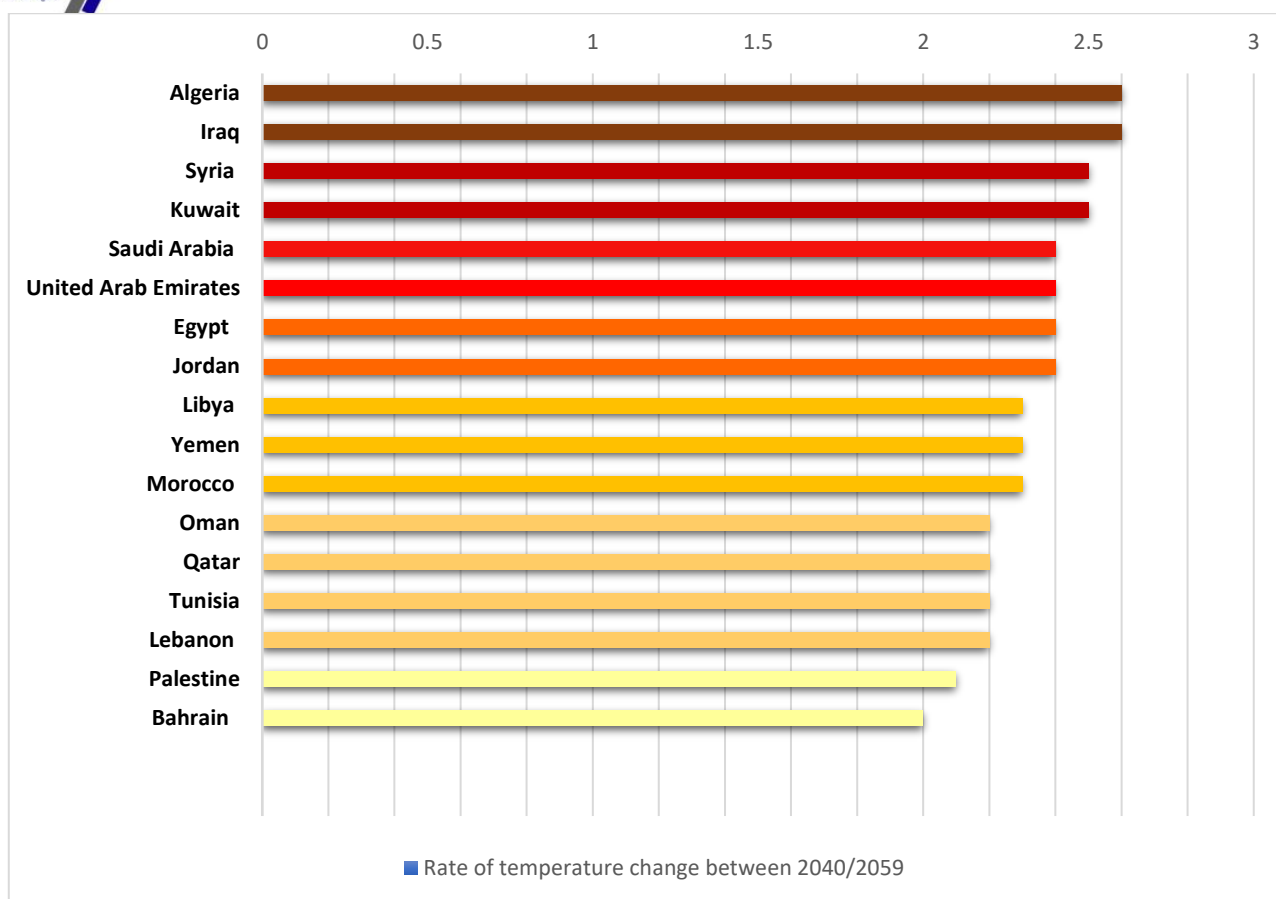


Figure (8): Expectations of the impact of temperatures on a number of Arab countries between 2040 and 2059

Environmental challenges in the Arab world are divided into two main challenges:

- **Climate changes:**

Climate change poses a major challenge to sustainable development in the Arab region. Temperatures in the Arab States region is rising at a rate twice as fast as the global average due to climate change, and by 2050, climate-related water scarcity portends economic losses equivalent to 14% of the region’s GDP and a decline in agricultural productivity of 30% by 2050, indicating 45% of the total agricultural area in the region is exposed to salinity, depletion of soil nutrients, and wind erosion²³. The impact of climate change is evident in Yemen, where it is most vulnerable to climate change, and climate change threatens Yemen with a loss of 93 billion US dollars in gross domestic product, and threatens the suffering of an additional 3.8 million

²³ UNDP, Rising to the challenge: Climate action in the Arab region, 28 September 2023, <https://shorter.me/2Atzs>

people from malnutrition in Yemen, and threatens the death of more than 121,000 people by 2060²⁴.

- **Water scarcity:**

The Arab region is one of the most water-scarce regions in the world, and out of 22 Arab countries, 13 receive less than 251 mm of rainfall annually, with approximately 362 million people suffering from conditions ranging from water scarcity to absolute scarcity. 18 out of 22 Arab countries face serious levels of water scarcity, and the region's per capita share is one-eighth of the global average per capita renewable water supply. About 59.2 percent of the Arab population lives in urban areas, putting additional pressure on urban water infrastructure²⁵.

2. Recommendations for mechanisms to confront challenges:

While the policies and strategies of each Arab country in the world differ in their approach and management of efforts to improve the state's status on the path to achieving development goals, a group of obstacles and challenges appear on the path, the mechanisms for confronting them vary according to the recommendations that highlight the best proposals for dealing with these challenges with the aim of overcoming them, including:

- **Recommendations to strengthen work on Goal 6 in the countries of the Arab region:**

- In light of the worsening water crises in the Arab countries that are witnessing intense conflicts, in conjunction with the decline in local efforts to manage the water file in an optimal manner, we recommend that the League of Arab States provide technical and advisory support to the governments of "Palestine - Syria - Yemen - Sudan" on ways to overcome the challenges of the water file in their countries.
- While the State of Libya was severely damaged as a result of the natural disasters that struck the country, most notably Hurricane Daniel, we recommend that the Libyan government launch a national strategy that focuses on integrating early warning mechanisms into the state's systems for the purpose of future protection from the risks of the climate crisis and its impact on the water file inside Libya.

²⁴ UNDP in the Arab Region, UNDP Report: Projections Showing the Devastating Impacts of Climate Change on Human Development in Yemen, December 3, 2023, <https://shorter.me/Y2LsH>

²⁵ Arab Development Portal, Gender, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://shorter.me/pcf5z>

- In the context of the continuing water crisis resulting from the extended dry seasons in Somalia, we recommend that the Somali government cooperate with experienced governments for the purpose of exchanging experiences with these countries that have strong contributions and successful strategies in managing the prolonged crises of water scarcity within them.
- Pollution of water sources is considered one of the most important crises in the Lebanese water sector. Within this framework, we recommend that the Lebanese government launch a national strategy that focuses on bringing in water purification systems, along with launching a supportive program for the smart management of the Lebanese water resources of 40 rivers.
- **Recommendations to enhance work to achieve Goal 7 in the Arab region:**
 - Regarding the negative impact of the Sudanese security crisis on the energy sector in the country, we recommend that both parties to the conflict quickly reach a settlement for the purpose of calming the country in a way that prevents the energy sector from collapsing due to the war.
 - While the Lebanese economic crisis is causing one of the most important challenges of the energy crisis inside Lebanon, we recommend that the Lebanese government cooperate with UN bodies to launch a local program that encourages the start of a multi-stage transformation towards the use of clean, cheap, sustainable energies, provided that the Lebanese government begins supporting projects in its agencies, reaching the stages Developed to expand its use in private centers and residential neighborhoods.
 - In light of the similar geographical and economic contexts facing the countries of Iraq and Lebanon, we recommend that the governments of the two countries work to exchange local experiences in managing the energy file, as Syria has previously started its own project to support the use of renewable energies in its safe areas, which has reduced the pressure on the electricity and traditional energy networks.
- **Recommendations to enhance work to achieve Goal 9 in the Arab region:**
 - In the context of the continuing losses witnessed by the Sudanese infrastructure, we recommend that the Arab League intervene to demand calm and open a political dialogue between the two parties to the conflict with the aim of protecting the development path within Sudan from declining to its worst points in years.
 - While more than 10% of Djibouti's population continues to carry out their activities offline in the absence of telecommunications services provided to

them, we recommend that the Djiboutian Ministry of Communications cooperate with its counterpart in UAE with the aim of benefiting from the Emirati experience as one of the leading countries in the Arab region in the field of expanding the scope of telecommunications and internet network services.

- After more than 11 years of continuing the Syrian war, which has massively destroyed the country's infrastructure, we recommend that the Syrian government, during the year 2024, announce its plan for Syrian structural reconstruction in accordance with the funding pledges the country has obtained.

➤ **Recommendations to enhance work to achieve Goal 11 in the Arab region:**

- In the absence of declared Sudanese strategies to manage efforts towards achieving Development Goal 11, we recommend that the Sudanese Sovereignty Council begin work on a national strategy for urban development and city management, in addition to launching a plan for the smart transformation of Sudanese cities from random settlements to sustainable communities.
- The Comoros is considered one of the largest Arab countries suffering from the consequences of the climate crisis, which raises the recommendations submitted to its government by Maat for the purpose of demanding that part of the government's attention be directed towards Development Goal 11 by launching a national strategy aimed at reducing pressure on urban cities within the Comoros, by working to create sustainable local cities, even in coastal areas within the country.
- In light of the widespread impacts that Iraqi society has experienced due to the lack of security stability and the activity of terrorist groups, we recommend that the Iraqi government launch a government project that focuses on large-scale urban planning with the aim of achieving better management of Iraqi cities and living communities and combating the spread of slums resulting from population overcrowding in the safest areas farthest from security disturbances within the country.

➤ **Recommendations within the framework of strengthening work to achieve Goal 17 in the Arab region:**

- In the context of the continuing growth in the importance of establishing development partnerships, especially in countries that have witnessed conflicts that affected their ability to manage development files individually, we recommend that the Syrian government break away from the cloak of

traditional partnerships, and begin cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Reconstruction to work on a joint strategy for the reconstruction of the Syrian infrastructure.

- For the purpose of establishing meaningful partnerships to improve the reality of life in Lebanon, we recommend that the Lebanese government cooperate with the United Nations Development Program to launch development programs aimed at improving the reality of life of Syrian refugees residing inside the country at all levels, especially economic and social.
- We recommend that the Yemeni government expand cooperation with Gulf development and investment funds to work broadly on reconstruction operations, improve infrastructure, and expand the scope of communications and electricity networks inside Yemen, while benefiting from leading Gulf expertise in the development field.

Section Three: A look at the human rights situation in the Arab region

This section of the report dealt with the human rights situation in 22 Arab countries during the year 2023, both at the legislative level as well as civil and political rights, in addition to economic, social and cultural rights, in addition to the rights of the most vulnerable groups. The report also examined the efforts made by Arab countries to address these violations and made recommendations to improve the human rights situation in Arab countries. During this executive summary, the focus will be solely on civil and political rights.

1. Syria

The Syrian government remained keen to demonstrate its support for civil and political rights in 2023. However, these rights still face challenges in practical practices, especially the Syrians' right to life, their right not to be arbitrarily detained, and their right to freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly.

The right to life

The Syrian government emphasizes ensuring the right to life, and the commitment not to implement the death penalty except in cases of the most serious crimes. However, various reports have claimed that the death penalty is still being applied on a large scale and in a large number of crimes that do not qualify as the most severe crimes. The legal texts contained in the Syrian Penal Code also confirm that the death penalty is still being applied to crimes that do not meet the criteria for the most severe crimes. Seriousness, including crimes related to drug trafficking and smuggling that

do not result in death, drug possession, gang robbery, terrorism that does not result in death, and membership in political opposition groups. As the Syrian conflict enters its thirteenth year, the right of individuals to life remains vulnerable to violations by all major actors and controlling forces in Syria. In this context, independent reports documented the killing of at least 501 civilians during the first half of 2023. Among the victims were 71 children, 42 women, 3 medical personnel, and 1 media personnel. The main responsibility for the killing of civilians in Syria goes to all parties involved in the Syrian conflict, active groups without the state, and regional and international powers intervening in the Syrian crisis, such as the Russian Federation, the United States of America, and pro-Iranian militias²⁶.

Protection from arbitrary detention, forced detention and torture

The Constitution and law in Syria prohibit all practices of torture or ill-treatment, as Article 53 stipulates that no one may be tortured or treated in a degrading manner. The Syrian Penal Code also criminalizes torture practices and imposes a penalty on those who carry out acts of torture to obtain a confession to a crime, or information about it, amounting to imprisonment for a period of three years. The Constitution also guarantees citizens their personal freedom, preserves their dignity, and prohibits their arrest except by virtue of a judicial order issued by a competent judicial authority. However, Maat noted that the practices of torture, arrest, enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention followed by inhumane treatment of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons in official and unofficial prisons and places of detention have been systematically and widely committed by all parties to the conflict, especially by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which Hundreds of citizens were detained in 2023, including political activists and journalists, for expressing opinions. In addition to subjecting detainees to inhumane and cruel treatment inside detention centers and prisons that lack proper ventilation, lighting, and adequate sleeping places and are characterized by severe overcrowding, depriving detainees of the right to access medical and food care or communicate with their families, which sometimes led to the death of some detainees.

In specific facts that support the above, a citizen died under torture on November 25, 2023 during his interrogation by State Security officers, on charges of writing anti-Syrian president phrases on the walls and burning his pictures in the city of Al-Tall in

²⁶ The most prominent human rights violations in Syria in June and the first half of 2023, Syrian Network for Human Rights, July 7, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/3Gw3rch>

The Rif Dimashq governorate²⁷. On May 27, 2023, The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic documented the death of a 44-year-old man as a result of being subjected to multiple types of torture while in the custody of the military police of the Syrian National Army in the city of Azaz²⁸.

Freedom of opinion and expression

The constitution and law in Syria guarantee freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom of the press, printing, publishing, and the media. It also grants every citizen the right to express his opinion freely and publicly, verbally, in writing, or by all means of expression. However, Maat noted that freedom of opinion and expression was subjected to widespread violations at the hands of all parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in 2023. In this context, Maat monitored many incidents during which journalists, activists, and media workers were subjected to arrest, detention, or Enforced disappearance by all parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria. On November 20, for example, the General Security Service of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham arrested an activist from inside his home in the city of Idlib, against the background of publications critical of the living situation on the social networking platform Facebook, and on the 28th In September, the Syrian government's security services arrested a journalist who runs a local news network called "Jableh 1," on the back of a post he made on Facebook²⁹, in which he criticized the deteriorating living and service conditions. On April 28, the same services arrested a journalist activist and the director of a media network in the city of Masyaf in the western countryside of Hama, on charges of undermining the prestige and resolve of the state, due to his criticism of the Syrian government on the network's page³⁰.

The right to peaceful assembly

Citizens in Syria have the right to freedom of peaceful assembly under Article 44 of the Constitution, and although the Syrian government affirms its respect for the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and demonstration, Maat has noted that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly has faced unjustified restrictions in practice. During

²⁷ Less than a month after his arrest, a young man dies under torture in the regime's security basements, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 25, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/3NcdXcB>

²⁸ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, General Assembly, August 14, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/47BQiu>

²⁹ Because of publications critical of the "government" and the living situation. The General Security Service affiliated with the "HTS" arrests an activist in Idlib, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 20, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/3T3B78V>

³⁰ Regime security services arrest the director of a local news network, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 28, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/47ZNN5I>

2023, on August 17, for example, popular demonstrations broke out to protest the high rate of inflation and the deteriorating economic situation in Syria in the Druze-majority city of Suwayda, and as the protests spread to the rest of Syria, including the cities of Daraa, Latakia, Tartous, Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah, and Homs. The security forces used excessive force to confront the gatherings, including arrest, torture, and forced disappearance. The media also accused the demonstrators of treason and collaboration. According to reliable local statistics, the security forces arrested at least 57 civilians, including 11 women, against the backdrop of the protests that broke out in several Syrian governorates, including Damascus, Rural Damascus, Latakia, Tartous, and Aleppo, during the period between 1 and 25 August 2023³¹.

2. Jordan

The right to freedom of opinion and expression

Freedom of opinion and expression remained vulnerable to violations by the Jordanian authorities during the year 2023. In this context, the Jordanian King, on August 12, ratified the notorious Anti-Cybercrime Law, which was approved by the Jordanian Parliament on May 27. The adoption of this law represented an additional obstacle for activists and human rights defenders in exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression in Jordan. In addition, during the period covered by the report, the Jordanian authorities continued to restrict the work of human rights defenders, including journalists, media professionals, lawyers, Internet activists, and bloggers, for no other reason than exercising their legitimate right to express opinions. At dawn on the 26th In July 2023, security forces arrested writer Khaled Turki Al-Majali, after the Amman Criminal Court convicted him of defaming an official body, and sentenced him to three months in prison, against the backdrop of his peaceful activity on the Internet and his criticism of the new anti-cybercrime law³².

On August 9, the Amman Criminal Court issued a ruling to imprison journalist Ahmed Hassan Al-Zoubi for a full year in addition to imposing a fine of 50 Jordanian dinars (\$70). This ruling came after the court convicted him of charges of inciting sectarian and racist strife and inciting conflict between the components of the nation. This happened in a post he published on his Facebook page during the strike of transport

³¹ The Syrian regime faces the demands of the protests in August 2023 with the same brutal mentality in which it faced the demands of the March 2011 movement, Syrian Network for Human Rights, August 26, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/4a2A8f6>

³² The authorities continue to suppress freedom of expression and imprison writers and journalists, Gulf Center for Human Rights, September 1, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/3tojwy7>

truck drivers in Ma'an Governorate in December 2022 against the rise in fuel prices, in which he criticized the way the authorities dealt with the events that accompanied the strike. On the same day, the Jordanian authorities released journalist Heba Abu Taha after she was arrested on August 8, where she spent 24 hours in detention. Her release came after she appealed the sentence that was issued against her on June 14, 2023, to three months in prison on charges of defaming an official body, based on a post she published on her private page on Facebook³³.

The right to form associations

During 2023, the Jordanian authorities continued to impose widespread restrictions on the establishment of civil society organizations and associations and the way they operate, as they maintained legal and policy measures that unjustifiably restrict the right to form associations, maintained the same bureaucratic and unnecessary procedures that hinder their registration, , and continued to impose unnecessary restrictions that limit the ability of civil society organizations to receive international funding. In this context, Maat researchers noted that the Jordanian authorities still continue to impose some laws that significantly restrict the freedom to form and organize associations, including the Labor Law of 1996 and the Law Associations Act 2008, and other laws that give the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Supply the right to approve or reject requests to register associations, the right to dissolve associations and unions and refer them to the judicial authority, the right to approve the boards of directors of associations, and the right In sending government representatives to any meeting of association boards, and the right to prevent associations and civil organizations from receiving foreign funding, which hindered the ability of civil society organizations in Jordan to freely receive foreign funding and grants. In addition, during the period covered by the report, the Jordanian authorities targeted civil society activists associated with their associations. On August 10, the Court of Appeal issued a 4-month prison sentence against Dr. Ibrahim Al-Mansi, coordinator of the "Popular Campaign to Defend the Holy Quran," in the case brought against him by the Minister of Endowments due to his defense of The Society for the Preservation of the Holy Qur'an after the authorities closed some of its centers³⁴.

³³ The authorities continue their gross violations of human rights, Gulf Center for Human Rights, August 14, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/4aCzUvq>

³⁴ Ibid

The right to peaceful assembly

The right to freedom of demonstration and peaceful assembly remained vulnerable to violations by the Jordanian authorities during the year 2023, as it was observed during the reporting period that the Jordanian authorities continued to suppress peaceful protests and arrest peaceful demonstrators and protestors who exercise their legitimate right to demonstrate and peaceful protest based on some laws restricting the freedom of individuals to peaceful assembly, including the Crime Prevention Law of 1954, which gives the authorities expanded powers to detain people by administrative order without judicial review. In this context, Maat researchers monitored a number of incidents during the year 2023 during which peaceful protesters and demonstrators were subjected to arbitrary arrest and administrative detention for nothing more than they exercised their legitimate right to demonstrate and peaceful assembly. During the peaceful demonstrations that broke out in Jordan during the last months of 2023 in protest against the brutality of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, the Jordanian authorities arrested more than 600 peaceful demonstrators and protesters during these demonstrations, and transferred them to criminal and security trials on charges of inciting riots, vandalizing property, assaulting security personnel, and attempting to change the regime, and imposed exorbitant bails on them that amounted to an average of 50,000 Jordanian dinars per person³⁵.

3. Lebanon

The right to life

Legislation in Lebanon guarantees the right to life, and in 2023 Lebanon continued to impose a moratorium on the application of the death penalty. The last application of the penalty, according to the Global Alliance to End the Death Penalty, was in 2004, that is, nearly two decades ago. The moratorium on the application of this penalty is a good practice that paves the way for the penalty to be abolished later. However, the right to life was affected by the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip that began on October 7, 2023. The Israeli bombing of southern Lebanon led to the death of a number of civilians, including journalists, and a random bombardment with live ammunition by the Israeli army on October 13th led to the death of the Reuters journalist, Issam Abdullah and the injury of six other journalists. Although the journalists were wearing blue protective vests marked with the word “press” logo, the Israeli army did not take

³⁵ The Jordanian authorities are determined to silence voices that reject war crimes in Gaza, Arab Organization for Human Rights in Britain, November 3, 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/3tvitwg>

into account the protection granted to journalists during conflicts, in violation of the principles of international humanitarian law.

Protection from enforced disappearance

The issue of missing and forcibly disappeared persons since the Lebanese Civil War has remained a concern for the families of the missing in 2023. The number of these missing persons is estimated at more than 17 thousand, and despite the establishment of the Lebanese National Authority for Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons, who were granted the authority to access information, exhume bodies, determine burial sites, and hand over their remains to their relatives, However, the Commission faced obstacles to carrying out its tasks stipulated in the law. The most important of these obstacles is the lack of financial resources allocated to it, and the failure to allocate a headquarters for the Commission, which prompted its members to meet in their homes. This made it impossible for the members of the Commission to exercise their mandate in an optimal manner, and Maat believes it is necessary for the Lebanese authorities to cooperate more closely with the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and to seek technical support from the team so that serious steps can be taken in the issue of missing persons.

Freedom of Press

Lebanon enjoys a margin of freedom of the press in 2023, and it ranked 119th in the World Press Freedom Index for 2023 compared to 130th in 2022, and the prisons in Lebanon are devoid of any detained journalists, which has prompted more journalists to express their opinions freely, with the harassment and threats facing journalists who dealt with controversial issues such as gender continued. The harassment facing journalists contravenes Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the same article in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Lebanon has ratified.

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly

Lebanon guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression, but current legislation continues to criminalize some practices and impose prison sentences for “defamation and criticism of public officials.” Peaceful gatherings that took place in downtown Beirut on September 30 to express their opinions against the violation of basic rights also faced attacks such as throwing stones and directing insults, reports indicate that these actions were carried out by loyalists to the state, at a time when the Internal Security Forces did not intervene to prevent these attacks. In a related

context, Maat examined a video of these marches, and the video shows an attack by a member of the Internal Security Forces on one of the demonstrators, who called for intervention to prevent the assault on the demonstrators. In light of the calls for a fair investigation into the clashes that occurred as a result of this demonstration, the Lebanese Minister of the Interior claimed that the march was not authorized.

4. Iraq

The right to life

The Iraqi Constitution guarantees the right to life under Article 15. However, Maat noted a group of practices during the year 2023, which conflict with Iraq's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, especially respect for the right to life, and attributed most of these practices to the armed and terrorist groups spread in Iraq, On January 27, human rights defender Abbas Kamel Al-Jabri was subjected to an assassination attempt near his home, and sustained minor injuries, as a result of his exposure to repeated threats for his refusal to drop the judicial complaint he filed against those accused of killing his brother Hamza Kamel Al-Jabri, who lost his life during the Olive Bridge protests. In the city of Nasiriyah, on February 22, the cardiology and internal medicine consultant, Dr. Ahmed Abdullah Al-Madfai, was assassinated after leaving his clinic in Diyala Governorate, by an armed group. As a result, the health institutions in Diyala Governorate organized, on February 27, protests to demand that the perpetrators be identified and brought to a fair trial. The Iraqi Doctors Syndicate announced the closure of private doctors' clinics and private hospitals, except for emergency cases, throughout Iraq for the same day. On March 17, Dr. Aqeel Abdullah Al-Nasiri was assassinated when he was heading to give a lecture at the Open Educational College. Although press reports confirmed that the security authorities arrested the perpetrators who assassinated Dr. Al-Madfai and Al-Nasseri, no other details have been announced yet to reveal their identities and the motives for the crime they committed. In May, civil society activist Akram Azab accused government agencies of killing his brother, Saad Azab, after he confirmed that a force consisting of three government vehicles belonging to the National Security Service had raided their house to arrest his brother for participating in demonstrations rejecting the adoption of the Cybercrimes Law. He confirmed that a member of the government security force tried to hit his brother with the handle of his gun, but a bullet fired from him and killed him.

On October 16, civil society activist Ali Mahmoud Abboud Al-Sibai was assassinated in central Baghdad using a silencer pistol. Al-Sibai had participated during the month of

October in the demonstration that began in Tahrir Square, where he posted on his Facebook page a picture of himself holding a banner on which he wrote the goals of the October Popular Movement, which included holding the killers of the demonstrators accountable and providing justice to the victims of the protests. On October 8, 2023, Zeina Hafez Al-Salhi, a candidate for the provincial council elections in Diyala Governorate, announced her withdrawal from running in these elections, and that the reason was the threats she received, which amounted to threats to kill her son. Article 6 of Part Three of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iraq acceded to in 1971, affirms that “the right to life is an inherent right of every human being, and the law must protect this right, and no one should be arbitrarily deprived of his life”.

The right to freedom of opinion and expression

Despite the guarantees provided by Iraqi legislation to protect freedom of opinion and expression, the Iraqi government took many decisions during 2023 that violated freedom of opinion and expression. On March 26, the Iraqi Media and Transport Authority decided to stop broadcasting Al-Kasir series, which is shown on the Iraqi satellite channel UTV, based on complaints received by members of the House of Representatives and tribal sheikhs. The Iraqi Artists Syndicate had said that it had examined Al-Kasir series, and followed the first and second episodes, and it did not find anything that offended the values and traditions of the Iraqi people, and this decision contradicts Article 38 of the Iraqi Constitution, which emphasized freedom of expression in all means. There was also a security campaign to combat offensive content on the Internet, a campaign that would have a negative impact and restrict freedom of expression. On August 24, journalist Islam Kashani was arrested by a security force affiliated with the Internal Security Forces, and at the same time another Asayish force stormed his house hours after his arrest. The two forces did not have a judicial permit to arrest him or storm his house, and reliable local sources confirmed that his arrest is linked to his opinions that he publishes on social media networks and his television news programs, in which he criticizes corruption in the region’s institutions, non-payment of salaries to employees, and poor public services provided to citizens. All of these incidents constitute a violation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the same article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Allegations of enforced disappearance

Many Iraqi citizens have been subjected to enforced disappearance for various reasons. There are approximately one million people estimated to have been victims of disappearance, including enforced disappearance, over the past five decades, which prompted the families of victims of enforced disappearance in Iraq to organize solidarity vigils in a number of governorates on August 15, which was joined by civil society activists and human rights organizations and called on the Iraqi government to reveal the fate of their children, and to prosecute the perpetrators of forced disappearance crimes against them, especially since enforced disappearance still does not exist as an independent crime in Iraqi national legislation, and therefore, he cannot be tried in this way in Iraq.

On February 1, environmental activist Jassem Al-Asadi was kidnapped by an unknown armed group wearing civilian clothes. He was tied up and taken to an unknown destination. Al-Asadi is one of the most prominent defenders of the marshes of Iraq and possesses detailed information about them. Since 2008, he has organized and participated in many events that aimed to preserve the marshes of Iraq and support its local population. After his release on March 15, Al-Asadi confirmed that he was subjected to interrogation, investigation, and ill-treatment that amounted to torture for about two weeks by an armed group. On March 21, Elizabeth Tsurkov, a researcher residing in the United States, was kidnapped in Iraq. Reports claimed that these incidents fall within the pattern of targeted kidnappings in Iraq by parties affiliated with the state and non-state parties, and that the Iraqi government is responsible for doing everything in its power to ensure her safety, release her, and hold her kidnappers accountable, especially since Iraq is a party to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and therefore Iraq is obligated to criminalize enforced disappearance, investigate it, bring those responsible to justice, and ensure compensation for the victims.

5. Palestine

The right to life

The Israeli ground invasion of the Gaza Strip was followed, and even before that, by widespread violations of the right to life, which is the most sublime human right and no other right is superior to it. According to statistics reviewed by Maat, the Israeli occupation forces killed more than 30,000 people in the Gaza Strip until December

30, 2023, including 27,800 civilians³⁶, in addition to wounding more than 58,000 others. Targeting civilians violates Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Targeting civilians also contravenes Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Israel ratified on October 3, 1991. The occupying power did not abide by any principles contained in the law. International standards such as the principles of proportionality, necessity, and distinction when firing, and on the contrary, excessive and indiscriminate force were a systematic behavior and strategy of the occupation forces based on higher orders received by the Israeli security forces.

The West Bank was not free of killings either, and from January 2023 until mid-December of the same year, the occupying force killed more than 400 Palestinians, including more than 100 children, according to credible statistics³⁷. The voracious Israeli killing machine also targeted journalists, which led to unprecedented deaths of those practicing this profession. The number of journalists killed as of December 30, 2023 reached more than 100. Targeting journalists contravenes Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. Targeting journalists also contravenes Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the United Nations plan to ensure the safety of journalists.

Form Associations

Maat noted the restrictions that continue to obstruct the work of Palestinian non-governmental organizations during the period covered by the report, as these organizations are caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank refused in March 2023 to re-register a non-governmental organization responsible for defending Palestinian citizens detained in The West Bank under the pretext that this organization practices non-profit activities while receiving foreign funding, while the organization claimed that it is registered as a civil institution in accordance with Palestinian law, which does not prevent receiving foreign funding, and these practices violate the Palestinian Authority's commitment to the provisions of Article 21 of the International Covenant on Rights. Civil and political.

³⁶ Euro-Med Monitor, <http://tinyurl.com/378bs4y4>

³⁷ Humanitarian Coordinator Lynn Hastings briefs the press in Geneva, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/humanitarian-coordinator-lynn-hastings-briefs-press-geneva>

On the other hand, the Israeli occupation forces continued to impose de facto authority in the Palestinian territories, and used terrorism laws to restrict the freedom of civil society, creating an unfavorable environment for the work of these organizations. Restrictions remained on the offices of six Palestinian organizations and the branch of the International Federation for the Defense of the Child after Israel's decision to classify these organizations as terrorist organizations. In May 2023, the Likud Party in Israel proposed a draft law that included imposing a tax of 65% of the total aid and funding received by non-governmental organizations and relief organizations in both Israel and Palestine.

In a related context, a report issued by the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Palestinian Territories in June 2023 concluded that the Israeli government imposed successive restrictions on civil society with the aim of silencing it. This includes criminalizing Palestinian civil society organizations and their members as terrorists, exerting pressure and threats on institutions, as well as additional pressure on donors and implementing measures aimed at cutting off sources of funding and support³⁸. The restrictions on civil society did not stop only in the West Bank, but expanded to include the Gaza Strip. On February 20, civil society organizations in the Gaza Strip held a discussion panel in which they called on the Ministry of the Interior in the Strip to cancel all decisions and procedures in place to restrict civil society work by an announced and published decision, as the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip restrict the work of civil society and impose on these organizations the necessity to provide a written notification by the civil society institutions to the Institutions Investigations Office before implementing the activity, as well as notifying the tourist police from the tourist facility in which the activity is held³⁹.

Administrative detention

Israel continued to practice detention and administrative detention against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip during the period covered by the report, despite the recommendations made to it in the latest review of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism and the concluding observations of the United Nations treaty

³⁸ The UN Commission of Inquiry has recognized that all entities in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory violate the rights of members of civil society and the restrictions imposed by the Israeli government on Palestinians are fundamentally linked to the occupation, <https://www.ohchr.org/ar/press-releases/2023/06/rights-civil-society-members-are-being-violated-all-entities-israel-and>

³⁹ Civil society organizations in the Gaza Strip call on the Ministry of Interior to cancel all decisions and procedures in place to restrict civil society work by an announced and published decision, <https://www.aman-palestine.org/activities/19463.html>

committees. During the period covered by the report, the Israeli occupation authorities detained more than 2,800 Palestinians, according to the Israeli Prison Service. These persons were not charged nor referred to trial, and communication between them and their families remained cut off during the same period of the report, in violation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. During the period from January 2022 to August 2023, the Special Rapporteur on Palestine reported that the number Children detained without charge are on the rise, and Maat documented the detention of more than 20 children during the same period. These children are often detained on charges related to throwing stones at armored vehicles of Israeli forces.

Peaceful assembly and meetings

The Israeli occupation forces continued to prevent Palestinian gatherings at Al-Aqsa Mosque during the period covered by the report, and there remained restrictions on exercising this right in the Gaza Strip. On August 4, security personnel in the Gaza Strip dispersed a number of gatherings that took place in protest against the decline in economic conditions and the continuing electricity crisis. Security personnel also prevented journalists from covering these gatherings and detained some of them, such as journalist Ihab Omar, whose phone was confiscated and assaulted. In March, security services in the West Bank city of Ramallah imposed restrictions on peaceful gatherings called for by the unified teachers' movement, and teachers in the West Bank went out to sit in front of the Palestinian Council of Ministers.

Deprivation of freedom of movement

The right to freedom of movement are fundamental rights entrenched in international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, Maat documented that this right was subjected to unfair restrictions in the occupied Palestinian territories, by the Israeli occupation authorities during the period covered by the report, which undermines this right and places the population in Palestine under an almost continuous siege. Although the occupying authorities are among the state parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, they have not complied with the principles and provisions of this Covenant. This has serious consequences on the lives of more than 4 million Palestinians. Restrictions on freedom of movement in the occupied Palestinian territories are represented by the absolute control of the occupation authorities over border crossings. In the West Bank, for example, the occupation authorities control the West Bank and impose

barriers between cities and each other, dividing the areas into small parts. The number of military checkpoints has reached about 108 checkpoints in the West Bank⁴⁰. While reliable reports documented the presence of about 175 military checkpoints, which consequently leads to restrictions on freedom of movement not only from Palestine to other countries, but also from Palestinian cities to some of them, and holders of Palestinian ID cards in the West Bank are often prevented from entering East Jerusalem and Israel without Israeli permits allow them to pass, and in many cases it is not easy to obtain these permits, as the procedures for obtaining them take long periods and may end in rejection.

As for the Gaza Strip, the occupation authorities control the Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing and the Kerem Shalom commercial crossing, which are among the only two crossings used to transport individuals to and from the Gaza Strip⁴¹. The closure of Beit Hanoun results in preventing the families of captives from seeing their children in the prisons of the occupation authorities, in addition to preventing patients from moving to hospitals and lack of appropriate treatment, which may lead to their death. While the closure of the Karam Abu Salem crossing threatens commercial movement in the Gaza Strip and affects about 14,000 Palestinian workers, the crossing is the only means of passage for them to their workplaces⁴².

6. Egypt

The right to life

Article 59 of the Constitution in Egypt guarantees the right to a safe life for every resident of its lands⁴³. The National Human Rights Strategy also allocated the first sub-item in the first axis on civil and political rights in favor of the right to life and physical integrity⁴⁴. During the period covered by the report, Maat did not observe any violations of this right by law enforcement forces. Maat has not seen reports indicating that this right has been violated. In the same context, although Egyptian courts continue to issue death sentences, according to the Global Alliance to End the Death Penalty, the year 2023 has not witnessed any executions in Egypt. The government’s point of view is that Egypt’s application of the penalty is based on the

⁴⁰ Weekly report on Israeli violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, Palestinian Center for Human Rights, at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3Aked31>

⁴¹ Al Mezan and PCHR send joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council ahead of Israel’s UPR, <https://bit.ly/3DStYim>

⁴² Israel continues to close the Karam Abu Salem crossing in southern Gaza for the second day, Russia Today, at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3zVWsXu>

⁴³ Amended Egyptian Constitution 2019, Article 59, at the following link: <https://manshurat.org/node/14675>

⁴⁴ National Strategy for Human Rights, p. 16, at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3iREtmb>

second paragraph of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that “In countries that have not abolished the death penalty, this penalty may only be imposed as a penalty for the most serious crimes in accordance with the legislation in force at the time the crime was committed and does not violate the provisions of this Covenant. This penalty may only be applied pursuant to a final ruling issued by a competent court.” The government stresses that the death penalty is consistent with the most serious crimes.

Peaceful assembly

The Egyptian Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly and refers the exercise of this right to law. The security forces also allowed some limited workers’ gatherings that went out to demand economic reforms in their favor. The security forces did not confront these limited demonstrations and gatherings by dispersing these gatherings. During the period covered by the report, demonstrations took place in various cities in solidarity with the Palestinian people after the events of October 7, and on October 21 specifically, demonstrations took place in several Egyptian cities, including the governorates of Greater Cairo and Alexandria, to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, and according to subsequent reports These demonstrations led to the arrest of some demonstrators who went outside the demonstration limits. According to lawyers, the number of detainees after the end of these gatherings reached approximately more than 100 people⁴⁵, and while some of those arrested in the gatherings that took place in Al-Azhar and Tahrir were released, the rest were detained pending investigations into Case 2469, Supreme State Security. It is worth noting that Egypt is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides the right to peaceful assembly in Article 21 of the Covenant, and imposing any restrictions on the exercise of this right is considered non-compliance with the provisions of the International Covenant.

Formation of associations and freedom of action of civil society organizations

Maat noted positive developments in favor of supporting civil society organizations during the period covered by the report. On August 22, the Ministry of Justice issued a statement announcing the dropping of criminal cases against 75 organizations that were investigated in the civil society case, known in the media as the “Foreign Funding” Case, No. 173 of the year 2011; There are 10 other organizations still under

⁴⁵ After demonstrations in support of Palestine: 109 arrested in Cairo and Alexandria, third corner, at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/whk9vs6r>

investigation⁴⁶. On October 19, the investigating judge assigned by the Cairo Court of Appeal to investigate the same case issued an order that there was no basis for filing a criminal case due to insufficient evidence on the part of the Egyptian Center for Housing Rights. The decision also stipulated that the names of those included in the order be removed from the lists of those prohibited from traveling and awaiting arrival, in addition to lists prohibiting them from disposing of their liquid and movable funds. Other signs also appeared during the period covered by the report to deepen the partnership with civil society organizations, especially by the Ministry of Social Solidarity. For example, on June 20, the Ministry of Social Solidarity opened the conference “Civil Society...Towards an Effective Partnership in the New Republic.” During this conference, it called for consolidating the partnership with civil society organizations⁴⁷. The Minister of Solidarity confirmed that the vision of the Ministry of Social Solidarity in partnership with civil society institutions, it depends on a number of foundations, the most important of which is “the independence of civil society, and its ability to set its priority agenda in a way that suits the social, cultural and economic needs of society, and in a way that suits national circumstances⁴⁸.” However, according to allegations by human rights organizations, there remained restrictions on funding civil society organizations during the period covered by the report. However, the Ministry of Social Solidarity revealed that the Ministry allocated 16.3 billion pounds to about 133 associations and civil society organizations during nine years, from 2014 to 2023⁴⁹.

Freedom of Press

Egypt ranked 166th out of 180 countries in the International Press Freedom Index for 2023, an improvement of two places from 2022, when Egypt was ranked 168th out of 180 countries. It appears that this progress is thanks to the releases issued against journalists during the period covered by the report. On May 1, a judicial decision was issued to release Raouf Obaid, editor-in-chief of the daily Rose Al-Youssef, and producer Hisham Abdel Aziz, who works for the Qatari Al-Jazeera Mubasher channel, who were under pretrial detention. However, there have been reports indicating that journalists continue to be imprisoned for the opinions they have expressed. The

⁴⁶ Two years after the launch of the National Human Rights Strategy... What has been achieved??, at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/26axv79f>

⁴⁷ “Civil Society...Towards an Effective Partnership in the New Republic” conference, at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/yu3wppah>

⁴⁸ Egypt: Concern about the regime’s view of the role of civil society, NGO Network for Development, at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/37rreuf7>

⁴⁹ Solidarity: 16.3 billion pounds in funding for civil society over 9 years, at the following link: <https://www.cairo24.com/1823038>

Journalists Syndicate made positive efforts during the period covered by the report, and on December 12, Khaled Al-Balshi, head of the Journalists Syndicate, addressed the administrations of national and party newspapers to implement the minimum wage for all journalists starting in January 2024.

In a related context, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation continued to block some journalistic websites. For example, on October 29, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation decided to refer the Mada Misr website to the Public Prosecution, and to block the website and its electronic link for a period of six months, under the pretext of practicing media activity without obtaining a license to do so from the Council, in violation of Articles 6 and 59 of Law 180 of 2018, and for publishing false news without investigating its sources. Mada Masr website said in a hearing that they are committed to the internationally recognized media codes of honor, as well as the strict professional standards followed by it and its work team, in light of the constant belief in the right of citizens to know and obtain information.

Combating torture

The Committee against Torture considered Egypt's fifth periodic report on November 14 and 15, 2023. During the dialogue with the Committee, Egypt indicated the steps it had taken to reduce practices of ill-treatment or cruel and degrading treatment. Egypt also indicated the allocation of a sub-item in the first axis of the strategy. National Committee for Human Rights to limit individual practices and preserve physical integrity. However, in its concluding observations, the Committee requested the Egyptian Government to consider amending Article 126 of the Penal Code to ensure that the definition of torture is fully consistent with Article 1 of the Convention, as well as to accelerate the harmonization of detention conditions with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), in places Detention centers include Badr Center for Rehabilitation and Correction.

7. Morocco

The right to life

The Kingdom of Morocco guarantees the right to life, as Chapter 20 of the Moroccan Constitution stipulates that "the right to life is the first right of every human being." The law protects this right." It should be noted that the Kingdom of Morocco is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects the right to life in accordance with the text of Article VI. However, Maat notes that the

Kingdom has not acceded to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which aims to abolish the penalty of death penalty in the states parties to it. Maat also noted that the Kingdom adopts a moderate policy in dealing with the death penalty, as the courts still acknowledge in their rulings the imposition of the death penalty as an original criminal punishment. Indeed, it is considered the highest of the hierarchy, but the implementation of the decisions imposing it was suspended since the year 1993, and the royal pardon initiative is often repeated against those sentenced to death. According to a report issued by the National Council for Human Rights in May 2023, the number of people sentenced to death in Morocco reached 83 people by the end of 2022, out of 83 death row inmates for whom final sentences were issued. The right of 54 people and the trial in favor of 14 people, while 15 people were tried on appeal, and about 213 people sentenced to death benefited from the royal pardon between the years 2000 and 2022.

Protection from human trafficking

Morocco guarantees protection from human trafficking, and Maat noted a number of efforts taken by the Moroccan authorities to overcome this practice. Among these efforts, the government approved a comprehensive guide to identifying victims, a national response mechanism, and a strategy to combat human trafficking for the period 2023-2030, in March 2023. However, agencies concerned with confronting this phenomenon continued to face various challenges, including insufficient shelter and specialized services for victims of human trafficking, and the cessation of providing financial or in-kind support to civil society organizations that provide services to victims. But at the same time, the government continued its plans to create specialized places for victims of trafficking. For example, in March 2023, the government announced that it intended to establish four specialized shelters for victims of trafficking in Oujda, Casablanca, Agadir, and Tangier, with plans to establish specialized shelters in all states. The government also continued to provide services for women and children victims of violence, including potential victims of trafficking, in 40 reception centers staffed by nurses and social workers in major hospitals, in addition to providing these services in the Ministry of Justice's protection units in Moroccan courts.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Chapter 25 of the Moroccan Constitution stipulates that freedom of thought, opinion and expression is guaranteed in all its forms, and that freedom of creativity,

publication and display in the fields of literary and artistic creativity and scientific and technical research is guaranteed. Chapter 28 also stipulates that freedom of the press is guaranteed and that it cannot be restricted by any form of tribal censorship. This chapter affirms everyone's right to expression and to disseminate news, ideas, and opinions freely and without restriction, except for what the law explicitly stipulates. Despite this constitutional guarantee, there are violations committed that limit the exercise of this right. According to Chapter 447.2 of the Criminal Code, "Anyone who, by any means, including information systems, broadcasts or distributes a composition consisting of a person's words or image, shall be punished by imprisonment from one to three years and a fine ranging from 2,000 dirhams (about \$200) to 20,000 dirhams (about \$2,000), without his consent, or broadcasts or distributes false allegations or facts, with the intention of harming the lives of people or defaming them." This law is used as a means to limit the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of opinion and expression, and the government uses this legislation at various times to punish opinion writers. On April 10, journalist Hanan Bakour was brought to trial before the Court of First Instance in the city of Salé on charges of "publishing fake news using electronic means that harm private life." On May 3, various reports claimed that a number of journalists and academics were deprived of the right to read and write in clear violation of the principles of The United Nations Standard Minimum Standard for the Treatment of Prisoners. In specific examples, the journalists Slimane Raissouni, Omar Radi, and Tawfiq Bouachrine, who were sentenced to 5, 6, and 15 years in prison respectively, were also presented, as well as the opposition lawyer Mohamed Zayan, who was sentenced to three years in prison on several charges, including "marital infidelity," and the human rights activist Reda Ben Othman, who was sentenced to 18 months in prison due to criticism on Facebook of the deprivation of the right to read and write.

Freedom of Press

The Kingdom of Morocco ranked 144th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index for the year 2023, a decline from what it achieved in the previous year, as in 2022 it ranked 135th out of 180 countries. Reports claimed that this decline is due to the Moroccan authorities' use of the Penal Code and the Criminal Code instead of the Press and Publication Law, as well as the use of a number of judicial procedures such as arbitrary detention and arrest of journalists without prior judicial summons for the purpose of intimidating journalists and limiting freedom of opinion and publication. On October 5, journalist Abdelmadjid Amiaye, editor of the Shams Post

website, was arrested in a café in the city of Oujda, northeastern Morocco, and was immediately taken to the police headquarters, where he spent more than 24 hours before being released on bail, where Amiaye faces charges related to broadcasting and distributing false factual allegations through information systems with the intention of harming the private lives of people and defaming them, freedom of the press contravenes Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the same article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Freedom of Movement

Moroccan law guarantees freedom of movement and the ability to change the place of work or education, as the Moroccan Constitution stipulates in Chapter 24 that the freedom to move across the national territory, settle in it, leave it, and return to it is guaranteed to everyone according to the law. The government also made travel documents available to Sahrawis to travel and encouraged the return of Sahrawi refugees from Algeria and other places if they recognized the government's sovereignty over the Sahara. This condition limited the right to freedom of movement guaranteed to everyone without exception. In a related context, the activist Sultana Khaya from the Sahara region noted that she has been subjected to (actual) house arrest since 2020 due to her political and human rights activity opposing Morocco, in contravention of the right to freedom of movement contained in Article Thirteen of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8. Algeria

Freedom of opinion and expression

Articles 44 and 48 of the Algerian Constitution guarantee the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the press. However, these rights remained vulnerable to arbitrary practices by the Algerian authorities during 2023. In this context, the Algerian authorities issued a number of laws restricting the freedom of individuals to express opinions during the reporting period, including a new media law that entered into force on August 29, 2023, and the two laws related to audiovisual activities, and the written and electronic press, which were ratified by the Algerian Parliament on November 28, 2023. The adoption of this law constituted an additional obstacle for activists, journalists, and human rights defenders in exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression in Algeria. In contrast, during the period covered by the report, Algerian authorities continued to harass, arrest, and prosecute journalists, activists, political opponents, and social media users on charges related to expression of opinion, including insulting the president, parliament, army, and state institutions,

as reported on the closure of independent media outlets. During 2023, the Algerian authorities prosecuted more than five journalists and closed more than three independent media outlets. On August 29, for example, the Constantine Court of First Instance sentenced Algerian journalist Mustafa Benjama and Algerian-Canadian researcher Raouf Farah to two years in prison and a fine of 200,000 dinars, based on allegedly trumped-up charges of publishing classified information and documents and receiving money from foreign institutions. On June 18, the Court of Appeal in Algiers raised the prison sentence issued against prominent journalist Ihssan El Kadi from five years to seven years, based on fabricated and baseless charges related to receiving money for political propaganda, endangering state security, and spreading false news. These charges are based on his publication of several political analyzes on the political situation in Algeria and the role of the Algerian army in the presidential elections scheduled to be held in 2024. On January 15, the Algerian authorities blocked two independent media outlets: Radio M and Maghreb Emergent, which imposed additional restrictions on opposition voices in Algeria.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Law No. 89-28 of December 31, 1989 and its amendments regulate the right to peaceful assembly. In this context, this right remained vulnerable to violations by the Algerian authorities during 2023, as it was observed during the period covered by the report that the Algerian authorities continued to suppress peaceful protests and arrest peaceful demonstrators and protesters who exercised their legitimate right to demonstrate and peacefully protest. In this context, Maat documented a number of incidents that during which peaceful protesters and demonstrators were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention for exercising their right to peaceful assembly. On August 20, for example, Algerian authorities arrested at least 40 activists who had gathered to commemorate the 1956 Soummam conference in the village of Afri in eastern Algeria, in contravention of the obligations of the State of Algeria under Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The right to form associations

The right to freedom of association remained subject to violation by the Algerian authorities during the period covered by the report. In this regard, on March 7, the Algerian authorities adopted a law on trade unions. The adoption of this law constituted an additional obstacle to trade unions and made it impossible for them to operate freely in Algeria. In addition, the Algerian authorities continued their arbitrary measures aimed at restricting the work of civil society organizations and their

workers. During the period covered by the report, the Algerian authorities continued to dissolve and close civil society organizations and associations and imprison their members, and maintained the same bureaucratic and unnecessary procedures that hinder the registration of associations and organizations, and continues to impose unnecessary restrictions that limit the ability of civil society organizations to receive international funding. On January 20, for example, the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights, the oldest independent human rights organization in Algeria, learned of the decision to dissolve it by the judicial authorities in Algeria through social media networks, without being informed that it would be subject to trial. During the period covered by the report, the Algerian authorities also targeted associated civil society activists, associations and organizations. On March 2, an Algerian court sentenced human rights defender Zakaria Hanash to 3 years in prison in absentia, based on false charges related to spreading false news, receiving money, and endangering state security. On October 8, the Algerian authorities arrested the activist Ahmed Mansri, head of the Algerian League for Human Rights, and issued a one-year prison sentence against him, based on fabricated charges related to publishing documents harmful to the national interest, and incitement to violence and unarmed gatherings, this happened after he met on September 17 with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and association during his visit to Algeria.

9. Tunisia

The right to freedom of opinion and expression

The Tunisian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression. However, this right was subject to various restrictions during the period covered by the report, and people who expressed opinions critical of the executive authority remained at risk of arbitrary detention. Among those detained was Lazhar Al-Akrami, a well-known lawyer and political figure who criticized the authorities in the Tunisian media, and Nouredine Boutar, director of Radio Mosaïque, an independent popular station, the Tunisian president had publicly described the detainees as terrorists and accused them of conspiring to destabilize the state and incite social tension⁵⁰. On July 25, at least 39 people were subjected to investigation or prosecution simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and the charges against them included

⁵⁰ A new detention campaign as part of a strategy to criminalize opposition activity, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights, February 13, 2023, available at the following link, <http://tinyurl.com/mpewtfam>.

insulting the authorities and spreading false news⁵¹. On October 3, security forces arrested Tunisian opposition figure Abeer Moussa, days after she announced her desire to run in the upcoming presidential elections. She was interrogated about a group of security-related charges and a decision was issued to place her in prison under preventive detention⁵². In December, a military court issued a one-year prison sentence with the execution of the opposition Salvation Front member, Shaima Issa, was suspended following her conviction on charges of inciting the military to disobey and insulting the country's president. Issa was arrested in February, after meeting with foreign diplomats and other Tunisian opposition figures to discuss the political situation in Tunisia⁵³.

Freedom of Press

Tunisia ranked 121 in the International Press Index issued by Reporters Without Borders for the year 2023, a decline of 27 places compared to 2022, as Tunisia ranked 94 in the index during the year 2022, and it appears that this decline is in light of the restrictions imposed on freedom of the press in Tunisia during the period covered by the report. In March, the Tunisian authorities prevented journalists from covering the opening session of the new parliament. This was the subject of criticism by journalists, considering that this ban represented a precedent in itself, since parliament, since the 1950s, had always had its doors open to media professionals, including the opposition press⁵⁴. On May 15, the competent department for terrorism cases issued a five-year prison sentence against a Tunisian journalist called Khalifa Al-Qasimi, a correspondent for Mosaïque FM radio in Kairouan, on the grounds of publishing a press report that he quoted from an official security source, in which he took into account the rules of professionalism and journalistic work ethics.

Reports indicated that attacks on the freedom of journalistic work in Tunisia have witnessed an increase over the past years, reaching about 257 attacks during the period from May 2022 to May 2023, the highest statistics in the last five years. The arbitrary practices did not stop at imposing restrictions on journalistic work and extended to attacks on journalists. On May 13, a security officer attacked the head of

⁵¹ Human rights are in danger two years after President Saied took power, Amnesty, July 24, 2023, available at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/y2ms2w8e>

⁵² The Tunisian judiciary issues a prison sentence against opposition figure Abeer Moussa, France 24, October 5, 2023, available at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/2p88pwnz>

⁵³ The military judiciary in Tunisia issues a one-year suspended prison sentence against opposition figure Shaima Issa, France 24, December 13, 2023, available at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/3skyacuu>

⁵⁴ The Tunisian Parliament: What is the extent of its legitimacy in light of the opposition's rejection? BBC Arabic, March 13, 2023, available at the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/37umca4d>

the branch of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists in the southwest, the journalist “Swar Amaydia” while she was covering a health event in a hospital in the state of Gafsa. The two officers pushed her forcefully and assaulted her violently, and she was threatened with being suspended from work.

Arbitrary detention

The Tunisian Constitution prohibits the prolonged arbitrary detention of people. However, this phenomenon has become widespread in Tunisia during the period covered by the report, as at least 7 people remain in arbitrary detention on the basis of their political activity or statements, including the two prominent opposition figures Johar Ben Mubarak and Khayyam al-Turki⁵⁵. This contradicts the provisions contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Tunisia ratified on March 18, 1969.

Peaceful Assembly

The Tunisian Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly. However, this right was violated during the period covered by the report. On February 18, the Tunisian President ordered the deportation of Esther Lynch, a member of the European Confederation of Trade Unions, under the pretext of interfering in Tunisia’s internal affairs. Lynch had come to support the demands of The Tunisian General Labor Union negotiated with the presidency and released the arrested trade unionists. On March 5, the governor of Tunis banned a march by an opposition political coalition, the National Salvation Front, because it would have opposed the Tunisian president’s seizure of power. Some of the Front's leaders were accused of seeking to conspire against state security. However, the Front was able to organize the march, but in smaller numbers due to police surveillance.

10. Libya

Right to Life

Libya guarantees the right to life for its citizens, and statements by government officials confirmed respect for this right, including the head of the Libyan mission to the United Nations in Geneva. However, Maat noted that there is a close relationship between the spread of armed militias, especially in western Libya, and the violation of the right to life, for example; Armed clashes occurred during the month of August, between the 444th Brigade and the Special Deterrence Force in western Libya, which

⁵⁵ Tunisia: What was achieved two years after Saied took power? <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/interactivity-66305148>

led to the death of 27 people and the injury of 104, most of them civilians. Among other examples indicating the lack of respect for the right to life, Maat documented on August 12, the discovery of the body of a Libyan citizen called Walid Muhammad al-Jadid al-Tarhouni, aged 42, in the Abu Salim Accident Hospital. Upon examination of the evidence that Maat reviewed, traces of physical torture were evident on his body. Al-Tarhouni was kidnapped on July 28, 2023 by the Stabilization Support Service of the Libyan Presidential Council, after a raid on his home in the Hadaba area of Tripoli. These practices contradict respect for the right to life contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In context, on September 10, a devastating natural disaster broke out in eastern Libya when Storm Daniel caused devastation with heavy rains and strong winds. The floods destroyed entire neighborhoods, some of which were reported to have been swept into the Mediterranean Sea. Damage to buildings and infrastructure was reported as severe, and many roads were rendered unusable. As of September 18, the death toll was reported to have exceeded 4,000, more than 10,000 people were still missing, and at least 34,000 people had been displaced from their homes. On September 28, the government appointed by the parliament in eastern Libya announced compensation for those affected by the floods, but there are continuing complaints that the compensation is unfair.

Freedom of Press

The interim constitutional declaration in Libya guarantees the right to freedom of the press. However, Libya ranked 149 out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index for 2023, compared to 143 in 2022, which means a decline of six places within a year according to the index's classification. Maat noted the continuation of some restrictions imposed on journalists in Libya during the period covered by the report. Among the examples documented by Maat was the arrest of photojournalist Salim Salem Al-Shibl on August 29. He is 29 years old and was kidnapped by members of the Internal Security Service, after his car was intercepted on a street in the city of Tripoli and he was pushed to an unknown location. Al-Shibl was arbitrarily arrested against the backdrop of his activity and participation in the popular protests against the National Unity Government. Maat also recorded other cases of arbitrary arrest of protesters in Tripoli, and verification is still ongoing. In September, against the backdrop of the demonstrations that broke out in eastern Libya demanding the reconstruction of the city of Derna, Maat noticed the imposition of strict security measures, such as isolating some areas, restricting the movement of journalists, and

cutting off the Internet and communications, which made journalists face difficulties in practicing their peaceful activity.

Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance

Maat noted an increase in the frequency of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in Libya during the period covered by the report against those they believe pose a threat to the interests of each party individually. The mission concluded that many of those detained after being kidnapped are unable to reach a lawyer or communicate with their families and live in isolation away from the outside world and sometimes in solitary confinement in a manner inconsistent with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules). According to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, as of May 5, 2023, more than 19,000 people, including 216 women, were detained in 28 official prisons. Many of them are detained for long periods of time with limited or delayed access to judicial proceedings. Furthermore, men and women in detention across Libya are reported to be subjected to ill-treatment, sexual violence, torture, or sexual exploitation in exchange for access to water or food or other essential items⁵⁶.

Among the incidents documented by Maat during the period covered by the report, on October 9, Maat documented the arrest of a lawyer while performing his work duties and his beating and verbal abuse by members of the judicial police inside the headquarters of the South Benghazi Prosecution Office. He was released after hours of arbitrary detention. On August 13, the director of the General National Maritime Transport Company, Khaled Khalifa Al-Tawati, was forcibly disappeared. He was 47 years old, and after his car was intercepted in the Ghout Al-Shaal area in Tripoli by gunmen riding in three civilian cars, he was then taken to an unknown location before appearing five days after his disappearance and release. On June 26, a citizen named Farouk Al-Siddiq, 51 years old, was forcibly disappeared by three unknown gunmen riding in civilian cars while he was with his children in the Bifi area in Tripoli, and until the end of June 2023, his fate was unknown. These practices contradict Libya's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which guarantee protection from arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

⁵⁶ Fierce clashes in Tripoli highlight precarious situation, UN NEWS, 22 Aug 2023, link, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1139967>

Freedom of peaceful assembly

The Constitutional Declaration document guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. However, following the deadly floods that occurred on September 10, 2023 in the city of Derna in eastern Libya, where thousands of people were reported killed and thousands more missing, and on September 18, it was reported that hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Derna to protest against the negligence of the authorities that led to the deadly floods. In their statement, the demonstrators demanded rapid investigations and legal action against those responsible for the disaster, and the demonstrators burned the mayor's house⁵⁷.

11. Mauritania

Freedom of Press

According to the World Press Freedom Index issued in 2023, Mauritania ranked 86th in the world, after being ranked 97th in 2022, moving up 11 places. It also ranked second in the Arab world. According to the index, journalists are rarely exposed to physical attacks, although they are subjected to verbal attacks or bullying campaigns on social media platforms. While reporters can move freely within the country, it remains difficult to access some military areas near the eastern and northern borders without official permission. The media rarely addresses issues of marital rape, sex, or slavery, let alone corruption, the army, Islam, and class differences. Moreover, despite the government's pledge to improve the working conditions of journalists, their situation remains fragile. Although journalists are subjected to great pressure from political authority, but some media platforms, such as Al-Akhbar website, have managed to maintain their independence in one way or another.

Allegations of torture

The Mauritanian government continued to use repression against citizens and civil society activists, as local organizations confirmed the continuation of cases of torture in police stations, the most prominent of which was the subjection of the Sufi activist Ould Chin to torture and ill-treatment that led to his death, as some visible marks were found on Ould Chin's body (bruises and traces of handcuffs, the legs, blood, etc.). In February 2023, human rights organizations demanded that the security tracking of the political activist Amadou Sidi, who was arrested following the protest organized by some young people on March 17, 2021, be ended, and that he not be

⁵⁷ Deadly Floods spark protests, authorities respond with restrictions, CIVICUS, 11 Sep 2023, link, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/deadly-floods-spark-protests-authorities-respond-with-restrictions/>

targeted by Political Security, and empowering him with his civil rights, as since his arrest by the security administration, he is still deprived of citizenship rights, and he and his family are exposed to harassment, deprivation, and psychological and physical torture in accordance with Mauritania's obligations under the Convention against Torture.

Forced detention and detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government did not always adhere to these texts and rights. A detainee has the legal right to challenge the legality of his detention in two circumstances: first, if the person remains detained after the expiration of the legal period of his detention; Secondly, if the detainee did not agree to his sentence, the security forces continued to arrest a number of human rights defenders and activists for their critical views of the government, and these practices led, on February 10, to the death of human rights defender Sofi Ould Djibril Ould Chien due to ill-treatment while in detention. Although the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture visits places of detention, this is often according to prior arrangements.

Protection against modern slavery

Mauritania continued to occupy advanced positions in the modern slavery index, and according to the modern slavery index for the year 2023, the country ranked third in the world and second in Africa in 2023, as approximately 32 out of every thousand people were living in modern slavery in Mauritania, while 149,000 people were subjected to forced labor or forced marriage in Mauritania, these practices contradict the protection against modern slavery guaranteed under Article Four of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

12.Sudan

Right to Life and Security of Person:

The drafting committee for the interim transitional constitution in Sudan worked to include respect for the right to life in the draft that was intended to be discussed. However, the current ongoing conflict has led to a widespread violation of this right. According to the statistics of the Armed Conflict Location and Event, the ongoing conflict in Sudan has led to the killing of 9,000 people as of October 2023, including more than 1,320 civilians, while more than 4,500 other civilians were injured. *Rapid Support Forces (RSF)* and militants loyal to the warring parties did not take into

account the protection granted to civilians in non-international armed conflicts, and their behavior was characterized by excessive force and indiscriminate attacks that did not respect the principle of discrimination and necessity guaranteeing protection to civilians under international humanitarian law. These practices are also a flagrant violation of the right to life enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In specific incidents documented by Maat, more than 50 civilians were killed in three sporadic attacks in the densely populated south of Khartoum in June 2023. On 22 July 2023, unidentified militants likely allies to rapid support bombed residential areas in Darfur, killing 22 civilians.

Allegations of enforced disappearance:

Various reports claimed the increase in enforced disappearance practices in Sudan in the reporting period. According to information shared with Maat, more than 715 civilians were forcibly disappeared in Sudan from 15 April to 15 October, including 49 women who were possibly subjected to rape and sexual abuse in the unknown places where they disappeared, and there are likely 16 children under 18 years of age among those who are forcibly disappeared during the reporting period, These practices are contrary to the provisions of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, ratified by Sudan on 21 August 2011.

Allegations of torture:

Numerous reports of torture and ill-treatment of civilians were received during the reporting period. In July 2023, Maat documented the torture of some individuals allegedly associated with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) by RSF militants, which was committed with impunity and without any form of accountability. Justice mechanisms have been limited to prosecuting perpetrators, and these practices are contrary to international humanitarian law, particularly article 4 (2a). Of the Additional Protocol 2 to the four Geneva Conventions that prohibits violating the physical and mental integrity of persons, in particular cruel treatment or torture.

Protection against contemporary slavery:

Sudan's legal framework protects modern slavery practices and contemporary slavery. However, various reports have alleged that the conflict in Sudan has led to the establishment of markets for slavery with knowledge of rapid support. The testimonies of abducted girls from Khartoum and areas in Darfur, who have been sold in slavery markets and their families were provoked to pay ransom to be released,

demonstrate the existence of these markets; In particular, in areas in El Fasher and the Northern Darfur metropolis. Reports indicate that in cases which families failed to comply with ransom payments, their girls were raped and subjected to sexual violence.

13.Somalia

Right to life:

Somalia's interim constitution guarantees the right to life, yet this right was wasted in the context of the military operations of the Somali government and the terrorist operations of Al-Shabab movement, where hundreds of civilians were killed during the reporting period. For example, from September to 13 October 2023, over 1,700 people were killed in Somalia.⁵⁸ Most of the deaths were in the states of Hershbilly and Galmudug. The right to life has also been wasted by natural disasters, such as rains and hurricanes. In November, 96 people were killed as a result of heavy rains that hit Somalia, due to the El Nino phenomenon and bipolar weather events in the Indian Ocean, which also caused the displacement of about 700,000 people.⁵⁹ From July to September, terrorist groups carried out 21 terrorist operations in Somalia, out of which 15 operations were claimed by Al-Shabab, which accounted for 71.4% of the total terrorist operations in Somalia, while other operations were carried out by unknown parties. These operations resulted in the largest number of deaths and injuries in the Arab region in the third quarter of 2023, with 562 civilians and military personnel killed and wounded, including 110 civilians and 452 military personnel.

The Somali Government also continued to apply the death penalty during the reporting period. On 8 March, the Puntland State Military Court carried out a death sentence by firing squad against 13 elements involved in terrorist operations in the provincial areas. On 1 November, five men were executed for murder in Hargeisa, with a total of 55 executions in Somalia in 2023.⁶⁰

Freedom of Press and Media:

The interim Constitution calls for freedom of the press, yet Somalia ranked 141 out of 180 countries in RSF 2023 International Press Index. Journalists continued to face restrictions and harassment during the reporting period, including suspensions, fines

⁵⁸ Somalia: Al-Shabaab Strikes Back at Local Administrators, <https://acleddata.com/2023/10/20/somalia-situation-update-october-2023-al-shabaab-strikes-back-at-local-administrators/>

⁵⁹ Death toll from flooding in Somalia climbs to nearly 100, Reuters, November 26, 2023, available on: <http://tinyurl.com/2p82y5ks>

⁶⁰ Worldwide Wednesday International Roundup: China, Israel, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Qatar, Somalia, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe, Death Penalty information center., Dec 06, 2023, available on: <http://tinyurl.com/555fwuf8>

and violence by non-governmental actors. The law gives the Ministry of Information broad power to regulate the media.⁶¹

On February 10, the lawyer of the journalists' syndicate and legal adviser of journalists, Abdulrahman Hassan Omar, suffered various injuries after four armed men attacked him while he was returning home from work. Three armed men beside another person driving the "Tok Tok" attacked him, which led to his injury. The journalists' syndicate informed the police of the incident, who promised to investigate,⁶² and no information released on the investigation and its outcome.

On 22 January, Somali police officers fired live bullets at two journalists working for "Resala Media Company" as they covered a terrorist attack on the Mogadishu Mayor's Office. According to the director of the Media Company, they were unharmed, but the journalists had to leave immediately.⁶³

Peaceful assembly:

Although the interim constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, security officials require the approval on demonstrations, and have used violence, including firing, to even counter unauthorized peaceful gatherings. Nevertheless, there continued to be government-approved demonstrations, for example on 20 October, a large number of Somalis in the capital, Mogadishu, came out in solidarity with the Palestinian people and demanded a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. On 8 May, protesters clashed with security forces in the Somali city of Burama, following the killing of a political activist by the Somaliland authorities, and protesters erected roadblocks; Security intervention against protesters included firing live bullets, causing a number of victims,⁶⁴ and those violations of the right to peaceful assembly were contrary to article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Freedom of Opinion and Expression:

Somalia's interim Constitution ensures freedom of opinion and expression in article 18. However, bloggers have faced harassments, arbitrary arrests, suspensions, fines and widespread violence. On 17 August, Mohamed Ibrahim Osman Bulbul was arrested by plainclothes security officers, He is a journalist for the Kaab TV channel

⁶¹ FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2023 Somalia, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/somalia/freedom-world/2023>

⁶² Amid ongoing crackdown on media freedom, SJS condemns recent arbitrary arrests of journalists in Mogadishu and Somaliland, <http://tinyurl.com/3asbpenk>

⁶³ Amid deteriorating press freedom situation, journalists continue to face detention and harassment in Somaliland and Mogadishu, <http://tinyurl.com/y4pvv22>

⁶⁴ Somalia: Protest and clashes ongoing in Borama, Somaliland, prompting security intervention, May 8, 2023, available on: <http://tinyurl.com/586fvw7e>

and an employee of a local media advocacy organization, and was arrested a day after he published a story about the embezzlement of European Union funds for the training of Somali police officers. On 25 September, he was charged with insulting the State and spreading false and tendentious news. He was transferred to Mogadishu Central Prison on September 28, where he remains in detention.⁶⁵ On 17 October, a Somali TV journalist was killed in a suicide bombing in Mogadishu and the director of Kabul TV was seriously injured, and Somali police confirmed that the perpetrators of the attack were members of the terrorist group Al-Shabab.⁶⁶ On 20 August, Somalia's Ministry of Communications and Technology ordered Internet service providers to suspend some social media applications such as Tiktok and Telegram, in order to protect society from terrorist ideas and preserve its tradition and tolerance habits.⁶⁷

14. Comoros:

Right to Life:

Maat did not observe the use of excessive or indiscriminate force by security forces in the gatherings that took place during the reporting period, especially the demonstrations in April that refused to receive immigrants from the French islands of Mayotte.⁶⁸ This is an improvement in the behavior of the security forces that dispersed the demonstrations following the last presidential elections in 2019.⁶⁹ Maat also notes that Comoros has voluntarily suspended the application of the death penalty. Although 7 persons were still sentenced to death, it was not possible to carry out their sentence, which is consistent with the guarantees of the right to life contained in article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Freedom of Press:

Comoros ranked 75th out of 180 countries in the 2023 International Press Freedom Index compared to 83rd in 2022, which is an advancement over most Arab countries ranked by the index, as there is no any journalist in prison right now, despite suspended sentences. However, reports allege that journalists and the press profession in general are censored, as Journalists exercise self-censorship for fear of severe sanctions, as well as internal censorship from State-owned press/media institutions, and journalists continue to be pressured to reveal their sources,

⁶⁵ Somalia: Free journalist jailed for investigative report: Mohamed Ibrahim Osman Bulbul, amnesty, October 6, 2023, available on: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr52/7279/2023/en/>

⁶⁶ Somali TV Journalist killed in Mogadishu suicide bombing, africanews, 17 october 2023K available on: <https://www.africanews.com/2023/10/17/somali-tv-journalist-killed-in-mogadishu-suicide-bombing/>

⁶⁷ Somalia Orders TikTok, Telegram Shut Down, voanews, August 20, 2023, available on: <http://tinyurl.com/yc6kc4xe>

⁶⁸ مظاهرات في جزر القمر رفضا لترحيل مهاجرين إليها من مايوت الفرنسية. <http://tinyurl.com/yxfe6w9x>

⁶⁹ FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2023 Comoros, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/comoros/freedom-world/2023>

intimidated and arrested, particularly during elections.⁷⁰ In February, commanders of the Comoros Radio and Television Office (the most widespread and State-owned media) filed reports against 4 journalists on charges of defamation and insult through allegations of sexual misconduct against a leadership in the Radio and Television Office. The 4 journalists were convicted on 24 August, each sentenced to nine months suspended imprisonment and a fine of 150,000 francs each for defamation and insult. The 4 journalists are Anguza Abuhir, Vice-President of the Journalists' syndicate, Tofi Maisha, former Director of the Comoros Radio and Television Office, Abdullah Mizimbaba, correspondent for Radio France International, and Abida Allah Machangama, correspondent for privately owned radio "FCBK FM".⁷¹

Freedom of Movement:

On 25 April, the French authorities administering Mayotte announced a plan to deport about 20,000 illegal Comorian migrants to Anjouan Island, which is 70km away from Mayotte. That French plan or operation is called (Wombosho). However, the Comoros authorities refused to receive the ships carrying out the operation, which led to a diplomatic crisis between the two countries. It is worth mentioning that the citizens whose deportation was planned by the French authorities are nationals of the Comoros, and have the right to freely return to the Comoros at will. The conduct of the Comoros constitutes a violation of article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates that "Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State has the right to freedom of movement and freedom to choose his place of residence".

Freedom of opinion and expression:

The 2018 amended Constitution and press laws guarantee freedom of opinion and expression. However, arresting bloggers remained common, noting that the Government had not restricted or disabled Internet access or censored online content; mainly due to poor telecommunications infrastructure, and there have been no credible reports that the Government has monitored private Internet communications without invoking legal authority. Despite the widespread suspicion that it did so, The Internet remains the most widespread means of expressing opinions and following the news, especially with the State's control over traditional

⁷⁰ Comoros, RSF, <https://shorturl.ac/7ctyl>

⁷¹ Four Comoros journalists appeal conviction over publicizing of sexual assault allegations, CPJ, September 20, 2023, <https://shorturl.ac/7ctz9>

media, as well as the decline of private media due to poor profit and material support.⁷²

15. Djibouti:

Right to life:

Djibouti has abolished the death penalty since 1995, and on 21 April 2010, it formally included the abolition of the death penalty in the Constitution, which stipulates that "No one shall be sentenced to the death penalty and the right to life is guaranteed by the Constitution of Djibouti in article 10". Djibouti has also ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which aims to abolish the death penalty, and Djibouti consistently votes on resolutions on the abolition of the death penalty in the Human Rights Council.⁷³ Nevertheless, migrants in Djibouti face many risks associated with violations of the right to life, especially by active smuggling gangs in Djibouti as an important transit point for migrants and refugees from neighboring countries, particularly from Ethiopia. In May and June 2023, Djiboutian and Spanish forces participated with the Joint Unified Task Force in the Horn of Africa in a biannual exercise at the Doraleh camp in Djibouti; which is an exercise on crisis response and the recovery of vulnerable individuals in regional waters.

Freedom of expression:

The Constitution of Djibouti stipulates in article 15 that "Everyone has the right to express and disseminate his views freely through speech, writing and image. All citizens have the right to form associations and syndicates freely, taking into account the formal procedures established by laws and regulations".⁷⁴ However, the Djiboutian media is widely controlled by the Government on the pretext that there are no private media due to Djibouti's weak advertising and marketing.

During the universal periodic review on 9 November, Djibouti received 266 recommendations from 100 States on issues including the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and some States called on the authorities in Djibouti to strengthen Djibouti's national human rights institution, and 14 States, including Ghana and Zambia, issued recommendations to protect the right to freedom of expression. Other countries made specific recommendations on the

⁷² La liberté d'expression aux Comores se rétrécit selon le département d'État américain, Mayotte Hybdo, 28 juillet 2023,

<https://shorturl.ac/7cu16>

⁷³ Peine de mort : Djibouti, <http://tinyurl.com/2p8xstvm>

⁷⁴ Constitution de la République de Djibouti, ARTICLE 14, <http://tinyurl.com/4nk94yw4>

need to strengthen freedom of the press, such as Belgium that recommended to review the Freedom of Communication Act and the Penal Code to repeal provisions restricting freedom of expression and association, including by decriminalizing defamation and removing restrictions on the establishment of the media on the basis of nationality and age, while Estonia recommended "decriminalizing defamation and incorporating it into civil law".⁷⁵

With regard to freedom of the press, Djibouti ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in the 2023 International Press Index, which is higher than 2022, when it ranked 164th, but it's a slow progress unlike 2022 when compared to 2021, when it ranked 176th out of 180 countries. Although no any journalist has yet been imprisoned in Djibouti, However, there are still illegal inspections and judicial harassments of journalists who have peacefully engaged in their journalistic activity.⁷⁶

Arbitrary Detention:

During 2023, the Government carried out arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders in Djibouti. On 14 March 2023, the Djiboutian Security and Documentation Services tracked Alexis Diswaef, the Vice-President of the International Federation for Human Rights, who was arbitrarily arrested from the hotel at which he was staying and was subsequently deported on a plane to the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, Although his official papers were entirely valid, he was arrested for his human rights activities.⁷⁷ On 13 April, Mustafa Ahmed Ali, the Secretary-General of Federation of the Movement for Democratic Renewal and Development of Belgium and Coordinator of the Political Movement in Europe, was arrested by Djibouti's intelligence services following his arrival at Djibouti airport and was on his way to Djibouti to visit his family.⁷⁸

16. Yemen

Right to Life:

Although violations directly affecting the right to life decreased during the reporting period, yet victims still remain due to the violence perpetrated by the warring parties, in particular the Houthis in Yemen. In 2023, there were 78 live shootings, killing and injuring 108, including 56 children and 11 women. The Houthi group is accountable for 46% of these incidents, while smuggling and human trafficking gangs are

⁷⁵ Djibouti's human rights record reviewed at its fourth UPR session, MENA RIGHTS GROUP, 14 November 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/2x4bbn3a>

⁷⁶ REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS, Djibouti, 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/3ky8wmcj>

⁷⁷ FIDH Vice-President arrested and expelled from Djibouti, FIDH, 14 march 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/9tzavu63>

⁷⁸ Djibouti: Arbitrary arrest of another political opponent, FIDH, 18 April 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/4ke9frxx>

accountable for 2.5%. the joint forces bear responsibility for 1.2% of them, while armed factions in southern Yemen account for 29% of total incidents, While internationally recognized government forces and Saudi Border Guard units are responsible for 20.5% of live bullet incidents.⁷⁹

The application of the death penalty remained in force in northern Yemen, where the Houthi governs. The Houthi courts in Sana'a continued to issue death sentences during the reporting period, the last of which was on 5 December 2023, when the specialized criminal court in Sana'a under the control of the de facto authorities handed down a sentence of execution for Fatma Saleh Muhamed Alaroli for espionage.⁸⁰ Reports alleged that the latter, a human rights defender, a former head of Yemen's office in the Arab Women Leadership Union of the League of Arab States and a women's rights activist, had not received fair trial guarantees and was subjected to flagrant violations by the Security and Intelligence Service, and denied her right to legal advice, including at the initial hearing of her trial on 19 September 2023, and family visits were denied, and her lawyer was not able to visit her once in custody.⁸¹

In August, the Sana'a criminal prosecution demanded the execution of businessman Adnan al-Harazi and the director of Prodigy, a company that monitors humanitarian action in areas under Houthi control, since the initial hearing of his trial. The prosecution's requests included the seizure of Al-Harazi's assets, detained in the group's prisons since January 2023, while Al-Harazi's family reported that he had been tortured in Al-Houthi prisons, and had not received good health care and had been prevented from obtaining some necessary medicines. Among other incidents on 19 July, Maat reviewed testimonies claiming the extrajudicial execution of 19 persons who had been arbitrarily detained by the Houthi group and remained in Al-Safra prison in Sa'ada governorate until their execution. On 14 February, the Central Military Court of Sana'a sentenced 30 military officers to be executed in absentia and their property reserved for treason, aiding the enemy and facilitating entry into the territory of the Republic of Yemen. The arbitrary and summary execution of death sentences runs counter to the prohibition called for by some UN treaties and special procedures mandate holders to use the death penalty only as a measure of last resort, in the most serious crimes and in cases where fair trial standards are respected. The executions issued by the Houthi judiciary were summary and expeditious and did not

⁷⁹ <http://tinyurl.com/bdz8b6j4> استمرار الانتهاكات خلال العام 2023. مواطنة. 11 يناير 2023 متاح علي الرابط التالي:

⁸⁰ بيان إدانة إصدار حكم مسيس بإعدام ناشطة مدنية في صنعاء.. منظمة ميون لحقوق الإنسان. 7 ديسمبر 2023. متاح علي الرابط التالي: <https://www.mayyun.org/news902.html>

⁸¹ Statement from the Women's Solidarity Network Regarding The Serious Violations of International Human Rights Law Targeting Human Rights Defender Fatima Saleh Al-Arouli, <http://tinyurl.com/mrxuu9zz>

respect the guarantees of a fair trial or the litigation procedures enshrined in international human rights conventions. In a related context, landmines and explosive remnants of war continued to claim civilian lives. During March, the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement documented 121 civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance. On 23 March, Save the Children reported that child victims of landmines and unexploded ordnance had risen almost eight-fold in the last four years.

Peaceful assembly:

The right to peaceful assembly was subjected to arbitrary practices by the Houthi group in Yemen during the reporting period. On 26 September, the date marking the anniversary of the Republic of Yemen's establishment, hundreds of demonstrators in various parts of Yemen, including in Sana'a, came out in peaceful rallies. The Houthi security forces faced these demonstrations with widespread arbitrary arrests, as the number of detainees in peaceful gatherings was approximately 1,000 according to their lawyers, and they were detained pending criminal inspection. The violations included the confiscation of their mobile phones and their obligation to unlock these phones and cancel their passwords.⁸² These arrests coincided with the disconnection from digital communication platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet and Signal application, According to the Civil Liberties Observatory, a local organization based in Yemen. While lawyers reported that most of them had been released, some demonstrators remained in arbitrary detention until the end of the reporting period.

Freedom of Press:

Yemen ranked 168 out of 180 countries in RSF 2023 International Press Index. Maat noticed the ongoing violations against journalists in Yemen. Three journalists are currently in arbitrary detention in Yemen. Arbitrary practices are also represented in the severe beatings of some journalists in northern Yemen. On 24 August, journalist Majali al-Samadi was assaulted and severely beaten near his home in Sana'a by Houthi militants, and Samadi reported that he continued to face further threats of aggression if he continued to criticize the group's policies, in blatant contradiction with the UN action plan on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

Arbitrary Detention:

Arbitrary detention remained a common practice during the reporting period in Yemen. Thousands are reportedly still held in Houthi prisons in northern Yemen. The

⁸² <http://tinyurl.com/2tzjmk4m> اعتقال ألف يماني في صنعاء احتفلوا بذكرى ثورة «26 سبتمبر». الشرق الأوسط.

practice of arbitrary detention also involved women, with more than 1,800 women reportedly still held by the Houthi group, including female media professionals and human rights defenders, while such practices has also affected UN staff. On 14 November, the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, demanded that the Houthi authorities in Sana'a release a UNESCO staff member and another of the OHCHR,⁸³ The latter is a UN Volunteer, in Sana'a, without any information on the reasons for their detention or whereabouts.⁸⁴

17. Kuwait

Right to life:

Kuwait has on various occasions expressed its respect for the right to life. Maat has not observed the use of live bullets by the security forces in dealing with protesters, especially from the Bedoun group. However, Kuwaiti courts continued to issue death sentences and apply the penalty in practice. In specific events during 2023, specifically in July, Kuwait carried out the death penalty against five prisoners, when The OHCHR criticized these sentences and affirmed its objection to the death penalty under any circumstances. During the reporting period, there have also been a lack of respect for the right to life of female domestic workers of Philippine nationality. For example, in January 2023, the Government of the Philippines suspended the accreditation of new recruitment agencies and new workers seeking employment in Kuwait, due to the murders of Filipino women domestic workers in Kuwait in previous years, resulting in a temporary ban on Filipino women domestic workers work in Kuwait.

Allegations of Forced Deportation:

During the reporting period, Maat documented the forced deportation of some writers because of their connection with the Bedoun community. On 4 January, the Kuwaiti authorities denied entry of the American writer Mona Karim, who is a 35 years old woman from the bedoun, to Kuwait to visit her parents. After being stopped at the airport, she wrote that for the 10th year in a row she was denied a visit to her people. After her arrest, she was again deported to Lebanon.

⁸³ UN entities demand immediate release of staff detained in Yemen. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/11/un-entities-demand-immediate-release-staff-detained-yemen>

⁸⁴ Ibid

Freedom of opinion and expression:

Freedom of opinion and expression, which is legally guaranteed to individuals under international human rights conventions and the Kuwaiti Constitution, remained subjected to violations. In August, the Ministry of Information introduced a unified media bill containing various provisions restricting freedoms. One of the most important is the prohibition of subjecting the Crown Prince or the Deputy Prince to criticism; After the old law was limited to the princely self, in addition to requiring the presence of the manager of any media to be licensed other than the license owner, Reducing media licensing from 10 years to just 5 years and the requirement that a licensed media member has a university degree, which threatens to close the media in Kuwait. The bill was met with opposition from the Kuwaiti National Assembly, leading to its withdrawal and attempts to introduce new amendments. The Kuwaiti Government has also sought to censor the Internet through what is known as "Developing the Kuwait International Gateway Tender" or "*Kuwait Government Online* portal", which is a tender put forward by Kuwait's Ministry of Communications for Internet censorship aimed at controlling certain applications such as WhatsApp, Which aimed at preventing contacts through it while keeping text conversations. The Ministry of Communications of Kuwait also aimed to monitor the information of all Internet users, monitor applications, the brand of mobile devices and their location, as well as restrict the passage of data and the speed of the Internet for certain applications, and the ability to copy users' Internet traffic and send that data to other parties. Endeavors of the Kuwaiti Government in this regard constitute a violation of article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the same article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, a positive development relating to civil and political rights in the State of Kuwait in 2023 was the issuance of an Amiri amnesty on 27 November of a number of convicts, especially in cases of opinion, grouping and political issues, and the revocation of certain citizenship withdrawal decisions, In addition to the approval by the Kuwaiti National Assembly, on 20 June, of the establishment of the Parliamentary Committee for the Defense of Human Rights.

Right to citizenship:

During the reporting period, the Kuwaiti authorities continued to deprive the Bedoun community of the right to citizenship. The population of Bedoun, whose numbers are estimated to be 100,000, remains illegitimate under government procedures, thus being denied Kuwaiti citizenship and excluded from obtaining identity cards required

for all other public services such as education and health care services, They also face serious difficulty in the context of deprivation of their nationality. These government policies have compounded the living difficulties of Bedoun citizens, leading many of them to end their lives in protest against the state's disregard for their suffering, as Bedoun people continued to try to end their lives through suicide. On 2 February, a Bedoun attempted to commit suicide in front of a police station and has been taken to hospital.

Accountability for violations of detainees' rights:

Kuwaiti authorities represented by the Ministry of Interior in June 2023 assaulted central prison inmates, which resulted in 12 prisoners suffering various injuries. These attacks came after riots in the prison and reports of excessive force used to control them, which has adversely affected inmates and their fundamental rights in the central prison. The two incidents are incompatible with the guarantees stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, following which the most recent decision was issued by the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior and Acting Minister of Defense, which included the suspension of both the Assistant Under-Secretary for Private Security and Correctional Institutions and the Director-General of the General Department of Corrections. In addition, a commission of inquiry has also been set up by the competent authorities accountable for incidents occurred in the central prison, which, after completion of the investigation, recommended that the matter be referred to the Public Prosecutor's Office. Accountability in this incident supports the right to redress for victims and is a good practice for Kuwait.

18. United Arab Emirates:

Right to life:

The UAE Constitution respects the right to life of all its citizens. For the third consecutive year, the UAE continued to suspend the use of the death penalty in practice despite issuing death sentences by UAE courts. The President of the United Arab Emirates has been issuing amnesties to death row expats. For example, on 26 March, the Head of State pardoned an expatriate who was sentenced to death for possession of drugs. In some cases where the death penalty imposed, the Government had negotiated with the victims' families to replace the death penalty with Diyah, in accordance with Islamic law, in exchange for amnesty and commutation of the death penalty.

However, there have been reports of deaths in prisons during the reporting period, for example, on 4 May, Lebanese businessman Ghazi Ezz Aldine, aged 50, died two months after being detained at an undisclosed security headquarters, and human rights organizations alleged that the businessman died of ill-treatment during his interrogation and investigation. The UAE authorities did not allow his body to be transferred to Lebanon for burial in his hometown.

Protection against contemporary slavery and human trafficking:

Maat noticed the efforts of the UAE to equally protect citizens and expatriates from contemporary slavery and human trafficking. Federal Act No. 51 of 2006, amended by Act No. 1 of 2015, provides the legal framework guaranteeing protection against trafficking. In March, the United Arab Emirates opened a shelter in Dubai for children care between the ages of 3 and 13, whose families are alleged to be victims of trafficking. The State has also distributed 416,000 dirhams through the Victims Support Fund to trafficking victims residing at government shelters across the state. These steps are consistent with Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the UAE is committed to implementing the rights contained therein. Nevertheless, the UAE was at the top of the Modern Slavery Index for 2023, ranking 2nd in the Arab region in terms of the prevalence of modern slavery among 11 countries, And 7th of the 160 States covered by the index. The index estimated that there are 132,000 people living in modern slavery in the UAE, representing 12 per 1,000 people in the country. The indicator attributed this to the system of sponsorship and commercial and sexual exploitation of adults and children.

Arbitrary detention:

Around 61 detainees remained in the UAE during the reporting period. Although some of the detainees' sentences expired and they were placed in counseling centers, they remained in the country without release. This was a major criticism of the UAE, particularly by human rights organizations and UN special procedures mandate holders.

Forming associations:

The Constitution of UAE guarantees the right of association and refers the regulation of this right to the law. However, the Law No. 2 of 2008 on Non-Governmental Associations and Institutions of Public Interest continued to be criticized for the restrictions imposed on associations. However, Maat noticed that the number of civil society organizations in the UAE in 2023 increased to 249 civil society organizations -

including 27 NGOs - from 166 in 2016. The scope of these organizations' work is limited to charitable, humanitarian and service activities with some limited human rights organizations.

Peaceful assembly:

The UAE pledged to provide space for peaceful gathering and demonstration in Expo Dubai, where COP 28 was held. This pledge came after the UAE and the UN signed an agreement in Abu Dhabi, the host country for COP 28 held from 30 November to 10 December 2023. On 9 December, Maat reviewed images revealing the area designated for demonstration in the city of Expo Dubai, they also show a group of activists and environmental rights defenders raising slogans for the release of defendants in the UAE. Others also called for respect for climate justice, considering that no climate justice without human rights.

19.Oman

Right to life:

On 31 March, Oman ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which stipulates in article 5 everyone's right to life. The Omani courts continued to issue aggravated sentences on practices of violence and femicide, as in June, the Criminal Court of Seeb in Sultanate of Oman sentenced to death the murderer of Omani lawyer Amal Al-Abri, who was stabbed to death by her ex-husband on 7 December 2022. It is worth mentioning that the Sultanate of Oman is one of the countries that delays the use of the death penalty, as it has been applied only to a very small number of convicts since 2015, while suspending its execution on many defendants. The death penalty for pregnant women is also suspended, and the sentence is postponed in accordance with article 293 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (No. 97/99).

Freedom of online expression:

The Omani Constitution guarantees freedom of opinion and expression. However, Maat noticed a number of arbitrary practices contradicting the provision of this right, during the reporting period. For example, on 9 August, the internal security service summoned businessman Hani al-Sarhani, Due to his social media activism and his continued criticism of corrupt practices, and he was reportedly detained by the internal security authorities in Oman and not investigated by the Public Prosecutor's Office until weeks after his arrest. On 22 August, He was forced to sign a statement containing the investigation and interrogation, while it was reported that it did not contain all his testimony. On 19 October, the Court of First Instance of Muscat

sentenced Sarhani to two years imprisonment for "disrupting public order", with a bail obligation of 600 OMR, and he was also obliged to pay a fine of 1,000 OMR. This provision is based on article 19 of the Law on Combating Cybercrime, which criminalizes the use of social media platforms as a means of disrupting public order, and article 115 of the Criminal Code. In the context of similar examples, the Sahar Court of Appeal held its first hearing in the trial of 4 Internet activists, Ali bin Marhoun Abdullah al-Ghaffri, Maryam bint Youssef bin Ali al-Naimi, Ghith Matar Hamad al-Shibli and Abdullah Hassan Jaber al-Muqabali. This hearing followed a sentence of the Court of First Instance in Suhar against the 4 in prison for three years, where they were charged with such charges as "using the Internet and information technology in the production of what would prejudice religious values and public order".

Right to political participation:

Municipal and Consultative Council elections were held during the reporting period in the Sultanate of Oman. The turnout reached 65% of the total electorates. This high proportion was due to the holding of elections through the electronic application of "Elect - Entakheb", which strengthened the voting process in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, some reports continued to suggest that potential candidates were excluded because of opposition opinions. Maat also noticed that no woman in the Sultanate of Oman received membership of the Shura Council out of 90 seats contested in the legislative elections.

Freedom of press:

The Sultanate of Oman ranked 155th in the 2023 Press Freedom Index out of 180 countries compared to 163rd in 2022, advancing 8 places that are a positive improvement in the promotion of press freedom in the Sultanate of Oman, yet there have been high levels of self-censorship by journalists on social media and in local newspapers.

20.Saudi Arabia:

Right to movement and protection against travel bans:

Opponents of Saudi Arabia claimed that the Government was imposing a travel ban on their relatives, contrary to article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In November, a number of Saudis abroad, including human rights defender Lena al-Hathloul, as well as a number of other activists, addressed Saudi Human Rights Authority to intervene to lift the travel ban currently imposed on their relatives in

Saudi Arabia. These activists claimed that the Kingdom had imposed these restrictions without any legal justification or judicial ruling.

Freedom of association:

The "NGO System" guarantees the right to form associations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and attributes to the Ministry of Social Development and Labor granting licenses to these institutions. NGOs must therefore obtain a government license to operate. Until the adoption of the NGO Act in 2015, only charities were approved by officials. In 2023, Saudi Arabia expressed its desire to encourage the growth of civil society, but reports had alleged obstacles to the work of organizations working on human rights issues, as Such organizations had been denied licenses in practice. In a related context, Maat noticed the continuing limitations of organizations working with international human rights mechanisms, with the exception of Saudi opposition organizations operating from abroad.

Freedom of press:

The Press and Publications Act regulates press freedom in Saudi Arabia. Only limited critical opinions of Saudi government policies have appeared in local state or private newspapers during 2023. There is very limited margin for press freedom in Saudi Arabia. Journalists or media bloggers who freely express a view are harassed and around 24 journalists are currently detained in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia ranked 170th out of 180 countries in the 2023 World Press Index, a four places decline compared to 2022, when It was ranked 166th out of 180 countries as well.

Right to protection from forced deportation:

Various reports have alleged arbitrary practices of forcibly deporting members of the Huwaitat tribe who reside in Neom City, on which the Neom Development Project is being built on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast, costing 500\$ billion, with an area of about 26,500 KM and a population of about 20,000, mostly of the Huwaitat tribe. People who opposed the forced deportation were reportedly subjected to arbitrary and forced detention, some of whom were sentenced to death. On 28 April, UN experts sent a communication to Saudi Arabia concerning 5 persons from the Houwaitat tribe who had been sentenced to severe sentences: "Shazali Ahmad Mahmoud Abu Taqi al-Hawaiti, Ibrahim Saleh Ahmad Abu Khalil al-Hawaiti and Atallah Musa Mohamed al-Hawaiti. Ali Abdal-Nasser Ahmed Mahmoud Abu Taqi al-Hawaiti, Mahmoud Ahmed Mahmoud Abu al-Hawaiti and Abdullah Dakhilullah al-Hawaiti were also sentenced

on charges related to terrorist acts. In May, UN experts demanded that Saudi Arabia suspend executions of members of the Houwaitat tribe.

21. Qatar

Right to life:

Neither the Constitution nor Qatari law explicitly stipulated the right to life, yet Qatar had recognized that right since its ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2018, in which article 6 stipulated that "The right to life is an inherent right of everyone. The law shall protect this right. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life". Qatar's Penal Code recognizes the death penalty, but only for particularly serious crimes, and 2023 saw no executions in Qatar. On 28 December, a Qatari court dropped a death sentence that had been handed down to 8 Indian officers on charges of spying for Israel.⁸⁵ During 2023, the judicial authorities conducted investigations into the deaths of some workers during the World Cup tournament hosted by Qatar in 2022. The criminal investigation was conducted with Salam Petroleum Company due to the death of Filipino worker Alexander while performing some of his duties related to the accommodation of some of the teams during the World Cup, and Investigations are still ongoing.⁸⁶

Freedom of opinion and expression:

Article 47 of Qatar's Constitution guarantees freedom of opinion and scientific research as regulated by law. However, the Qatari authorities violated this right by imprisoning some activists on social media who criticized the Qatari authorities. On 18 March, human rights activist Nov Maadid posted a series of videos on her social media account, during which she complained of violations by Qatari authorities and their security services, particularly the State Security Service.⁸⁷ Since these clips were posted on her account, Maadid has not yet appeared again. Freedom of opinion and expression included in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates that "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds regardless of frontiers, whether in writing, in print, in art or by any other means of his choice".⁸⁸

⁸⁵ <http://tinyurl.com/encb9f76> محكمة قطرية أسقطت أحكام الإعدام الصادرة بحق ثمانية هنود، مونت كارلو الدولية، 28 ديسمبر 2023.

⁸⁶ Criminal case is opened over death of migrant worker during Qatar World Cup, theguardian, <http://tinyurl.com/ywk4273r>

⁸⁷ <http://tinyurl.com/4uhdrv5h> قطر: قصة مداخلة عن حقوق النساء اسمها نوف المعاضيد، 10 سبتمبر 2023.

⁸⁸ <http://tinyurl.com/5eza6h7d> العهد الدولي الخاص بالحقوق المدنية والسياسية، المادة 19، للاضطلاع علي باقي المواد.

Freedom of press:

Qatar ranked 105th out of 180 countries in the 2023 International Press Index compared to 119th in 2022, although this was attributed to the freedom accorded by the State to some media and journalists working in it in Qatar, however, there has been criticism of restrictions on freedom of the press, particularly the criminalization of criticism of the royal family. Some journalists working in Qatar have also referred to other practices that are incompatible with freedom of the press, such as inspection of correspondents, journalists and media organizations, during the coverage of some of the country's most important global and political events.⁸⁹

Allegations of enforced disappearance:

On 30 July, Maat received credible affirmations that Dr. Abdulaziz Al Ansari had been arrested by Qatar's State Security Service,⁹⁰ and has not been allowed to communicate with his family since his arrest. He had only been in contact with the lawyer assigned to his defense once, and his place of detention remains undisclosed until the time of writing this report, which is considered enforced disappearance. Ansari is a human rights advocate and social activist who has disappeared forcibly against the backdrop of expressing his views on social media platform X. It is worth mentioning that Ansari's family is still unaware of his place of detention, which contradicts the UN Set of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment. As there have been reports of incommunicado detention, Maat reminds the Qatari government that incommunicado detention should not exceed the permissible limits, as solitary confinement for more than 30 days is contrary to rules 44 and 45 of the UN Supreme Standard Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners "Nelson Mandela Rules".

In a similar context, Qatar did not provide a suitable environment for women human rights defenders, Women who have claimed their rights have performed in an atmosphere of intimidation contrary to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. More than 300 days have passed since the disappearance of Nov al-Maadeed, a 25-year-old human rights defender in Qatar who was forcibly concealed by the Qatari government in close periods of time, before she was released and banned from traveling.⁹¹ On this basis, Maadeed came out in a series of videos on X criticizing human rights in Qatar, resembling the Qatari government to North Korea,

⁸⁹ الصحافة في قطر.. انفتاح إعلامي سباق يواجه بعض التحديات. <http://tinyurl.com/3aa2wyvv>

⁹⁰ See the following link, <https://tinyurl.com/2zux2yfm>

⁹¹ The human rights situation in Qatar, <https://www.gc4hr.org/human-rights-situation-in-qatar/>

and in one video addressing the government saying "If you hate me, why don't you let me go", and in a video she posted on X in March 2023, she said that she asked for her travel ban to be lifted, However, members of Qatar's State Security Service bargained to let her out for unethical demands. It is worth mentioning that practices against Maadid began when she criticized human rights in Qatar and restrictions on women's rights.⁹²

22. Bahrain

Right to life:

Bahraini authorities have not expanded the use of the death penalty. for six full years since 2017 and until September 2023, Bahraini authorities have carried out only 6 death sentences. Although there are still 26 people in Bahrain on death row, especially after the appeal. Death sentences are based on allegedly coerced confessions through cruel and degrading treatment or ill treatment, and not to mention violations of fundamental rights to a fair trial and due process of law, such as the right to be assisted by a lawyer during interrogation, examination of prosecution witnesses.⁹³ Bahraini law gives the judge freedom to carry out the death penalty between the actual execution and the imposition of a penalty of deprivation of liberty such as life imprisonment.

Freedom of opinion and expression:

Bahrain's Constitution and law ensure freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the press. However, reports have alleged that this right has been violated by the Bahraini authorities, noting that on 28 February 2023, three individuals were tried - for exercising their right to freedom of expression and belief – such as Jalal al-Qasab, Reda Rajab and Mohammed Rajab, belonging to "Renewal Society", an association that defends freedom of debate and raises dialogue questions about religion and Islamic jurisprudence.⁹⁴

Reports also alleged that since October 2023, dozens of Bahraini authorities have been arrested, including children, because of their participation in pro-Palestine protests, as well as those who participated in pro-Palestine activities online. By December 2023, the Bahraini authorities had arrested approximately 57 people, including at least 25 children, for reasons related to protests. Not to mention the fact that detainees are subjected to numerous violations such as corporal and

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ <http://tinyurl.com/t8htsba9> التقرير العالمي البحرين 2024، هيومن رايتس ووتش، متاح علي الرابط التالي:

⁹⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/bdf9nu4h> البحرين: محاكمة ثلاثة أشخاص على خلفية حوار ديني، هيومن راتس ووتش، 28 فبراير 2023، متاح علي الرابط التالي:

psychological punishment for extracting confessions by force, confiscation of the detainee's property and beatings, interrogation of minors without informing their relatives or the presence of a lawyer.⁹⁵

Arbitrary detention:

Reports claimed that the Bahraini authorities violated the right to protection from arbitrary arrests during 2023, noting that in early March 2023 the Bahraini authorities arrested four people for social media posts. Among the four detainees were prominent lawyer and activist Ibrahim al-Mana'i, who called for reform of Bahrain's parliamentary system ahead of the IPU General Assembly.⁹⁶

Conditions of Detention:

Bahraini authorities promised in 2023 to improve conditions of detention and provide a suitable environment for detention and to end the restrictions by which prisoners are deprived of the exercise of their legally guaranteed rights. This prompted Joe Prison detainees in September 2023 to suspend their hunger strike.⁹⁷ Despite this, some prisoners declared hunger strikes in protest against their lack of right to adequate conditions of detention. On 9 August, Bahraini Danish jurist Abdulhadi Alkhawaja, co-founder of both the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, began hunger strike with hundreds of other prisoners in order to demand an improvement in their conditions of detention. The impact of this strike deteriorated Khawaja's state of health and was taken to a Bahraini military hospital, as the doctor who supervised his condition warned that he had been subjected to deadly cardiac arrest at any moment.⁹⁸ Alkhawaja has not been offered a cardiologist since he suffered a heart rhythm disorder inside the prison on 28 February 2023.⁹⁹

On 15 September, Maryam al-Khawaja, daughter of activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, was prevented from boarding a plane to Bahrain to pressure the Bahraini authorities to release her father. Maryam Alkhawaja was accompanied by prominent figures from three human rights organizations, including Anias Kalamar, an expert on human rights, Olive Moore, current director of the Front Line Defenders Foundation, Timothy

⁹⁵ منظمة أمريكيون: «البحرين تقمع مظاهرات مؤيدة للفلسطينيين ومنذدة بالهجوم الصهيوني على غزة». مانا بوست، 14 نوفمبر 2023. متاح على الرابط <http://tinyurl.com/yc34mzrn> التالي:

⁹⁶ تغريدة للمحامي المتأعي عن اجتماعات الاتحاد البرلماني الدولي تؤدي به إلى السجن، امرأة البحرين، 9 مارس 2023، متاح على الرابط التالي: <http://tinyurl.com/5cjjas6t>

⁹⁷ أخبار إيجابية حول انتهاكات شارك الأورومتوسطي في الدعوة/العمل للحد منها - سبتمبر 2023، الأورو متوسطي لحقوق الإنسان، 1 أكتوبر 2023، متاح على الرابط التالي: <http://tinyurl.com/tex965jz>

⁹⁸ الحرية لعبد الهادي الخواجة، أغسطس 2023، متاح على الرابط التالي: <http://tinyurl.com/2p8t6jh5>

⁹⁹ <http://tinyurl.com/2wr3mnkz> البحرين: حرمان سجين رأي من الرعاية الصحية، منظمة العفو الدولية، 22 مايو 2023، متاح على الرابط التالي:

White, General Secretary of Action Aid Denmark; however, everyone was denied access to Bahrain.¹⁰⁰ On 15 January, 20 human rights organizations sent a joint letter to the King of Bahrain and the Prime Minister that conditions of detention compatible with the international standards should be provided to Dr. AbdulJalil Al-Senkis, and that his arbitrarily confiscated research should be transmitted to his family as soon as possible.¹⁰¹

Right to a fair trial:

Bahrain's Constitution guarantees the right to fair trials, as Article 20 of the Code refers to a range of guarantees, such as the principle that there is no crime or punishment except on the basis of law, that acts prior to the application of criminal law shall not be punished, and in order to guarantee the right to a fair trial, the Constitutional Court was established by Decree Law No. (27) 2002, although the right to a fair trial witnessed some violations by the Bahraini authorities during this year. On 26 September, a group trial was held for 65 accused, and 13 accused were convicted by the First Criminal Court on charges of use of force against prison guards and vandalism of prison property, after a peaceful demonstration organized by inmates at Joe Prison in April 2021, the 52 other defendants were acquitted. The most significant violations of the Bahraini authorities against these defendants were the denial of their rights to attend hearings affecting them, nor did the court investigate the defendants' allegations of torture and excessive force by prison guards.¹⁰²

Section Four: Gaza: Everything worthy of protection.. is permissible!

This section of the report highlighted the situation in the Gaza Strip since the events of 7 October 2023, which the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Volker Türk, described as a "human tragedy foreshadowing the end of the world". No other conflict in the current century has witnessed such tragedy as the collective punishment of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. Gaza's civilian death toll as of 20 February 2024, amounted to approximately 34,000 people, including more than 14,000 children, as well as 8,600 women, as well as elderly, journalists and medical personnel, while the number of wounded and injured reached more than 71,000.

¹⁰⁰ ناشطة بحرينية تقول إنها مُنعت من السفر من المملكة المتحدة، فرانس 24، 15 سبتمبر 2023، متاح علي الرابط التالي: <http://tinyurl.com/2p5ke6kc>

¹⁰¹ البحرين: رسالة مشتركة: أفرجوا عن الدكتور عبد الجليل السنكيس بعد عام ونصف من الإضراب عن الطعام، منظمة العفو لدولية، 15 يناير 2023، متاح <http://tinyurl.com/ejpyu62k> علي الرابط التالي:

¹⁰² البحرين تدين 13 "سجيناً سياسياً" لتنفيذهم اعتصاماً داخل سجن في 2021، فرانس 24، 29 سبتمبر 2023، متاح علي الرابط التالي: <http://tinyurl.com/2fv5jxtn>

More than 70% of Gaza's infrastructure has been destroyed, according to the Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, requiring more funding for reconstruction. In addition, 90% of Gaza's population became displaced.

Since that date, civilians in Gaza have lived on the sounds of missiles and deadly aerial bombardment, in which the occupying forces used grenades of wide destructive force capable of destroying high-rise buildings of several floors. This has had a severe impact on the population and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, places of worship and even some UN facilities, and Israel has continued to impose a complete blockade on the Gaza Strip to prevent any form of relief and humanitarian assistance from reaching the Gaza Strip.

Since the beginning of the war on the Gaza Strip, along with daily violations, the Israeli occupying forces have committed a series of massacres that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. These massacres have resulted in the deliberate killing of hundreds of civilians, including women, children and the elderly, who do not take into account the protection accorded to civilians in armed conflicts and wars.

Rashid Street massacre

On 3 November 2023, Israeli occupying forces convinced Palestinian civilians living on Rashid Street near the coast of the Gaza Strip to go to safe areas by throwing leaflets in air advising them to head south. As soon as these displaced persons moved along Rashid Street, they were targeted by the Israeli Air Force, leaving behind scattering bodies along Rashid Street, resulting in 14 deaths among women and children.

Massacre of Ma'medani Hospital

On 18 October 2023, one of the most heinous Israeli massacres in the Gaza Strip took place, the massacre of the Ma'medani Civil Hospital, where the Israeli Air Force targeted the hospital in downtown Gaza City, resulting in the deaths of more than 500 civilians and hundreds of others wounded, as well as hundreds of others missing under rubble. Despite various international condemnations of the Ma'medani hospital massacre and Israel's claim that an investigation was launched, the investigation was neither impartial nor transparent, and did not produce real outcomes. In response, the IDF stated that it had warned that the hospital would be evacuated because Hamas was taking refuge from it. These allegations were not substantiated by the occupying Power, but on the contrary, according to information, there were no Palestinian faction members present in the hospital, which was providing treatment to more than 2,000 people and sheltered hundreds of others.

Jabalia camp massacre

On 1 November 2023, the Israeli Air Forces targeted a residential square in the Jabalia camp in the Gaza Strip near the Indonesian hospital, resulting in 400 people killed and wounded, including women and children. The occupying Power did not open an investigation into this targeting, which wasted the victims' rights and consequently continued crimes against humanity against Palestinian civilians.

Zeitoun neighbourhood massacres

The Zeitoun neighbourhood was the target of a series of massacres by the occupying Power. For example, on 29 October 2023, the IAF targeted the Zeitoun neighbourhood in eastern Gaza City, repeating this indiscriminate bombing on various occasions, resulting in more than 200 deaths only of civilians.¹⁰³ For example, on 2 December 2023, the IAF also killed about 20 civilians in another bombing on the neighbourhood. On 31 December 2023, the IAF targeted with missiles the Zeitoun neighbourhood, killing more than 60 people and wounding 2 others. In January 2024, the Israeli Air Force targeted the Zeitoun neighbourhood, resulting in the death of 120 civilians, while ambulances failed to extract a number of dead people who remained in the rubble.

Mukhazi camp massacre

On 24 December 2024, the Israeli Air Force committed a new massacre in the Makhazi camp in the central Gaza Strip, killing 70 civilians and wounding 2 others, while others are still missing. According to information, a series of bombs thrown at the camp are indiscriminate and unguided, meaning that Israel is aware of the possibility of targeting civilians as a result of the bombing on the camp.

Conclusion and recommendations:

In conclusion, in 2023, the Arab region witnessed a momentum of issues, events and even chronic crises, protracted conflicts and asymmetric wars that will overshadow the internal and external interactions of the region's States during 2024, at all levels whether political, economic, social and security. Israel's launching of the war against the Gaza Strip following the Operation "Al-Aqsa flood", which was carried out by Hamas and some Palestinian resistance factions on 7 October 2023, is perhaps the most prominent event in the region, which will result in extended regional impacts.

¹⁰³ <https://tinyurl.com/45vwupc5> مراسلتنا: مجزرة جديدة يرتكبها الاحتلال في حي الزيتون جنوبي غزة.

Political settlements between the warring parties in Arab countries (Libya, Yemen, Syria, Sudan) continue to be stagnated, as well as the risks of natural disasters, especially those related to earthquakes and recent floods in several Arab countries, as well as the implications of climate changes for the security and stability of Arab countries. All coincides with the resurgence of threats of irregular migration from North Africa to Southern Europe, the centrality of the role of border crossings, and the increasing impact of economic dimensions and crises on societal stability in the Arab region.

In 2023, Arab States' engagement with the special procedures remained limited, requiring further cooperation with these procedures, and some Arab States remained behind in submitting their periodic reports to UN treaty bodies. The human rights situation in the Arab region remains in need of further efforts, bearing in mind that human rights are interdependent and indivisible, which means that considering some rights without others may delay the advancement of human rights in general, and slow down the fulfilment of the pledge included in Agenda 2030 that no one will be left behind.

Maat hopes and in light of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is an irreplaceable opportunity to recall the principles enshrined in this Declaration and whose noble purpose is still being wasted in many parts of the world, and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is a clear testimony to the absence of these rights. Armed and terrorist groups in Yemen, Somalia and Syria continue to cut off and control parts of the territories and practice the most heinous violations against civilians that render the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights forgettable. What contributes to undermining the Declaration is also the intimidating growth in double standards by Western States and the United States of America, reflected in the changing positions in the Russian-Ukrainian war as compared to Israel's aggression against the Gaza Strip. Governments that have taken offensive positions calling for the protection of civilians in Ukraine have not taken the same steps to protect civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, thereby guaranteeing the rights of one category of individuals and extracting them from others, forgetting that human rights are interdependent and indivisible.

Maat also calls for wider respect for the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequently inspired by conventions, protocols and other declarations relevant to human rights, stressing that the realization of human rights

is not a luxury, but fundamental for building democratic societies and a basis for development in all areas, and the most important way to combat the forces of violent extremism.

Eventually, Maat hopes that Governments and other human rights actors will make a greater effort to raise awareness of the values and rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in order to give everyone access to human rights values. Respect for, promotion and protection of human rights begins with awareness and deep realization, and with the will of all.

Maat therefore recommends the following:

- Consider joining other core international human rights treaties;
- Prompt submission of periodic reports to the UN treaty bodies and effective engagement with them;
- Adopting a human rights-based approach in addressing economic and social rights in the Arab States;
- Alignment of national legislation in the Arab region with the provisions of international human rights conventions;
- Promoting the settlement of armed conflicts in the Arab region, as they have a negative impact on the achievement of sustainable development goals;
- Reduce double standards exercised by European States in dealing with the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;