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United Nations

In the United Nations, the General Assembly closes its year with positive remarks

The ongoing session of the United Nations' General Assembly that has begun in September – a year of extremely challenging events at a global scale -, seems to be about to end with positive remarks. *“This has been an eventful and demanding year for the United Nations, with several significant developments since I assumed the Presidency of the General Assembly”*, stated al-Nasser in a year-end press conference.

The Secretary General pointed out the uprisings and popular protest movements that have spread through North Africa and the Middle East, having culminated in the fall of the dictatorial regimes in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen: the Arab Awakening, as al-Nasser calls it. The Secretary General added the growing concern with the evermore consensual Human Rights issues.

Al-Nasser also pointed out the mutual aid between the United Nations' General Assembly and the Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, looking forward to an upcoming year with tighter cooperation between both

offices. *“We are demonstrating the UN working as one to achieve the best results for the benefit of groups and people in need around the world”*.

In China, Navi Pillay, the United Nations High Commissaire for Human Rights, has been actively condemning the harsh prison sentences given to pro-democratic activists Gao Zhisheng, Chen Xi e Chen Wei. Pillay is affirmatively more concerned with what appears to be an ever growing repression from the Chinese government towards Human Rights Issues. In Syria, information compiled by a inquiry commission and presented to the UN Human Rights Council on the 28th November showed that the Syrian security forces have committed crimes against

humanity throughout the country since the March 2011 protest began, with 3500 people killed due to the Syrian regime's repressive conduct. In a vote that passed with 133 to 11, an almost unknown result, the UN condemned the Human Rights violations perpetrated by Bashar Assad's government, urging an end to violence.

In Bahrain, a United Nations delegation invited by the government visited the country from 13 to 17 December, gathering with several government officials and civil society representatives. This visit was preceded by a report of the inquiry commission in Bahrain, published in November 23rd, which confirmed systematic Human Rights violations, concluding that the lack of responsibility shown by Bahrainis authority has led to a *“culture of impunity”* and constant violation of the international laws concerning Human Rights and even national legislation.

In Iran, the UN special envoy on Human Rights, Ahmed Shaheed, declared in November that he believes that if the country does not cooperate with its mandate and persistently continues to ignore international mechanisms for monitoring the observance of





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Human Rights – that are believed to be rapidly deteriorating –, the country may eventually end up in the UN Security Council. Finally, steps have been taken to promote the **participation of women** in the democratic processes, mainly in the Arab countries that experienced the fall of authoritarian regimes. The active participation of women in public protests around the world shows their will to promote social change, mainly in what concerns the respect of the rule of law and Human Rights, stated Rashida Manjoo, the UN special rapporteur on the violence against women, adding that *“Impunity, coupled with existing laws and practices that discriminate against women, will only encourage more violence against women”*. Any flaw on behalf of the authorities concerning any action on women violence has arisen, according to Manjoo, as a consequence of the State’s reluctance to observe its obligation to prevent, investigate and persecute all responsible for the acts of violence.

With the catchy slogan **“It’s not gay rights, it’s Human Rights”** repeated throughout the major international telecasting networks, the UN gave a

significant step to promote the respect toward the sexual minorities’ rights, compiling a report in which the States’ obligations to protect and promote the rights of every individual regardless of his sexual orientation are reiterated. António Guterres stated, on December 7th, that it is extremely important that the international community takes a stance towards the countless challenges met by the millions of stateless individuals throughout the world. In the biggest conference related to this topic, Guterres affirmed that a succession of political and economic crisis is contributing to a tougher environment to those who seek to protect everyone that is forced to leave their home.

International Criminal Court
Four years after the post-election violence that haunted Kenya, the police and judicial system have failed to investigate and prosecute crimes and to ensure justice for victims. The International Criminal Court has decided to pressure Kenya so they should establish a special judicial mechanism in its justice system to provide justice and compensation to the victims.

Africa director at Human Rights Watch said that *“Under international law, Kenya has an obligation to prosecute serious international crimes, and all victims of such crimes have the right to justice.”* and that *“Kenya should tackle these cases head on with a special judicial mechanism strengthened by international judges and prosecutors and insulated from political interference.”*

The International Criminal Court has decided to request in the beginning of December an arrest warrant for Sudan’s defense minister Abdelrahim Hussein, based on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Darfur region of Sudan from August 2003 to March 2004. *“The warrant request is an important step to advance justice for the many victims of crimes in Darfur”* said Elise Keppler, senior international justice counsel at Human Rights Watch. Hussein appears to have played a central role in the Sudanese government’s strategy of *“ethnic cleansing”* in Darfur and seems to be the responsible for coordinating military attacks on civilians and against specific ethnic groups.



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Burma

In spite of the alleged relaxation of its restrictions towards the media, **Burma's notorious Press Scrutiny and Registration Division is losing flexibility again**, refusing to publish some comments made by Aung San Suu Kyi in a press conference marking the 1 year anniversary of her release from house arrest, on November 14. Amongst these unpublished statements made by Suu Kyi, a Rangoon's journal managing editor kept in anonymity stressed the following: "There are no political prisoners in a country which has the rule of law"; "We all know that there's no freedom and balance in the country's judicial pillar", amongst others. Still, on December 23rd, the National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, re-registered as a political party in order to participate in the upcoming by-elections. Subsequently, the first steps are being taken to conduct a closer unity between the government and the opposition party's leader, who has the known objective of amending the Constitution, stating that "We must amend any laws that are not for the benefit of the country."

- Cease-fire in Kachin?

Burma's president, Thein Sein, has ordered the country's powerful military to cease attacks against ethnic Kachin rebels in an effort to solve the damaging conflict politically in Kachin state.

The president's office in Naypyidaw – administrative capital of Burma since 2005 – sent a communication saying that "The President instructed the military on Saturday – December 10th – not to start any fighting with the KIA [Kachin Independence Army] in Kachin State, except for self defense". That being said, Thein Zaw, the second in the Burmese government's Union and Peace Committee hierarchy, in charge of seeking peace with the ethnic groups, reluctantly told the Kachin Independence Army leadership that the ongoing military operations against the ethnic militias are being limited and have the sole purpose of applying pressure on the peace signing.

- Kachin refugees in poor health conditions

Thousands of children in war-torn in Kachin State, in Burma, appear to suffer from psychological trauma while adults experience a sense of insecurity and diminished confidence, the

Burmese government rights body reported on Wednesday. Most of venerable people among more than 34.000 refugees in Kachin State are children, women and eldest people. The Myanmar National Human Rights Commission made the statement after visiting Kachin State, northern Burma, to observe the condition of war refugees who have been displaced from their homes.

Kachin refugees are also facing food shortages and lack of proper sanitation and access to clean water in spite of the United Nations effort to help people in rebel-controlled areas.

Some of the displaced crossed the border to China but now face the prospect of returning to the conflict zone after the Chinese authorities ordered them to go back to Burma a few days ago.

- Buddhist Protests end and Dalai Lama looks forward to visiting Burma

Five Buddhist monks ended a rare protest in Burma, having attracted hundreds of passers-by with their requests for peace and the liberation of all political prisoners. The protest came two days when ministers at an ASEAN meeting in Bali recommended



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that Burma would accept one of the seats on rotation in the organization in 2014. For the monks that have started the protest, there are priorities to consider in the country, and at the top must be the guarantee of freedom of expression, release of political prisoners and end the civil war that continues to plague the country.

Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama expressed his desire last week to visit Burma to pay homage at the country's holiest shrine of the Shwedagon Pagoda, in Rangoon. However, the visit of the "simple Buddhist monk" – as he defines himself – may not happen so soon because the probability of acquiring a visa for the highly respected spiritual leader of Tibet is restricted since China is opposing the visit of Dalai Lama to any Southeast Asian countries. Their reason for raising objection of the visit is due to the political exposure that would lead to international campaign for Tibetan independence.

World

179 Journalists jailed worldwide

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) there are currently 179 journalists in prison across the world which represents

a rise of 34 in one year. This is the highest number of writers, editors and photojournalists for 15 years. Based on the CPJ ranking of countries, Iran was placed top with 42 journalists behind bars, while Eritrea was second with 28. China, Burma and Vietnam followed in the list with 27, 12 and nine respectively.

– Uzbekistan: The western indifference

Uzbekistan has not kept its promises to stop torture in its criminal justice system, including electric shocks and asphyxiation, Human Rights Watch said.

Western governments, seeking closer ties with the authoritarian Central Asian government for strategic reasons, have all but ignored the abuses while some human rights activists are languishing in prison and independent civil society is ruthlessly suppressed. "The West has to wake up to the fact that Uzbekistan is a state with one of the worst human rights records. Being located next to Afghanistan should not give Uzbekistan a pass on its horrendous record of torture and repression." said Steve Swerdlow, Uzbekistan researcher at Human Rights Watch.

These critics emerged because

some of the key international actors, such as United States or European Union, have in recent years dramatically weakened their stance on human rights toward Tashkent, due to Uzbekistan's strategic importance to neighboring Afghanistan as land route for NATO troops and supplies.

– Kim Jong-Il's death: a new hope for human rights in the country?

The death of ex-North Korean Leader Kim Jong-Il, on December 19th, was seen by the 22 thousand north-korean refugees, who live in South Korea, as the first step to a new wave and to democratization of one of the most isolated countries in the world.

According to Human Rights Watch this occurrence is seen by many as a new hope that the new leader choose a way that allows to make several changes on the human rights critical situation in the country. Over 17 years Kim Jong-Il exercised total control over one of the most closed and repressive governments in the world and has been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of North Koreans through widespread preventable starvation, horrendous prisons



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and forced labor camps and public executions.

King Jong-Il will be replaced by his son, Kim Jong-un, and about that Justice for North Korea organization speaker, Peter Chung, said that he believes that Jong-un *"will take the power for now but, in two or three years, there will be several changes in North Korea because many people are tired of the regime and also because there are now more external influences in the country"*.



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**News collected from the Human Rights Watch news services and Burmese newspapers on the exile*

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