

Journalists were abducted and executed by IS in areas under their control. In October, Ra'ad Mohammed Al-'Azawi, cameraman for Sama Salah al-Din TV Channel, was beheaded in Samarra, after a month in captivity, reportedly for refusing to co-operate with IS.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

Almost 2 million people were forced from their homes due to the fighting in the Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninevah and Salah al-Din provinces, with half of them fleeing to Iraq's Kurdistan Region, which by November was also hosting some 225,000 refugees from Syria. Thousands of Iraqi refugees returned to Iraq from Syria and elsewhere but could not return to their homes, swelling the number of internally displaced persons.

The unprecedented scale of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq led the UN to categorize it at the highest level of emergency and advised governments to afford international protection to Iraqi asylum-seekers and safeguard them from forcible return.

KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

Although Kurdish Peshmerga forces battled against IS in several areas of northern Iraq, the three provinces that comprise the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region remained largely immune from the violence engulfing much of the rest of Iraq until November, when a car bomb exploded outside an Erbil governorate building killing at least four and injuring 22 others.

The KRG authorities continued to target those who openly criticized official corruption or expressed dissent. The executive authorities continued to interfere in the judiciary, influencing trials. Incidents of torture and other ill-treatment continued to be reported. People arrested on terrorism charges were held incommunicado without access to family or lawyers for prolonged periods.

KRG authorities continued to detain journalist Niaz Aziz Saleh, held since January 2012 for allegedly disclosing details of election rigging, without charge or trial. General Security (Asayish Gishti) in Erbil reportedly refused repeatedly to take him to court to stand trial.

DEATH PENALTY

Courts continued to impose death sentences for a range of crimes. Most of the defendants had been convicted on terrorism-related charges, often after unfair trials. In April, the Justice Ministry said 600 prisoners were on death row at al-Nassiriya Prison alone, where new execution facilities were installed. In August, the Justice Minister said that a total of 1,724 prisoners were awaiting execution, including some whose sentences had still to be finally confirmed.

The authorities continued to carry out large numbers of executions, including multiple executions. On 21 January, the authorities executed 26 prisoners less than a week after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the Iraqi authorities to impose a moratorium on executions. Rebuffing this call during a joint press conference with Ban Ki-moon, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said that his government did "not believe that the rights of someone who kills people must be respected".

IRELAND

Republic of Ireland

Head of state: **Michael D. Higgins**

Head of government: **Enda Kenny**

Abortion legislation and guidance failed to comply with Ireland's human rights obligations. Transgender individuals faced barriers to legal gender recognition. Responses to victims of past institutional

abuse fell below adequate standards of truth, justice and reparations.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act (the Act) was enacted in 2013 to respond to the 2010 European Court of Human Rights decision in *A, B and C v. Ireland*, with the stated aim of ensuring pregnant women's or girls' access to abortion when there is a "real and substantial risk" to their life as permitted under the Constitution. Neither the Act nor related guidance published in September 2014 provided sufficient assistance to medical professionals in assessing when a pregnancy posed such a risk to life, or adequately protected the rights of the pregnant woman or girl. In December, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers closed its examination of the implementation of the *A, B and C v. Ireland* decision.¹

The Act recriminalized abortion in all other circumstances, with a potential penalty of 14 years' imprisonment.

In July, the UN Human Rights Committee criticized the criminalization of abortion, and the Act's requirements of excessive scrutiny of pregnant and suicidal women or girls which could lead to further mental distress. The Committee called on Ireland to revise its laws, including its Constitution, to provide for access to abortion in cases of rape, incest, serious risks to the health of the woman or girl, and fatal foetal impairment.

DISCRIMINATION

Transgender people

In December the government published a bill proposing legislative provision for legal gender recognition.² The bill's proposals fell short of human rights standards, including by requiring transgender individuals to dissolve their marriages or civil partnerships before applying for legal gender recognition.³

People with disabilities

Independent registration and inspections of residential care centres for people with disabilities began in November 2013. In

December 2014, a current affairs television programme revealed secretly recorded evidence of abusive treatment, and denial of basic rights and autonomy, of three people in one centre, raising wider concerns about other centres.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

There were continuing delays in the determination of individuals' asylum or other protection needs, with many people remaining for years in "direct provision" accommodation unsuitable for long-stay residence, especially for families, children and victims of torture.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In February 2013, the government published a report purporting to clarify the state's interaction with the religious-run "Magdalene Laundries". The report and the ex gratia compensation scheme announced thereafter fell below adequate standards of truth, justice and reparations.⁴

In June, following international outcry at allegations of past abuses of women and children in so-called "mother and baby homes", operated by religious orders with state funding between the 1920s and 1990s, the government committed to establishing an independent Commission of Investigation.⁵

LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL OR INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In July legislation was enacted creating the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission as the new National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), the result of a merger between the Irish Human Rights Commission (the former NHRI) and Ireland's equality body. The legislation contained two definitions of human rights, limiting the new NHRI's enforcement and powers to a narrow definition which excluded the majority of economic, social and cultural rights.

The government-appointed Constitutional Convention recommended several

amendments to the Constitution, including providing for equal access to civil marriage for same-sex couples and removing the offence of blasphemy; the government accepted both recommendations and committed to putting them to referendum in 2015. In February, the Convention recommended constitutional incorporation of economic, social and cultural rights.

Ireland ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure in September.

In December, the government requested that the European Court of Human Rights review its 1978 judgment in *Ireland v. United Kingdom*, a landmark case concerning the torture and ill-treatment of 14 Irish nationals held by UK authorities under internment powers in Northern Ireland during 1971-72 (see UK entry).⁶

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

State of Israel

Head of state: **Reuven Rivlin** (replaced **Shimon Peres** in July)

Head of government: **Benjamin Netanyahu**

Israeli forces committed war crimes and human rights violations during a 50-day military offensive in the Gaza Strip that killed over 1,500 civilians, including 539 children, wounded thousands more civilians, and caused massive civilian displacement and destruction of property and vital services. Israel maintained its air, sea and land blockade of Gaza, imposing collective punishment on its approximately 1.8 million inhabitants and stoking the humanitarian crisis. In the West Bank, Israeli forces carried out unlawful killings of Palestinian protesters, including children, and maintained an array of oppressive restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement while continuing to promote illegal settlements and allow Israeli settlers to attack Palestinians and destroy their property with near total impunity. Israeli forces detained thousands of Palestinians, some of whom reported being tortured, and held around 500 administrative detainees without trial. Within Israel, the authorities continued to demolish homes of Palestinian Bedouin in "unrecognized villages" in the Negev/Naqab region and commit forcible evictions. They also detained and summarily expelled thousands of foreign migrants, including asylum-seekers, and imprisoned Israeli conscientious objectors.

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