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1 – In Egypt, National and International Human Rights Organizations are Under Attack

In Egypt, several Human Rights organizations have been and are, reportedly, still being subjected to several raids, in what seems to be the context of the Egyptian government's and the Supreme Council for Armed Forces' campaign against civil society organizations, particularly Human Rights groups. According to the Minister of Justice, there is an effective link between several events – such as the one that occurred in December 16, when the military used unnecessary violence to disperse protesters, resulting in the death of 18 people and the detention and torture of many others – and certain NGOs allegedly receiving foreign funds. In the Minister's words, the "third party" responsible for the attacks are the Human Rights NGOs, currently being labeled as a foreign agent.

2 – Sudan Plagued With Increasing Violence and Famine Warnings

Sudanese forces have been repeatedly using unnecessary or excessive force to end protests at universities across the country. In Khartoum, on December 22, a

peaceful student demonstration supporting a community that had been displaced by a dam construction saw an abrupt end when the police and the internal security forces used batons and teargas against the protesters. Similar actions have been taking place amongst the politically outspoken, with a growing rate of unexplained or unsatisfactory detentions.

"Using violence and arrests to repress political speech and silence activists is both illegal and counterproductive," Daniel Bekele, the Executive Director of the Africa division of Human Rights Watch, said. *"Instead of stifling dissent, Sudanese authorities should be promoting dialogue as the best way to work out differences."* After the country's secession in

2005, fighting broke out in June between the Sudanese army and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North rebels in South Kordofan, spreading in September to the state of Blue Nile. Both states border newly independent South Sudan. As the war carries on, increasing alarm has been voiced concerning famine, a serious and deadly consequence of the continued clashes. *"I received alarming reports with respect to malnutrition and the food situation, particular in areas that are controlled by SPLM-North,"* Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, told reporters in Khartoum

3 – Hamas and Fatah Claim to Agree on the Release of Political Detainees

Leaders of the Hamas and Fatah met in Gaza City to discuss the implementation of the reconciliation deal signed in May to end the violent rivalry between both parties. As agreed in the deal, both Fatah and the Hamas claim to be processing the release of political prisoners.

"The case is being processed by both sides, and the committee for public freedoms as well as Egypt is involved in assessing whether those detainees were





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held over political affiliation or criminal charges. The case is almost resolved.”, stated the Fatah leader.

Rivalry between the two parties reached a peak in 2007, when the escalation of the conflict neared civil war and led to the creation of separate governments in the West Bank and Gaza. About half a year on from the signing of the reconciliation agreement in Cairo, of its guidelines have yet to be implemented, including the formation of a unity government.

4 – Fleeing North Koreans ‘killed by troops’

As North Korea attempts to tighten its control over the country’s borders, its troops have been reported to shot dead three nationals in their 40s trying to escape into China. “People waiting at the Chinese side across the river to help the three defects saw the scene. The guards took with them the bodies which were lying on the ice,” Do Hee-youn, who helps refugees from the North, told AFP news agency.

Korean activists fear a violent crackdown during the transition period following Kim Jung-il’s death. “They are trying to let people know that those trying

to flee will be shot dead right away,” Do said, citing sources in the North who communicate via mobile phones smuggled in from China. The numbers point to about 23,000 North Koreans that fled their country’s highly repressive grounds since the 1950-53 war, most of them in recent years.

5 – Burma sets April date for by-elections

According to the Burmese government, the by-elections, with Aung San Suu Kyi’s party running for the first time in 20 years, will be held on April 1. Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) stated that it will be running for each of the 48 seats being contested. In the last general elections, the NLD staged a boycott accusing the government of holding restrictive rules, including the one that disallowed Suu Kyi from being a candidate.

6 – Ten Years of Guantanamo Bay

Ten years after the inauguration of the American facility in Guantanamo Bay, and despite promises made by President Obama following his inauguration, 171 prisoners remain incarcerated. On January 11, 2002, the first prisoners were

brought to Guantanamo, marking the first stages of an agenda of indefinite detentions without charges of trials of terrorism suspects just outside the country’s physical and jurisdictional borders.

Of the 171 prisoners still being held, the current administration has affirmed plans to prosecute 32, but only one prisoner is currently facing formal charges, and five others, the ones accused of planning the 9/11 attacks, have charges pending against them. Of the remaining 139 prisoners, there are plans to detain 46 indefinitely without ever pressing charges and plans to send the 89 remaining prisoners to their homes or other countries. A bleak anniversary is the prognosis for Human Rights organizations around the world.

7 – Karen National Union and Burmese Government Sign a Ceasefire Agreement

History seems to be on the Making in Burma, with the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU), the oldest ethnic armed group on the country, and the government. Under this agreement, the first since the beginning of the KNU’s struggle for Karen autonomy



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about six decades ago, both sides will allow each other to have unarmed patrols in their territories, and the KNU will be formally authorized to set up offices in government-controlled areas. Despite the optimistic tone transmitted prior and after the talks, a note of caution is to be ascertained in some comments. *"This time they didn't ask us to give up our arms, they just want to work for equal rights for ethnic groups. This time we trust them,"* stated Saw Johnny, committee member of the KNU, before adding: *"We have been fighting for 60 years and one meeting alone will not end it."*

8 – Discrimination and Injustice Towards the Bidun Continue in Kuwait

In Kuwait, a statement was issued on January 11 by the Interior Ministry, affirming that it will *"absolutely not allow the brothers who are illegal residents to organize any rallies, gatherings, sit-ins or demonstrations regardless of their nature, objective and mission"*. This statement refers to the Bidun, the stateless people that have been consistently denied citizenship for decades, even if many of them belong to the second, even third generation

living in the country. Although the Bidun consistently tried to organize several demonstrations since February 2011, in order to get the authorities' attention to their citizenship claims, it seems that nothing has yet been accomplished.

9 – Burmese Uncensored Films Finally See the Light of Day

In Burma, the days 1 to 3 January saw the first national film festival ever recorded, the Freedom Film Festival. Put together by Aung San Suu Kyi and the comedian activist Zarganar, this festival sought the depiction of some stories of the country's four decades of military rule.

Voted "Best Film" by the audiences, the 35-minute movie "Ban That Scene" satirized the power plays within the censorship board. The laureate of the title of "Best Short Documentary" was a 15-minute film about a Karen photographer, named "Click in Fear", telling the story of a photographer who valiantly documented the violent crackdowns on protesters in 2007.

"I am encouraged by the films and I wonder how long these filmmakers were waiting for a chance to make these movies of freedom," wrote Zarganar on his Facebook page. *"I expected*

that I would celebrate this film festival with my colleagues freed from prison, but now I wish to change this festival's name to the Festival of Captivity," he said.

10 – In Burma, Political Prisoners Walk Free and Censorship Carries On

Political prisoners in Burma started walking free from jails on January, 6 in an amnesty that will allegedly cover 651 inmates. For Burma, freeing political prisoners is one of the most important steps needed to warm up relations with the US and Europe, that are currently putting severe economic sanctions over the country. The exact number of political prisoners is still unclear, the UN estimating about 2.100 and the national government affirming the number was close to 400 after the October 12 amnesty.

Although the grip seems to be loosened in some aspects, in others it seems not to budge. Months after the head of Burma's censorship board declared that his job ought to be abolished, many news journals editors were warned by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) that there would be consequences for the publications that choose not to abide by the board's guidelines. According to those



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guidelines, events such as the alleged campaign irregularities by Burma's ruling party just ahead of the April 1 by-elections are strictly off-limits. "How can we say that the elections will be free and fair if we don't have press freedom?" said a journalist who has been unable to report his findings because of press censorship.

11 – Kachin Peace Could Take Three Years

In spite of the Burmese government's recent policy of engaging in talks with the ethnic armed groups involved in the conflict in the State of Kachin, the government's chief negotiator, former minister Aung Thaung, claims that the culmination of this peace process could take up to three years. The current peace plan includes three major steps: the ceasing of fire and reposition of both sides' troops, the development of the region and the finding of a political solution to the crisis through extensive and inclusive talks.

"Even during talks between the KIO and the government delegation led by U Aung Thaung, government troops launched offensives on two of our bases," KIO Joint-Secretary La Nan stated, affirming that

this assault has put the peace process in utter danger. "We complained about the attacks to U Aung Thaung and his delegation during talks on Thursday. He [Aung Thaung] told us that he would raise the issue when he was back in Naypyidaw," La Nan added.

12 – Heavy Clashes as Police Clear Phnom Penh Neighborhood

About 300 families in a Cambodian village called Phnom Penh are facing the risk of being evicted by the government, becoming thus homeless. A development deal on land in the Borei Keila commune of Prampi Mkara district, an area supposedly set aside for the poorest residents, is resulting in the eviction of hundreds of families, with a faint and vague promise of re-allocation that doesn't seem bound to happen.

Up to date, at least 20 people have been injured and 12 people were arrested in some violent clashes between protesters armed with rocks and bottles and security forces in riot gear that eventually had to deploy tear gas and water cannons to disperse the people. Phoung Thavy, 36, a resident of the neighborhood, wept near a pile of rubble that was once

her home. "Where should we live without a house?" she said. Chan Saveth, an investigator for the rights group Adhoc, said the clash underscored increasing violence between police and protesters in the city. "This is not a resettlement," he said.

13 – Nepalese Political and Judicial Institutions Off the Track on Human Rights Issues

Human Rights Watch states in its 2012 World Report that the Nepalese government and political parties consistently failed to establish a system of accountability for serious abuses occurred during the conflict with Maoist insurgents that ended in 2006. By ignoring court orders and appointing possible perpetrators of serious rights violations to government positions, the Nepalese government and parties have further weakened an already fragile justice system.

According to Human Rights Watch, up to this date not one person from either side of the conflict has been held criminally responsible for any rights violations during the clashes and many of those who were eventually accused have been consistently protected by the security forces of the political parties. Apart from



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having refused to extend the mandate of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the government has proposed several withdrawals and amnesties, which are clearly prohibited under international law if the amnesties concern such crimes as war crimes, crimes against humanity, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment.

14 – Asean Human Rights Document is to be Judged by Universal Standards

The Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights is currently trying to reconcile the desires of a regional body with an overwhelming majority of non-free countries in a task that consists on the drafting of a Human Rights document capable of holding up to

universal standards. Even though such document will probably be extremely difficult to write, the tone has been quite positive, as the international community seems to believe that a positive step is being taken towards international integration in a region deemed one of the most disrespectful of the said Human Rights. It is still to be seen if this particular tree will bear any fruits.

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

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