



EGYPT

LEBANON

SYRIA

ISRAEL/OT/
Palestinian Authority

JORDAN

IRAQ

KUWAIT

IRAN

SAUDI ARABIA

BAHRAIN

QATAR

U.A.E .

YEMEN

OMAN

ARABIAN
SEA

Middle East and North Africa

Doreen Khoury

Very few seasoned observers of the Middle East and North Africa could have predicted the wave of uprisings that spread throughout the region in 2011. The self-immolation of Tunisian street vendor Mohamad Bouazzizi on 17 December 2010, the event which triggered the Arab Spring, was a desperate cry for dignity in a repressive state and symbolized the plight of many citizens in the region. Young people in particular, who led the revolutions, felt disenfranchised and disconnected from the decades-old obsolete state ideologies which had failed abysmally to provide employment, social mobility and prosperity.

Future prospects for minorities in the region became a much discussed topic, especially following the tragic outcome of the Maspéro demonstrations in Cairo on 9 October 2011, during which Coptic Christians, who were protesting against the destruction of a church in Aswan, were attacked by the Egyptian army, with up to 27 protesters killed. Maspéro symbolized the current predicament of minorities after the Arab Spring: will the prejudices and identities of the old order continue to dominate or will public space open to allow minorities to express their culture and enjoy full political participation?

As 2011 drew to a close, the prospects did not look particularly promising. In Egypt, Coptic Christians continued to suffer violent attacks on their property and churches by Islamists while the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that replaced ousted President Hosni Mubarak repeatedly failed to hold perpetrators to justice. The victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian elections has also caused concerns that non-Sunni minorities will face further discrimination and repression of their religious and cultural rights.

In Libya, the effect on minorities of the six-month conflict by the Libyan rebels to unseat Muammar Gaddafi has been mixed. While Libya's Amazigh minority, also known as Berbers, liberated their lands from Gaddafi's hold and are enjoying freer cultural and linguistic expression, sub-Saharan Africans and Libyan Tawerghans have suffered severe discrimination and violence at the hands of the former rebels and many continue to be detained.

The Syrian revolution, which by the end

Right: A crowd of Coptic women leaving a church service in Egypt during a Coptic Mouldid of Mari Girgis, a religious festival celebrating the life of Saint George. *James Morris/Panos.*

of 2011 had entered its ninth month, was, according to some observers, in danger of erupting into a sectarian civil war between the regime, led by the Alawite Assad family, and the Sunni-led opposition.

The situation of minorities in other Arab countries did not improve in 2011. In Saudi Arabia, persecution of the Shi'a minority escalated, as the kingdom feared that shockwaves from demonstrations in Bahrain would spill over onto its own soil. Iran's numerous minorities, despite inhabiting regions rich with natural resources, continued to experience high rates of unemployment, poverty and health problems because of weak infrastructure and poor government investment in their regions.

Across the region, minorities have suffered from the confiscation of their land and property, and the degradation of their surrounding environment due to development projects, irresponsible agricultural methods as well as a general lack of government response to climate change. Minorities whose livelihoods have been negatively affected by these problems have received little or no help from their governments, as this chapter will show.

The Arab Spring is an ongoing process, where the relationship between citizens and the state is still being redrawn and negotiated. While the old Arab nationalism may be waning, more inclusive national identities in the region – one more accommodating to minorities and not defined by a dominant religion, ethnicity or language – has yet to form. The full political, social and cultural integration of minorities in Arab countries will be a major litmus test of the success of the Arab Spring.

Egypt

The Egyptian revolution began on 25 January 2011 when protests erupted throughout Egypt, focusing on the symbolic Tahrir Square in Cairo, and eventually led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak after 20 years of authoritarian rule. And at the end of 2011, the revolution was



arguably still ongoing, as opposition strengthened against the SCAF, which assumed power after Mubarak's departure. The SCAF has continued to use the repressive practices of the Mubarak era, including bringing its critics before closed military trials. In terms of women's rights, the most prominent violation was the so-called 'virginity tests' on female protesters arrested by army soldiers; the practice reportedly continued into 2012, despite widespread protest.

While the Egyptian revolution created an atmosphere of national solidarity as Egyptian Muslims and non-Muslims united to topple the Mubarak regime, religious and ethnic minorities continued to face discrimination and sectarian attacks. Muslim fundamentalists have been responsible for a number of sectarian attacks on minorities. The SCAF has also been complicit

in attacks against minorities, either by ignoring cases of sectarian violence, failing to investigate them or actively engaging in violence alongside extremists. Human Rights Watch (HRW) found that public prosecutors often encouraged extra-legal settlements, thus reducing sectarian attacks to personal disputes. This has fostered a climate of impunity, allowing extremists to target minorities without fear of punishment.

The year 2011 was a grim one for Coptic Christians, who represent between 6 and 9 per cent of the population. Over 10 major attacks occurred against Copts, most of them involving disputes about whether they had permission to build or renovate a church. Under existing laws, Copts must obtain an official endorsement and permission from the local Muslim community to build or renovate a church.

On 1 January, a bombing occurred at a church in Alexandria during the New Year's prayer service, in which at least 21 people were killed and over 70 injured. In March, a crowd burned down a church in the town of Atfih, south of Cairo. Lawyers representing the church told HRW that they had presented the names of 100 suspects alongside video evidence of the arson attack to the local prosecutor, but none of the suspects were prosecuted. In protest, Copts held demonstrations in Cairo, during which at least 13 people were killed and nearly 150 injured in clashes. A crowd attacked the demonstrators, while the Egyptian military apparently stood by for hours without intervening. Also in March, a group of men, alleged to be members of the Salafi movement, adherents of an interpretation of Islam that seeks to restore Islamic practice to the way it existed at the time of the prophet Mohammad, set fire to a flat in Qena owned by a Coptic Christian. The authorities made no efforts to arrest the perpetrators.

In May, Salafists attacked and badly damaged two churches in Cairo's Imbaba district, acting on rumours that a female convert to Islam was being held in a church. The government later reported that 12 people had died in the violence. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights said that security forces knew in advance that Salafists were gathered outside the churches, and failed to take any preventive measures. Christian houses and businesses were also vandalized.

On 30 September, a group of local residents in Al-Marinab village, Edfu Province, set fire to Saint George's church as it was undergoing reconstruction, because they believed that the congregation did not have a permit and objected to the height of the steeple that bore a cross. Authorities confirmed that the church did have a permit. Copts were angered by the governor of Aswan who appeared to justify the attack.

In October, thousands of Copts demonstrated outside the Maspero government building in Cairo, to protest the authorities' failure to punish attacks on Christians. They were met with armoured personnel carriers and hundreds of riot police who opened fire on the crowd. An estimated 24 people were killed, mostly Copts, and about 250 injured. The state media was

allegedly also instrumental in inciting sectarian unrest. The SCAF was criticized, as generals denied the use of live ammunition despite video evidence, and the inquiry set up to investigate the incident was headed by a military prosecutor.

In June 2011, a draft law on the construction of religious buildings was issued by the government to replace the previous Hamayouni Decree, dating back to the Ottoman era, which regulated church construction but did not apply to mosques. The law sought to promote religious equality by applying equal regulations to mosques and churches, but was opposed by the Muslim Brotherhood for not abiding by 'measures of justice that are espoused by Islamic sharia [law]'. Coptic Christians also expressed dissatisfaction with the draft law, since they still had to receive permission from governors to build places of worship.

In 2011, Sufi Muslims, who adhere to the esoteric, mystical dimension of Islam, faced attacks and harassment from Salafists who consider them to be heretics. Salafists attacked 16 historic Sufi mosques in Alexandria where half a million Sufis live and which has 40 Sufi mosques. Aggression against the Sufis in Egypt included a raid on a mosque named after and containing the tomb of the thirteenth-century Sufi al-Mursi Abu'l Abbas. Another target was the Qaed Ibrahim mosque, where mass protests were organized during the revolution. Sufi residents of the Egyptian governorates of al-Minufyia and Aswan have also demanded state protection of Sufi institutions and buildings.

Bahá'ís in Egypt have historically suffered from state-sanctioned discrimination and persecution. Most Egyptian Bahá'ís do not have official identity cards which are necessary for access to education, employment, opening bank accounts, receiving pensions and carrying out business transactions. In addition, they have been barred from holding government jobs. Bahá'í marriages are still not recognized in Egypt. While the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that Bahá'ís could obtain official identity cards back in 2008, the implementation of this ruling has moved slowly. Bahá'ís are still banned from forming spiritual assemblies in Egypt.

The Egyptian paper *Youm al Sabe'* reported that on 23 February two homes of Bahá'ís were

set on fire and burgled in Shuraniya village, in the Sohag governorate. According to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights there was strong evidence that state security officers incited the attack.

Following the 2011 revolution, ethnic Nubians began to demand their right to return to their homeland around Lake Nasser. Egyptian Nubians are an ethnic group with a distinct culture and language, and live mostly in the Upper Nile region. Developmental projects in their ancestral lands have led to the loss of their livelihoods which are dependent on farming. In the 1960s, during the construction of the Aswan High Dam, when the surrounding region was flooded to create Lake Nasser, 50,000 Nubians were relocated to less fertile government lands in Upper Egypt. But Lake Nasser has receded over the past decade, making fertile land available again. Nubians were subject to repression under Mubarak's regime because of the strategic location of ancient Nubia on the site of the Aswan Dam and have also seen Egyptian Arab communities settled by the government on the land they claim as their homeland.

In early September, about 2,000 Nubians protested in Aswan City against their marginalization and the elimination of their traditional rights to the land. Protesters set fire to the Aswan governorate headquarters.

Iran

Large-scale protests by government critics and opposition members were held in Iran in 2011, but were met with a heavy crackdown by security forces. On 14 February, opposition groups staged a 'Day of Rage' protest in Tehran and other cities, during which thousands gathered in solidarity with protesters in Tunisia and Egypt, despite the large number of security forces. Police fired tear gas on protesters, killing two people.

In April, the Iranian parliament passed regulations severely limiting the independence of civil society organizations, and created a Supreme Committee Supervising NGO Activities chaired by ministry officials and made up of members from the security forces. Activists from the One Million Signatures campaign, a women's grassroots movement aimed at ending discrimination against women, were targeted in

2011 by the state. Several women are currently detained or serving prison terms for their activities, and many have been held in solitary confinement or have limited contact with their families and lawyers.

In 2011, Iran did not permit Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur assigned with investigating its human rights record, to enter the country. Widespread discrimination against Iranian minorities in both law and practice continued during 2011, according to an Amnesty International report that noted that minorities face land and property confiscations, denial of employment and restrictions on cultural, linguistic and religious rights. In February 2011, MRG published a briefing which noted that the traditional lands of many Iranian minorities (namely Ahwazi Arabs, Azeris, Kurds and Baluch) are rich with natural resources and provide large sources of wealth for the Iranian government, but local communities experience high rates of unemployment, poverty and disease because of weak infrastructure and poor government investment.

The Iranian government continued to persecute Kurdish activists in 2011, convicting them on vague charges such as 'acting against national security' and 'waging war against God'. Fifteen imprisoned Kurdish activists are believed to be on death row. Death sentences against Zainar and Loghman Moradi, and Habibollah Latifi, were upheld in 2011 following failed appeals. Another Kurdish activist, Sherko Moarefi, was also at risk of imminent execution.

In terms of land rights, there are high levels of property confiscation and governmental neglect in the Kurdish region of north-west Iran – Iranian Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam provinces. The Kurdish region has abundant water resources. Dams have been built by the government to facilitate water irrigation and for hydroelectric power generation, but Kurds are generally excluded from the benefits of this investment. They experience poor housing and living conditions because of forced resettlement, and the expropriation of rural land for large-scale agricultural plantations and petrochemical plants which pollute the surrounding environment.

The Bahá'í faith, with over 300,000 followers in Iran, has long been the target of persecution.

Hundreds of Bahá'ís have been executed, tortured and imprisoned, and many others have been denied livelihoods, education and the right to inherit property. In January 2011, Navid Khanjani, who began advocating for Bahá'í rights after he was denied access to higher education, was sentenced to 12 years in prison. At the beginning of 2012, the case was pending appeal. In March, six Bahá'ís were arrested in Kerman, at least four of them for providing education for young children. The high-profile case of the seven Bahá'í leaders attracted renewed attention and criticism during 2011. Their 20-year prison sentences had been reduced to 10 years in September 2010; however, they were told in March 2011 that the longer sentences had been reinstated. They maintain that the charges against them are without foundation; their lawyers have had very limited access to them. In May, security forces arrested at least 30 Bahá'ís affiliated with the outlawed Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education, a correspondence university.

Several of the country's ethnic minorities – Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmen – practise Sunni Islam. These groups are doubly affected by discriminatory policies based on both their ethnic identity and their faith. Sunni Muslim religious leaders are regularly intimidated and harassed by security services and report widespread official discrimination. In 2011, Sunni Muslims in Tehran were banned from congregating at prayers marking Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday that signals the end of the month of Ramadan.

Christian converts regularly face state harassment and arrest. Many belong to evangelical protestant groups, and are regularly charged with 'insulting Islamic sanctities' and apostasy. One of the main targets is the Church of Iran, an evangelical congregation with members throughout the country. In January 2011, the governor of Tehran, Morteza Tamaddon, publicly referred to detained Christians as deviant and corrupt. Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, who converted to Christianity, has been a frequent target of the Iranian authorities. He was arrested in October 2009; the Supreme Court upheld his apostasy conviction and death sentence in September 2011.

Sufi Muslims have faced growing government repression of their communities and

religious practices, including harassment and imprisonment of prominent Sufi leaders and destruction of prayer centres. In January, three lawyers who had defended Sufi members were put on trial. They were reportedly sentenced to 6–7 months' imprisonment for 'propagating lies and creating public anxiety'. Over 60 people, mostly dervishes (members of a Sufi religious order), were arrested in September. In the same crackdown, a member of the Nematollahi Gonabadi Sufi order was reportedly killed. By 2012, at least 11 remained in detention. Also in September, four lawyers who were representing the detainees were also arrested; they were charged in December for spreading lies and membership in a 'deviant group'.

Most of Iran's Ahwazi Arab community lives in the south-western province of Khuzestan, which borders Iraq and contains 90 per cent of Iran's oil wells. Ahwazis are marginalized and subject to discrimination in access to education, employment, adequate housing and political participation. In April 2011, HRW reported that several dozen Ahwazi protesters were killed by security forces during demonstrations over the Ahwazi minority's grievances over state discrimination and denial of economic and cultural rights. Authorities arrested hundreds, prosecuted them during flawed trials where they had limited or no access to lawyers, and executed several.

Sistan-Baluchistan

The Baluch region is rich in energy and mineral resources, but activists claim the government has deliberately pursued a policy of underdevelopment. Baluchistan has the lowest per capita income in Iran, a high infant mortality rate, and the average life expectancy is at least eight years below the national average. As Sunni Muslims, Baluchis have also come under pressure from the government to convert to Shi'a Islam if they want to find employment and access education.

Sakhi Rigi, an ethnic Baluch blogger and former member of opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi's campaign staff, was sentenced in June to a 20-year prison term on charges of 'acting against national security' and 'propagating against the regime.' He was first arrested in 2009.

.....

Case study

.....

Between a lake and a river: government neglect in Iran

.....

Azeris, Lake Urmia

Azeris in Iran have joined together to protest against dam construction on Lake Urmia's tributaries that is destroying the region's ecological and economic resources.

Lake Urmia, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, is situated between the East and West Azerbaijan provinces and is one of the largest salt lakes in the world. But over the past 15 years it has shrunk by 60 per cent due to the construction of 36 dams on the lake's tributaries, prolonged drought, and the construction of a major highway bisecting the lake to connect the cities of Urmia and Tabriz. The region now faces a growing ecological disaster, with serious negative consequences on Azeri communities whose livelihoods depend upon the lake.

In April 2011, Azeris gathered to protest in Urmia and Tabriz, calling on the government to save the lake. According to Amnesty International, 70 people were arrested in Tabriz and 20 in Urmia for protesting illegally. During the summer, Azeri activists escalated their protests after the Iranian government dropped plans aimed at reviving the lake. On 24 August, 30 Azeris were arrested at a private gathering, and on 27 August, thousands of protesters in Urmia clashed with riot police, resulting in 300 arrests, according to HRW. Police shot tear gas at protesters and beat them with batons. At another environmental rally in early September, security forces resorted yet again to violence and arrested 60 people.

As the lake recedes, its salt content is gradually dispersed into the local environment, causing increased soil salinity in surrounding farmland. Experts estimate that if the lake dries up completely, the surrounding cities will

be covered by layers of salt, eventually displacing up to 1.3 million people. The lake also plays an important role regulating regional weather systems, and its disappearance will lead to damaging shifts to seasonal weather patterns

Thousands of Azeris in the cities of Tabriz and Urmia depend on the lake for their livelihoods, especially for ecotourism, irrigation and salt production. The shrinking of the lake has already affected tourism and regional investment has dropped significantly. Proposals made by the Iranian government to save the lake have been dismissed by activists and experts as short-term measures. For example, rather than launching a cloud-seeding programme to increase rainfall and supply the lake with remote sources of water as the government proposes, activists argue that releasing the water held behind dams would be far more effective in the long run. But for years, the Iranian government has chosen to ignore the problem and shirk responsibility, instead blaming global warming.

Ahwazi Arabs and the Karoun River

In 2011, the World Health Organization declared that Ahwaz City, the capital of the Khuzestan governorate, was the most polluted city in the world, with high asthma levels among children and teenagers due to industrial waste and emissions. Industrial pollution has damaged the natural environment, and marshland biodiversity is so seriously threatened that migratory birds have



Above: An Azeri man in Kandovan, Iran, near Lake Urmia. Piotr Bystranowski.

Case study continued

left the area. The Bandar Iman petrochemical complex is a major pollutant, and has created environmental devastation and low fish stocks, directly impacting the livelihoods of the Ahwazis.

Despite or more likely because of their region's strategic importance – most of Iran's oil wells are there – many Ahwazi Arabs have been forced to migrate. The Iranian government has pursued a policy of encouraging ethnic Persians to move in from other provinces. The confiscation of Ahwazi land has been so widespread that it has amounted to a government policy of dispossession. The creation of the Arvan Free Zone in 2005 involved the mass expulsion of Ahwazis and the destruction of their villages. Iranian authorities have also followed a policy of ethnic segregation in Khuzestan, by constructing walls that separate Ahwazis from non-Arab districts and neighbourhoods. In urban areas, many Ahwazis live in shanty towns which lack plumbing, sewerage and safe drinking water.

In recent years, the Iranian government's decision to divert the Karoun River in Khuzestan to other drier regions has had further serious implications on the livelihood of Ahwazis. In May 2011, the director of the Ahwaz Human Rights Organization claimed that the diversion of waters from the Karoun and Karkhe rivers from Arab lands to ethnically Persian provinces of Isfahan, Yazd and Kerman represented a further erosion of Ahwazi farmers' economic security. The river is essential for agriculture and fishing, and is the largest source of income for them. The disruption of water sources will lead to a lack of safe drinking water, diseased fish and a decline in fish stock. River diversion erodes farmer's economic security. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) has repeatedly warned the Iranian government of the disastrous environmental impact of diverting the Karoun River, but the Iranian government has rejected concerns. The governors of Khuzestan, Chahar Mahaal va Bakhtiari and Lorestan provinces have also reportedly expressed their opposition to the diversion project. The project was due to start in 2011, but as a result of the protests the project was postponed. ■

Iranian security forces were reported to have arrested or killed several members of the pro-Baluch armed group People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI), also known as Jundallah, which was created in 2003 and is considered by both the United States and Iran to be a terrorist organization. In May 2011, nine members of Jundallah were arrested and in July two Jundallah commanders were killed in Baluchistan by security forces. In late August 2011, four members were arrested on suspicion of planning an armed attack in Baluchistan.

Iraq

Chris Chapman

In the run-up to the pull-out of US combat troops at the end of 2011, many observers predicted a significant worsening in the security situation. Certainly the US had played a role in patrolling areas such as the Nineveh Plains and the city of Kirkuk, which have significant minority populations. In fact, while January 2012 saw the highest monthly death toll since August 2010, the number of civilians killed then fell back to levels comparable with the previous year.

Kirkuk city was a centre of much violence throughout 2011, particularly targeting the Turkmen community, notably through killings of prominent individuals such as police officers and business leaders. This prompted the setting up of a parliamentary committee of enquiry, which at the time of writing has still not reported. No-one has claimed responsibility for the deaths but they are likely to be linked to tensions between Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs over political control, access to resources and jobs, and the long overdue referendum over the future status of Kirkuk. Christian churches have also been targeted in the city.

Dohuk governorate, in the Kurdistan region, normally a relative haven of peace, was struck by a series of arson attacks on 37 Christian and Yazidi businesses in December 2011.

According to a survey conducted among 11 minority communities for a 2011 MRG report, minorities in Iraq face considerable problems in gaining proper access to employment, health care or education. Only 47 per cent of members of religious minorities felt safe visiting places of worship. Those surveyed described how they fear wearing religious symbols publicly, especially

minority women, who often need to protect themselves from harassment by hiding their religious affiliation.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has signed an exploration and production deal with the international oil giant Exxon Mobil for six blocks, including three in disputed territories bordering the official KRG region. Although the KRG controls these regions *de facto* through the presence of its security forces, its sovereignty over them is not recognized in the Constitution; the federal government has protested against the deal. The blocks include areas of Nineveh and Kirkuk provinces of significant ethnic and religious diversity, in particular a block to the north-east of Mosul, in Nineveh Province, which is inhabited by a patchwork of Shabak, Christian, Yezidi and Kaka'i communities, as well as Kurds and Arabs.

The deal is also controversial because Iraq has still not passed a law on hydrocarbons, defining procedures for awarding oil concessions, the respective rights of the KRG and federal governments to sign deals, the role of foreign companies and export modalities, a draft of which was presented to parliament in 2007. However, the federal government has itself signed exploration deals with multinationals covering fields in the south of Iraq.

Both the federal and Kurdish governments accuse each other of smuggling oil out of the country to bypass revenue-sharing agreements. The KRG has since closed down oil production in protest at the federal government's alleged failure to pay sums owing from a revenue-sharing deal.

In February 2012, an Iraqi court of appeal confirmed death sentences for three people who were convicted of the attack on the Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad in October 2010, in which 44 worshippers, 2 priests and 7 security force personnel were killed. An accomplice was sentenced to 20 years in prison. While the use of the death penalty is deplorable, it should be noted that the sentences break with a tradition of almost complete impunity for large-scale attacks on Iraqi minority communities.

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Israel

There are approximately 1.2 million Palestinian

Arab citizens in Israel, comprising 20 per cent of the total population. Of these, 82 per cent are Muslim, while the remainder are roughly split between Christians and Druze. There is deep institutional discrimination against Palestinian Arabs in employment, education and property ownership. Palestinian women face further discrimination, both as women and as members of a minority. Though Israel's Knesset has passed highly progressive laws on anti-discrimination and legal protection for women and disabled persons, such legislation does not cover discrimination against the Arab minority on the basis of ethnicity. According to various UN and local statistics, over half of Palestinian families are poor.

Palestinian citizens of Israel are deprived of access to and use of their land under laws aimed at confirming state ownership of land confiscated from Palestinians. In 2011 Adalah, an NGO and legal centre for Arab minority rights in Israel, published a report that points to the lack of development and investment in Arab towns and villages. Palestinian Arab towns and villages in Israel suffer from severe overcrowding, with Arab municipalities representing only 2.5 per cent of the total area of the country. Since 1948, 600 new Jewish municipalities have been established, whereas no new Arab village, town or city has ever been authorized.

In March 2011, HRW reported that the Knesset passed a law authorizing 'admissions committees' in small rural communities to filter out applicants on the basis of vague 'social suitability' criteria. HRW estimated that approximately 300 Jewish-majority communities will fall within the law's definition, although the practice is already common in many others. While the law's sponsors added a non-discrimination clause, statements made at the time indicated their intention to target Arab Israeli citizens. HRW foresaw that other marginalized groups, such as Jews of non-European origin, will be affected.

About 200,000 Bedouin live in the Negev Desert, where they are an indigenous people – a fact which is not recognized by the Israeli government. Since 1948, Israel has built dozens of Jewish towns, villages and farms, confiscated Bedouin lands and attempted to move them into



specific planned townships. Israeli governments have recognized only a few Arab villages in the Negev, even though many were established before the state of Israel. Israel does not recognize Bedouin ownership rights. On 11 September 2011, the Israeli cabinet decided to go ahead with the controversial 'Praver Plan' which will result in the demolition of thousands of houses in the Negev and force 30,000 Bedouin from their ancestral lands and into townships. The Israeli government sees the plan as an attempt to end the long-standing dispute between the state and its Bedouin population. But the plan

has been drawn up without any consultation with Bedouin communities and will in effect extinguish Bedouin land claims without adequate compensation. An MRG report published in December condemned the government's policy towards Bedouin not only as discriminatory but also as a violation of international human rights law. At year's end, the Knesset was expected to consider the enabling legislation soon.

During 2011, the Knesset passed other legislation adversely affecting Palestinian citizens of Israel. One law will lead to fines being imposed on any government-funded institution,

Left: Sabah Ismail, a Bedouin woman, speaks to MRG in 2011 of the horror her family went through when the Israeli government demolished her entire village, Al Arakib, the previous year. Her family now live in a tent in the cemetery in Al Arakib. *Farah Miblar/MRG.*

including municipalities, that commemorates the 'Naqba', the Arabic term for the destruction of Palestinian villages and the expulsion of their residents following Israel's independence, and any expression deemed to 'negate the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state'. While the law will most clearly affect municipalities, it could also harm attempts by arts groups and other cultural organizations to build bridges between communities through educational programmes.

During January 2012, the Israeli Supreme Court upheld the country's controversial Citizenship Law. According to the legislation, which began as a temporary order in 2002, Palestinians who live in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) or citizens of Arab countries that are considered 'enemy states' are not eligible for Israeli residency or citizenship if they marry Israeli citizens. Thousands of Palestinian families are thus forced to live apart, move abroad or live illegally in Israel.

The West Bank

Following the 1993 Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided into three administrative divisions. Area C, comprising 60 per cent of the West Bank, is the Israeli-controlled and administered area. Around 150,000 Palestinians live in this area, alongside approximately 500,000 Israeli settlers. Minority groups include Bedouin who number around 25,000 people in Area C and 40,000 in the whole of the West Bank. The Israeli government has put aside 70 per cent of the land in Area C for settlements, firing zones, the separation barrier, checkpoints and nature reserves, and this land is therefore 'off-limits' to Palestinians.

In 2011, the Israeli authorities continued its practice of house demolitions and forced evictions in Area C and East Jerusalem, violating its obligation to respect the right to adequate housing. The UN Relief and Works Agency

(UNRWA) reported that as a result of escalated demolitions by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank, over 4,000 people were either displaced or otherwise severely affected by demolitions during 2011. The vast majority of demolitions were carried out in Area C. In February 2011, for example, Israeli forces destroyed 6 homes and 21 animal pens in Khirbet Tana near Nablus, displacing about 6 families and affecting over 100 people who rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. It was the third time since January 2010 and the fourth since 2005 that the community had experienced large-scale demolitions.

The Israeli authorities continued to revoke residency permits of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, and in August 2011 the Israeli government approved the construction of 1,600 new Israeli settler homes there. The decision should be viewed against a diplomatic backdrop; it came just weeks before the Palestinian Authority moved to have the Palestinian state recognized at the UN.

In recent years, opposition to the eviction of Palestinians from East Jerusalem has coalesced around the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, located to the north of the Old City. Approximately 60 people have so far been evicted, often with minimal notice, and 500 others remain at risk of displacement. In May, the NGO Avocats sans Frontières issued a report in which it highlighted a key issue, namely the expansion of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries into areas considered by Palestinians as well as the UN to be occupied territory. Thus, the evictions violate the Fourth Geneva Convention which prohibits occupying powers from displacing civilians or transferring groups belonging to its own population into occupied territory.

The Israeli authorities are developing plans to forcibly relocate Bedouin from Area C in 2012. Initially, 2,300 people will be relocated to a site bordering Jerusalem's biggest rubbish dump. It should be noted that attacks by Israeli settlers can also cause displacement. UNRWA noted for example that 19 Bedouin families – 127 people – decided in July 2011 to move from their Area C homes under fear of further settler attacks, citing lack of adequate protection. The forced displacement undermines Bedouin

livelihoods as well as their tribal identity. EU country ambassadors noted in a joint report that settler attacks have increased dramatically from 266 reported incidents in 2010 to 411 assaults in 2011.

Under a planning system condemned as discriminatory by the UN, Israeli authorities have allocated only 1 per cent of Area C for Palestinian development. It is virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain construction permits, while Israeli settlements receive preferential treatment in the allocation of water and land, and approval of development plans. Settlements built on privately owned Palestinian land and which do not have building permits rarely face demolition.

Several human rights agencies have highlighted the lack of access to safe drinking water. In a report published in December, the UN's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) noted the continuing destruction of local civilians' wells, roof water tanks, and other water and irrigation facilities, which forces many civilian to leave their home areas.

The CESCR also reported on Israel's continued gross violations of housing and land rights, in particular noting that the Israeli-controlled separation barrier along and within the West Bank has prevented Palestinian farmers from accessing their land and natural resources, affecting their right to work. In 2011, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) produced a report on the impact of the barrier on Palestinian communities which has cut off land and natural resources required for agriculture, negatively impacting rural livelihoods. Of particular note is the so-called Seam Zone or area between the Green Line (the pre-1967 boundary between Israel and the West Bank) and the barrier. Access to the Seam Zone by Palestinian farmers is through designated gates and depends on a cumbersome 'prior coordination' system. In the Biddu area, for example, some Palestinian communities have been cut off from almost 50 per cent of their agricultural land in the Seam Zone near the Giv'at Ze'ev settlement. One essential agricultural activity that has suffered is the olive harvest. In October, OCHA reported that the Israeli authorities were denying thousands of

Palestinian farmers access to their olive groves in the Seam Zone either due to security reasons or an inability to prove ownership of land. The Israeli authorities have also reportedly been destroying Palestinian crops. The situation has increased food insecurity and impoverished herder communities who have lost access to water, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Shuetter.

Lebanon

Lebanon has enjoyed greater freedom of speech than many other Arab countries, and largely avoided the Arab uprisings. But the country continued to be gripped by political paralysis. The national unity government led by Saad Hariri collapsed in January 2011, because of disagreement over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon on the assassination of Rafik Hariri. Competing regional affiliations also played a big part in the government's demise. It took Hariri's successor, billionaire Najib Mikati who was named prime minister in January 2011, six months to form a government. Despite being a coalition of supposedly like-minded parties, including Hezbollah and the Christian Free Patriotic Movement, the new government has also struggled to reach consensus on many local and regional issues. The situation of minorities, both ethnic minority groups and those who do not have citizenship in Lebanon, remained relatively unchanged in Lebanon, except for the influx of Syrian refugees across the border, fleeing the violence there.

There are approximately 455,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon registered with UNRWA (comprising 10 per cent of the country's population), around half of whom live in 12 recognized refugee camps. Palestinian refugees are denied citizenship and so have few basic rights, or access to state services. Most Palestinian refugees can only find low-paid temporary employment and cannot work in over 30 professions, such as medicine, law and engineering; women are significantly more likely to be unemployed than men and some families rely on child labour for income. As UNRWA only provides them with basic health services, many cannot access long-term health care. They also face restrictions on their movement, requiring permits to leave their camps.

In February 2011, UK-based Palestinian NGOs the Palestinian Refugee Centre and the Council for European Palestinian Refugees reported on the desperate situation in the refugee camps that are prohibited from expanding and therefore suffering from increasingly overcrowded living space. Prime Minister Mikati promised to grant Palestinian refugees work permits and to grant civil and human rights, but ongoing Lebanese political dysfunction makes it virtually impossible to imagine this happening in the foreseeable future.

By the end of 2011, 4,840 Syrian refugees were registered with the UNHCR and the Lebanese High Relief Committee, the majority of whom had fled from Syria's Homs province. Many are residing with host families in north Lebanon, waiting for the situation at home to stabilize before they return. Their legal status is ambiguous, and they also face the threat of Syrian troop incursions and kidnappings by Syrian agents in Lebanon. Syrian refugees have complained that their movements are restricted by the Lebanese army, since they do not have exit stamps on their passports or identity cards, and that little has been done to ensure their security.

There are about 150,000 Arab Bedouin in Lebanon, who lived in what is now Lebanon before the country was created. Originally self-sufficient, years of urbanization and drought have impoverished them, weakening their customs and traditional pastoral livelihoods. Bedouin in Lebanon have fought for years to be recognized as Lebanese citizens. During Lebanon's only population census in 1932, many Bedouins who failed to register did not get citizenship and thus became stateless. Those without citizenship are given laissez-passer papers, which protect them from arrest and deportation, but does not grant them any civil rights. Because some of their settlements are not recognized, their access to water and electricity is also limited.

Libya

The Libyan revolution began with protests in the eastern city of Benghazi on 15 February 2011 and, like the other Arab Spring uprisings, caught most observers by surprise. By late February, opposition to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's

42-year rule had transformed into an armed struggle that spread across the country. The opposition formed the National Transitional Council (NTC) in Benghazi. On 17 March, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1973, which paved the way for the imposition of a no-fly-zone against Gaddafi's forces, led by NATO. The Libyan capital, Tripoli, eventually fell to rebel forces in late August 2011, and Gaddafi was captured and killed on 20 October 2011 in the city of Sirte. On 16 September, the UN General Assembly recognized the NTC as the legitimate representative of Libya.

In November 2011, a report by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon expressed concerns over alleged war crimes committed by rebels, particularly against black Libyans and Sub-Saharan Africans. The report said many of the 7,000 African detainees, including women, had been beaten and tortured.

According to rights groups, rebel fighters killed and detained black Libyans and sub-Saharan African migrant workers, claiming they were pro-Gaddafi mercenaries. However, allegations that Gaddafi employed many Africans from neighbouring countries such as Chad, Nigeria and Sudan as mercenaries appeared to be heavily exaggerated. Many Africans worked in civilian jobs. There have been reports of harassment and violence towards sub-Saharan African migrant workers from rebel fighters and civilians alike, and security missions have allegedly turned into persecution of Africans based on their skin colour. During a field mission in September, HRW reported that Africans held in Libyan prisons were in overcrowded cells with appalling hygiene standards and no access to clean drinking water. In addition, many sub-Saharan Africans have been displaced by the fighting and for fear of reprisals; the largest group of displaced Africans was in the port of Janzur between Tripoli and Zawya, housed in camps with poor hygiene and sanitation conditions. Residents of the camp complained to HRW that armed Libyans frequently entered the camp to harass them and rape women.

During the Libyan revolution, government forces attacking Misrata were partly based in the town of Tawergha, east of Tripoli. Following

Right: A child carries water at a camp for refugees from Tawergha in Benghazi, Libya. *REUTERS/Esam Al-Fetori.*

Gaddafi's fall, Misrata rebels have been accused of serious abuses against unarmed Tawerghans, including arbitrary arrests, beatings and torture. This forced many Tawerghans to abandon Tawergha, which is now described as a ghost town. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that Tawerghans fled mostly to the Jufra region, south of Misrata. An estimated 15,000 people were displaced, and 4,000 Tawerghans sought refuge in three refugee camps. Others have moved to Benghazi, Tripoli, or to southern Libya. Forcing all residents of Tawergha to resettle permanently as a form of collective punishment would constitute a crime against humanity for deportation or forced transfer, HRW said in March 2011.

Libyan Amazigh, also known as Berbers, are the country's largest indigenous minority and faced discrimination and harassment under Gaddafi's rule. The Amazigh language, Tamazight, was outlawed, and Gaddafi passed laws which banned the use of non-Arab Amazigh names on official documentation. Amazigh New Year celebrations were considered un-Arab by Gaddafi, and Amazighs who expressed their culture and heritage were often persecuted by the state.

Amazigh living in the Nafusa Mountains in north-west Libya were among the first to protest against Gaddafi on 18 February 2011. Protesters in the main Nafusa towns of Naluf and Yefren called for Gaddafi's downfall, and an end to the marginalization of Amazigh people, demanding improved infrastructure and political representation. Fighting in the Nafusa Mountains between rebel forces and Gaddafi forces blocked access to food, medical supplies and fuel. As fighting intensified by May, thousands of people fled across the nearby border into Tunisia – nearly 55,000 according to the UN OCHA.

Following Gaddafi's fall, Amazigh activists demanded that Amazigh identity be recognized in Libya's new constitution and for Tamazight to become an official language. Following the expulsion of Gaddafi forces from Amazigh



regions, there has been what observers have called a cultural and linguistic renaissance. Schools have begun to teach Tamazight, and a weekly Tamazight newspaper was launched. But the draft constitution outlined by the NTC only vaguely alluded to Amazigh culture and rights – Tamazight was not recognized as an official language for example – and the cabinet of Prime Minister Abdurrahim al Keib appointed in November 2011 did not include Amazigh ministers. This angered Amazigh who fought against Gaddafi forces. Amazigh demands extend beyond cultural and linguistic rights to full political participation. The overthrow of Gaddafi has allowed the formation of indigenous advocacy groups like the National Amazigh Libyan Congress.



Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Arabian authorities were deeply disturbed by the Arab uprisings of 2011, particularly the eruption of popular protests in neighbouring Bahrain and Yemen. The ongoing protests and activism by the majority Shi'a in Bahrain, who are calling for full political rights and integration, have created fear among the Saudi royal family that the Shi'a minority in the country will increase their demands for equality. This deep sense of threat was reflected in new anti-terrorism legislation passed in July 2011 that criminalized political dissent and allowed the government to jail anyone who questioned the integrity of the King for a minimum of 10 years.

Saudi Arabia's 2 million Shi'a are mostly concentrated in the kingdom's eastern province,

where most of the oil fields are located. Since Sunni Islam is the dominant religion of Saudi Arabia, and the strict Wahhabi interpretation is the official Islamic school of the state, practice of any other faith is not permitted, even in private.

The 2011 Arab uprisings encouraged a growing civil rights movement among Saudi Shi'a, and there were several protests in Shi'a towns. In February, there were peaceful marches in the Shi'a towns of Safwa and Qatif in the Eastern Province. In early March, around 24 Shi'a were detained following protests in the city of al-Qatif, denouncing the prolonged detention without trial of Shi'a prisoners. They were released shortly after without charge, reportedly only after they signed a pledge not to protest again. Clashes broke out in 'Awwamiyya, a Shi'a town, in

October; 11 security personnel were injured and three citizens, two of them women. On 25 November, four Shi'a men were killed in protests in the most serious outbreak of violence in the Kingdom in 2011 in the Qatif region.

Shi'a cleric Shaikh Tawfiq al-'Amir has been a frequent target of the Saudi authorities. In February, he was arrested for apparently calling for a constitutional monarchy and equal rights for Shi'a in his Friday sermon, but was subsequently released. In August, he was arrested again for statements made in sermons during Friday prayers, although Amnesty International said no formal charges were made.

As with all Arab Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia has for years mistreated domestic migrant workers from countries such as Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Indonesia. Migrant Care and HRW have both documented how domestic migrant workers are often deceived during the recruitment process and made to pay large fees, leaving them heavily in debt. They often work up to 18 hours a day, and some are beaten or raped by their employers. They are excluded from labour laws, and there is poor government oversight on both recruiters and employers. The consent of employers is needed before any worker can leave the country.

Syria

By the end of 2011, the Syrian revolution had entered its ninth month with no sign of the Assad government backing down on its excessive use of violence against protesters and opposition activists. The UN estimated that more than 5,000 people had been killed in the government's crackdown on protests by the end of the year. The increased militarization of the conflict, and Syria's sectarian composition have raised fears that civil war will erupt between the minority Alawites, the sect that President Bashar al-Assad's family belong to and whose members arguably dominate positions of power, and the majority Sunnis. Previous MRG reports have not considered Alawites as a threatened minority, given their elevated position in the regime apparatus, but their close identification with the Assad regime puts them in danger of revenge attacks should the government fall. While there have been worries concerning the possible vulnerable situation of Syria's Christians,

who make up between 7 and 9 per cent of the population, MRG did not receive any reports of attacks directed against that community during the year.

Kurds are the largest non-Arab ethnic minority in Syria, estimated at 1.7 million or about 10 per cent of the country's population. Since independence, the Syrian government has sought to eliminate Kurdish identity in Syria by institutionalizing discrimination and racism against them. The 1962 census stripped around 120,000 Kurds of citizenship, amid accusations they were foreigners and thus registered illegally. HRW and other NGOs estimate that there are around 300,000 stateless Kurds living in Syria today.

When the Syrian uprising began, the Assad government sought to placate minorities in Syria and in April issued a decree granting Kurds citizenship. As the citizenship process includes an interview with the state security apparatus, which entails interrogation and intimidation, few Kurds are willing to go through with it. Young Kurdish men who did apply for citizenship were asked to do military service, which might entail joining the army against the protesters.

Since the 1960s, the Syrian government has confiscated many Kurdish lands on the borders with Turkey and Iraq to create the so-called Arab Belt. Bedouin Arabs were brought in and resettled in Kurdish areas. Although Kurdish farmers were dispossessed of their lands, they refused to move and give up their houses.

Years of drought have now exacerbated the situation of Kurds in the northern Hasakeh governate, where the majority of stateless Kurds live. The region has vast arable lands and is the principal producer of cotton, oil, lentils, wheat and barley. But reduced rainfall has decreased the arable land available for cultivation and caused desertification. The result has been reduced agricultural production and a decline in the regional and national economy. The Ministry of Agriculture says that 40,000–60,000 families have migrated from Hasakeh, but Kurdish analysts say that the number is much higher; 30,000 families have left Kamishli city alone. The Syrian government has been slow to respond to the dire agricultural and economic situation of the region.

Kurdish areas initially did not witness many protests for two reasons; at the beginning of the year, the Assad government was quick to reach a rapprochement with the Democratic Union Party, the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), allowing them to set up cultural centres and schools in Kurdish regions. However, the Kurdistan National Assembly of Syria, composed of 11 parties, is aligned with the Syrian opposition.

Secondly, Kurdish parties have been wary of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), since its leader, Bourhan Ghalyoun, had stressed the 'Arab' nature of Syria, and Kurds have distrusted the SNC's relations with Turkey, fearing they will quash their demands for full civil and political rights.

But some Kurds did participate in the uprising. Since March 2011, Kurdish activists have been arrested due to their participation in the opposition local coordination committees. Leading Kurdish activist Mashaal Tammu was killed on 7 October, when armed men forced him out of a house during a meeting with activists and shot him dead. His funeral, which turned into the biggest demonstration in the Kurdish areas since the uprising began, was attended by 50,000 people. State security forces fired on protesters, killing six and wounding several others.

Amid the violence, many Iraqi refugees in Syria no longer felt safe, fearing the very sectarian violence they had escaped from at home; but many were also uncertain about returning to Iraq where instability and violence continues. There are approximately 1 million Iraqi refugees in Syria – over 100,000 of them are registered with the UNHCR.

In June 2011, clashes broke out in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus between residents and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, backed by the Assad regime. Approximately 20 people died, according to Palestinian sources.

In August 2011, UNRWA reported that over 5,000 Palestinian refugees had fled a camp in Lattakia after the Syrian army attacked the area. At least 4 people died with 20 injured. UNRWA said that some refugees had been told by the Syrian authorities to leave. The situation at the

camp was described as alarming. According to UNRWA, more than 486,000 Palestinian refugees live in nine official and three unofficial camps across Syria. Although Palestinian refugees enjoy many of the rights of Syrian citizens, UNRWA reported that they lag behind in key areas, such as infant mortality and school enrolment. ■