



Rising Human Rights Challenges in the Gulf Region and Beyond



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GULF CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS 2014



Table of Contents

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
II. COUNTRY REPORTS.....	6
BAHRAIN	6
IRAN	9
IRAQ	10
KUWAIT	11
OMAN.....	12
QATAR	14
SAUDI ARABIA	15
SYRIA	18
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE).....	20
YEMEN.....	22
III. CONCLUSION.....	24

On the cover: Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and Nabeel Rajab, GCHR’s founders, to whom this report is dedicated.



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This is the second annual report of the Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR). GCHR documents the human rights environment for human rights defenders working in the six Gulf Cooperation Council member states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), as well as Iran, Iraq, Yemen and Syria. Syria has been included, not because it is typically considered a Gulf country, but because GCHR believes it is essential to document the ongoing large scale human rights atrocities occurring in a country that is close to the Gulf region and because the Syrian conflict has significant regional implications.
2. During 2013, GCHR documented human rights violations throughout the Gulf region, undertook observation missions, and trained nearly 150 human rights defenders, including on digital security, security generally, the use of UN mechanisms, the use of social media to promote human rights, transitional justice, stress management and well-being, and mechanisms for investigating and documenting human rights violations. In cooperation with its international partners, GCHR also secured various grants for human rights defenders and their organizations. In addition, GCHR undertook human rights missions to UAE, Yemen, Oman and Kuwait.
3. GCHR believes that the situation for human rights defenders is worsening in the Gulf region. Across the region, those who lobby for the promotion and protection of human rights, document rights violations, express dissenting views, align with the political opposition or, in some cases, simply deliver humanitarian aid have been painted as threats to state security and consequently punished. Indeed, in almost every country reported on, authoritarian regimes are severely restricting the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association in an effort to silence dissent. For example, governments are restricting freedom of expression on the Internet through new laws that criminalize criticism online. Governments are meeting peaceful protestors with violence. Would-be reformers have been imprisoned. Defenders who seek to cooperate with international human rights bodies have faced reprisals both at home and abroad. Human rights defenders have been

subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, ill-treatment at times amounting to torture, unfair trials and disproportionate prison sentences. The report concludes that greater international attention is necessary to ensure the protection of those who risk their lives in both the exercise and promotion of human rights throughout the Gulf. Note that the scale of abuses in certain countries required more attention than others.

4. In March 2013, the UN Human Rights Council passed its first ever resolution affirming the specific rights of human rights defenders. This recognition is important because GCHR has documented an increase in both the targeting of human rights defenders and in the restrictions placed on their activities throughout the year in the Gulf Region.
5. GCHR's findings regarding the countries within its mandate are summarized below:

BAHRAIN

6. In Bahrain, authorities continued their harsh crackdown on protesters, civil society leaders, human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists, which began at the time of massive pro-democracy protests starting in February 2011. Despite numerous representations made to the international community, most notably during its Universal Periodic Review in 2012, the Bahraini government has thus far failed to implement the key recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which released a report regarding human rights abuses in November 2011 that was endorsed by Bahrain's King. Impunity continues for those responsible for the torture and deaths of protesters in 2011 and thereafter. The harassment of human rights activists and lawyers has continued through arbitrary arrests, detention, ill-treatment and torture in detention. Numerous human rights defenders are behind bars on trumped up charges, having faced or facing judicial proceedings that do not meet international fair-trial standards. Disproportionate force was used to disperse and deter peaceful protesters on numerous occasions in 2013, often leading to significant injuries.

IRAN

7. 2013 saw the election of Hassan Rouhani in Iran which gave rise to some hope for better human rights protections in the country, given Rouhani's promise to bring about a "Rights

Charter”. Prior to the election, however, many opposition voices were silenced, with 672 of 680 registered candidates disqualified. Prominent dissidents and political opposition leaders, including Mir-Hossain Mousavi, were unable to participate in the election due to their ongoing detention. The UN Special Rapporteur for Iran reported on the continuing harassment, arrests without warrant, detention and ill-treatment of human rights defenders in 2013. In line with a growing trend across the Gulf region, vaguely defined national security crimes were used to target human rights defenders, many of whom have reported ill-treatment and torture in prison. Concerns over freedom of expression remain, with many journalists and bloggers harassed and detained for criticizing authorities.

IRAQ

8. Amid the worsening security situation in Iraq, with daily attacks on civilians by insurgents, the Iraqi government and non-state actors continue to violate fundamental rights of Iraqi citizens including the rights to life, freedom of expression and freedom of association. During 2013, GCHR documented a clear targeting of journalists and human rights defenders by both state and non-state actors, in particular where they exposed corruption or demanded reform. Peaceful protestors were subject to disproportionate force, including the killing of 51 protestors in April, an atrocity which is yet to be adequately investigated.

KUWAIT

9. Restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly were a key feature of the human rights situation in Kuwait in 2013. GCHR documented excessively violent responses to demonstrations, including the use of smoke and tear gas to disperse crowds. Bloggers and other online activists faced harassment, detention, travel bans, and disproportionate sentences for, *inter alia*, charges of ‘insulting the Emir’ when advocating for reform.

OMAN

10. Human rights defenders continue to be harassed and targeted in Oman for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Numerous political prisoners remain behind bars, many of whom were arrested following widespread protests in 2011 and faced charges that included “defaming the Sultan”, “illegal gathering,” and violations of cybercrimes laws. Protests were forcibly dispersed in 2013 and protestors arrested and

detained. Activists were subjected to intimidation and reformists were targeted with criminal prosecutions, arbitrary arrest and detention. In a report published in January 2014, GCHR documented systematic torture in secret detention centres, including mock executions, beatings, hooding, solitary confinement, abuse and humiliation.

QATAR

11. Restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression remain of concern in Qatar. GCHR documented harassment of human rights defenders, but the criminalization of dissent, the lack of independent media, and the paucity of authorized human rights NGOs continues to make it difficult to access information on the human rights situation in Qatar. Article 134 of the penal code remains in effect, which criminalizes criticism of the Emir or Vice-Emir. In May, the Cabinet approved a draft cyber crime law. This follows the introduction of a draft media law in 2012 that sought to impose prohibitive financial sanctions on journalists if they criticized any Gulf Cooperation Council state. Neither law has yet been enacted, but both exemplify a worrying trend, both within Qatar and in the wider region, of governments seeking to curb criticism, dissent and calls for reform through disproportionate restrictions on the right to freedom of expression.

SAUDI ARABIA

12. Human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia face a myriad of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, travel bans, judicial harassment, and unfair trials. So-called counter-terrorism measures are being increasingly used as a tool to arrest human rights defenders. Article VI of the Anti-Cyber Crimes Act of 2007, for example, is being used to impose long periods of imprisonment on human rights defenders. That article relates to websites of 'terrorist organizations' and forbids unlawful access to websites or information systems with 'the intention of obtaining data jeopardizing the internal or external security of the State or its economy'. Authorities repeatedly refused to register human rights organizations and subsequently targeted those that applied for legal recognition. Saudi Arabia has yet to sign and ratify core UN human rights treaties and agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and continues to refuse to accept outstanding requests from seven UN Special Rapporteurs to visit the country.



SYRIA

13. The capacity of human rights defenders to carry out their work within conflict zones and elsewhere in Syria was severely restricted in 2013. Civil society activists, humanitarian aid workers, writers, journalists, lawyers and those who sought to document human rights violations were deliberately targeted by all parties to the conflict. Reports of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and systematic torture and other ill-treatment at the hands of both government security forces and armed opposition groups were received by GCHR throughout 2013. Tens of thousands of civilians, including peaceful protestors, civil society and political activists, aid workers, journalists, physicians and lawyers were detained in dire conditions. Reports indicate that thousands of detainees died in 2013 as a result of torture, neglect and, in some cases, starvation.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

14. The human rights landscape in the UAE in 2013 was dominated by the highly criticized trial of 94 activists who came to be known as the UAE 94, which led to 69 convictions in July and sentences of up to 15 years. GCHR, along with a coalition of NGOs, published two reports documenting the human rights violations associated with the trial, including credible allegations of torture and clear violations of due process rights. This trial was emblematic of the wider human rights situation in UAE in 2013, which saw the continuation of severe restrictions on freedom of expression, unfair trial standards and ill-treatment in detention. Human rights defenders, including lawyers, and their families continue to be targeted by authorities through harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and detention.

YEMEN

15. Yemen remains an extremely dangerous place for human rights defenders, who regularly face attacks, intimidation, and harassment from both state and non-state actors. In June, GCHR published a report on Yemen following a mission that had been conducted in April. The report concluded that the transitional period in Yemen is proving to be more dangerous for human rights defenders than under the previous regime. Previously, it was clear that threats emanated from a corrupt and violent government. Now, those who report human rights violations and campaign for justice face increasingly unpredictable and intensifying attacks including assassinations and beatings, widescale online campaigns of abuse and

intimidation, and the use of court processes to repress legitimate journalism. The transitional government has failed to prevent, investigate or punish these attacks.

II. COUNTRY REPORTS

BAHRAIN

16. The authorities in Bahrain continued their harsh crackdown on protesters, civil society leaders, human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists in 2013, evident since the protests began in February 2011. Despite numerous undertakings given to the international community, including during its Universal Periodic Review in 2012, the Bahraini government failed to implement the key recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which issued a report in November 2011 endorsed by the King. Impunity continues for those responsible for the torture and deaths of protesters in 2011. The harassment of human rights activists and lawyers through arbitrary arrests, detention and systematic ill-treatment and torture in detention remained a key feature of the Bahraini human rights landscape. Numerous human rights defenders are behind bars on trumped up charges, having faced or facing judicial proceedings that do not meet international standards of fair trial.
17. On 7 January 2013, Bahrain's highest court upheld convictions against 13 leading activists for their role in anti-government demonstrations in 2011. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, (OHCHR), expressed concerns about the lack of fairness and due process afforded to the defendants. The Court ruling came more than a year after the government's pledge to implement the recommendations of the BICI, which called on authorities to "commute the sentences of all persons charged with offences involving political expression not consisting of advocacy of violence" and to overturn convictions imposed after grossly unfair trials. GCHR received reports that the prisoners were subjected to ill-treatment and torture while in detention.
18. In April, the Bahraini authorities indefinitely postponed, for the second time, the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez. In May, GCHR, with the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, (BCHR), initiated a joint appeal to Juan Mendez, Margaret Sekaggya and Frank La Rue, respectively UN Special Rapporteurs on torture, on the situation of human rights defenders, and on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The appeal was signed by over 50 NGOs worldwide and called for an investigation into torture in Bahraini prisons. Bahrain ratified the 1984 Convention Against Torture (CAT) in 1998 and is thus required under international law not only to take effective measures to prevent torture but also to investigate

credible allegations of torture. GCHR documented numerous claims of ill-treatment and torture in detention throughout 2013, none of which were adequately investigated by the authorities.

19. A clear example of the culture of impunity evident in Bahrain is the case of human rights defender and journalist Nazeeha Saeed, Bahrain correspondent for France 24 and Radio Monte Carlo Doualiya. According to Saeed, she was tortured at Riffa police station in 2011. She was “blindfolded, kicked, punched, and slapped. Her hair was pulled, she was whipped with plastic tubing, had a shoe forced into her mouth and her head dunked into a toilet.” Saeed obtained three independent medical reports which confirmed that she was subjected to torture, two of which were issued by doctors working for the Ministry of the Interior. Despite the clear evidence of torture and the fact that she identified five of her alleged torturers, only one of them, policewoman Sarah Al-Moosa, was taken to court by the Public Prosecution Office. Al-Moosa was acquitted of all charges on 22 October 2012 and her acquittal upheld on 23 June 2013. No one has thus been held accountable for the torture of Nazeeha Saeed.
20. In October, three medics, arrested during the 2011 protests, sent a letter from Jaw prison, seen by GCHR, outlining their poor conditions of detention, including ill-treatment, overcrowding, and poor hygiene and health standards. They announced their intention to set up an independent body of Medics for Human Rights. The letter was signed by Ibrahim Al-Demistani, a nurse and secretary general of the Bahrain Nursing Society, Hasaan Matoq, an emergency department nurse at the Salmaniya Medical Complex and Dr Ali Al-Ekri, a pediatric orthopedic surgeon.
21. In November, the Bahraini authorities rejected a request by GCHR, along with a coalition of international NGOs, to observe a hearing in the case of Naji Fateel, co-founder of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR) and a prominent blogger. Naji Fateel was arrested without warrant on 2 May 2013 and held incommunicado for three days, during which time he was allegedly tortured at the Criminal Investigation Directorate and taken to the Ministry of Interior hospital twice for treatment. At his first Court hearing, Fateel spoke about the torture he had been subjected to and took his shirt off to show the marks on his back. He alleged that he was subjected to electrical shocks to his genitals, to his left foot and to his back, in addition to simulated drowning, severe beatings, hanging by his hands from the ceiling, sexual harassment and threats of rape and sleep deprivation. There has been no investigation into these allegations and Fateel was prevented from attending his next Court hearing, in an attempt to silence him, GCHR believes. Fateel was sentenced on 29 September 2013 to 15 years in prison for “the establishment of a group for the purpose of disabling the constitution” under Article 6 of the Terrorism Act. This followed a six-month sentence imposed in May on charges of “attending illegal gatherings.”
22. GCHR is particularly concerned at the targeting of human rights defenders in Bahrain who cooperate with the UN system. In October, human rights defender, co-founder and President of the BYSHR,

Mohamed Al-Maskati, was summoned to Al-Khamis Police Station where he was interrogated on charges of “inciting hatred against the regime.” Al-Maskati had been actively cooperating with the OHCHR, and had visited the relevant UN Special Rapporteurs in August 2013. Human rights defender Hussain Jawad, the Chairman of the European-Bahraini Organization for Human Rights (EBOHR), was arrested, detained for 15 days and charged with “inciting hatred of the regime” based on a speech he gave in Manama in November. He was known to have been in communication with the OHCHR. Jawad was also one of 18 human rights defenders who were named with photographs in a pro-government newspaper, *Akhbar Alkhaleej*, in late November, accused of human rights violations and “terrorist” activities in a blatant attempt to tarnish their names and reputations.

23. Protests in Bahrain continue to be restricted and forcibly dispersed. On 14 August 2013, the ‘Tamarrod’ movement organized peaceful protests around the country, with many shops and businesses closing for the day. These protests were met with an aggressive crackdown by the authorities and the arrest of several human rights defenders. The police closed off a number of streets with razor wire and used tear gas to disperse those who gathered to protest. Dozens were arrested without warrants prior to the protests and at least 13 arrests were made on the day. Many of those arrested reported that they were severely beaten during the arrests. On 9 August 2013, the Acting President of BCHR and Co-Director of GCHR, Maryam Al-Khawaja, was informed she was not allowed to board a flight to Bahrain from Copenhagen as the Bahraini authorities had banned her from entering the country. Al-Khawaja had publicly announced that she intended to observe the protests on 14 August.
24. In November, GCHR, along with BCHR, Front Line Defenders, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) called on the Bahraini government to release imprisoned human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, in accordance with article 349 of the Bahraini Criminal Procedure Code, on the basis that he had completed two thirds of his sentence. Rajab, who is President of BCHR and Secretary-General of GCHR, has been unfairly imprisoned since 9 July 2012 for his leadership in advocating for the promotion and protection of human rights in Bahrain. Rajab is also on the MENA Advisory Board of Human Rights Watch and is a Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). He remains behind bars.
25. Further examples of the ongoing harassment of human rights defenders in Bahrain include the following. On 31 July 2013, online human rights activist Mohamed Hassan was arrested and held incommunicado in detention for a week. His lawyer Abdul Aziz Moussa, was later arrested when he publicly reported that there were marks on his clients’ arms from having been tortured in detention. On 6 September 2013, 20-year-old Hussain Ali Abdul Nabi, a member of the Documentation Team of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, was arrested and detained for 45 days. A prominent

Bahraini blogger, Ali Abdulemam, owner of one of the most popular websites in Bahrain bahrainonline.org, on which the first calls for the 14 February 2011 protests were made, fled into exile from Bahrain after over two years in hiding after having been sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison for his role in the protests.

IRAN

26. 2013 saw the election of Hassan Rouhani in Iran which gave rise to some hope for more emphasis on human rights in the country, given his promise to bring about a “Rights Charter”. Prior to the election, however, many opposition voices were silenced with 672 of 680 registered candidates disqualified, according to Human Rights Watch. Prominent dissidents and political opposition leaders, including Mir-Hossain Mousavi, were unable to participate in the election due to their detention. The UN Special Rapporteur for Iran reported on the continuing harassment, arrest without warrant, detention and ill-treatment of human rights defenders in Iran. In line with a growing trend across the Gulf region, vaguely defined national security crimes were used to target human rights defenders, many of whom have reported ill-treatment and torture in prison.
27. Iran continues to place restrictions on the right to freedom of expression. Journalists and bloggers who criticize the authorities have been harassed and detained. GCHR received reports that online activists have been tortured with the intention of gaining forced confessions and passwords to allow access to their online accounts. Certain Internet sites remain blocked by the authorities. An investigation into the death of blogger, Sattar Beheshti, called for by, among others, the UN Special Rapporteurs on Iran; on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression has yet to bear fruit. Beheshti was reportedly arrested by the Iranian Cyber Police in October 2012 on charges of “actions against National Security on social networks and Facebook”. He died in state custody seven days later.
28. A number of political prisoners and prominent human rights defenders were released in September 2013, though many were released because their jail terms had ended or were coming to an end. GCHR welcomed the news that human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, winner of the European Parliament Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2012, had been released, having been imprisoned since September 2010 on charges of “spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security.” The GCHR believes that Sotoudeh was targeted and imprisoned solely due to her human rights work, including representing other human rights defenders following the disputed Iranian elections in 2009 and working with young prisoners sentenced to death. Sotoudeh had been sentenced to 11 years in prison, later reduced to six, of which she served three. She was barred from practicing law for ten years and a travel ban had been imposed on both her and her daughter. GCHR

hopes that Sotoudeh will be allowed to return to her legal practice and will not face restrictions on travel in the future, though this was not made clear by the Court.

29. Other prominent human rights defenders remain in prison in Iran, with reports of ill-treatment, including denial of adequate medical care. In November, GCHR called on the Iranian authorities to release and ensure the physical and mental integrity of human rights defender and lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani. Sentenced to 18 years in prison in March 2012, a term later reduced to 13 years, Soltani began a hunger strike in November 2013 to protest against the lack of proper medical care for himself and other prisoners of conscious held in Tehran's Evin prison. Three others joined Soltani in the hunger strike. Soltani is a prominent human rights lawyer and co-founder and spokesman for the Human Rights Defenders Centre (HRDC). His charges were described as "being awarded the 2009 Nuremberg International Human Rights Award," "being interviewed by the media about his clients' cases," and "co-founding the Human Rights Defenders' Centre."

IRAQ

30. Amid the worsening security situation in Iraq, the Iraqi government and non-state actors continue to violate fundamental rights of Iraqi citizens including the right to life, the right to protest, freedom of expression and freedom of association. During 2013, GCHR documented a clear targeting of journalists and human rights defenders by both state and non-state actors, in particular where they exposed corruption or demanded reform. Peaceful protestors were subject to disproportionate force, including the killing of 51 protestors in April, an atrocity which is yet to be adequately investigated.
31. Journalists were targeted solely for their peaceful human rights activities, including regular harassment, arrest, detention, and prosecution, and, in the worst cases, assassinated in broad daylight. In fact, Iraq was named the "worst nation" by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in its 2013 Impunity Index of unsolved murders of journalists. In April, human rights defender Jalal Thyab Al-Jawhar, President of the Liberty Supporters Association (LSA), was killed near the Association's headquarters in the centre of Al-Zubair City. Al-Jawhar had co-founded LSA in 2009, an organization that aims to defend the rights of Iraq's over one million black citizens.
32. In June, the body of journalist and active member of the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate Zamil Ghanam Al-Zoba'ie was found in Baghdad. No one was held accountable for his death. In October, journalist and human rights defender Saad Zaghoul, senior member of the Iraqi Association for Defending the Rights of Journalists, was murdered in the city of Mosul. He worked at several independent local newspapers in Mosul and had focused his writing on corruption, human rights and law reform. On 7 December 2013, prominent human rights defender and campaigner Kawa Kermyani, aged 32, was killed in Kelar by two unidentified gunmen. Kawa Kermyani worked as chief editor of the local Kurdish

magazine *Royal*, was a correspondent for the weekly magazine *Awene* and had written several articles about corruption in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. There have been no investigations into these killings, which were reported as having been carried out by “unknown” persons.

33. The authorities in Iraq imposed severe limitations on the right to freedom of assembly during 2013, including by prohibiting protests and through the use of disproportionate force to disperse gatherings. Security forces attacked a demonstration in Hawija in April 2013. According to Human Rights Watch, 51 protesters were killed without adequate investigation. In August, thousands of protestors, calling for social justice and an end to corruption, took to the streets in Baghdad and in many provinces throughout the country. Several groups were refused permission to participate in the protests. A number of prominent human rights defenders were harassed by security forces, including during night time raids on their homes, during which they were warned not to take part in the demonstrations. In the city of Nasiriyah, despite the fact that an official license had been granted for the demonstration, riot police used stun grenades and water cannons to disperse protestors, resulting in some significant injuries. The police later arrested four wounded protestors while they were receiving treatment in hospital.

KUWAIT

34. GCHR remains concerned at reprisals against human rights defenders in Kuwait, including arrests, detentions and prosecutions of those who exercise their right to freedom of expression, in particular online. Opposition leaders were arrested and detained and government critics targeted during 2013. Excessively violent responses to demonstrations were also a key feature of the human rights situation in Kuwait in 2013, with protestors, at times, suffering serious injuries.
35. Criticism of the government on social media including on Twitter, Facebook and personal blogs was met with arrest and prosecution, often under article 25 of Kuwait’s penal code, which prescribes a prison sentence of up to five years for anyone who publicly “objects to the rights and authorities of the Emir or faults him.” Critics were also charged with libel. On 27 February 2013, security forces in Kuwait arrested publisher and managing editor of online newspaper, *Alaan*, Zayed Al-Zaid, upon arrival at Kuwait International Airport from Washington. Al-Zaid had been sentenced to one month in prison in absentia, in a case filed against him by former Minister of Oil Abdulmohsen Al-Madaj. Al-Zaid was accused of libel and slander for publishing an article calling for an end to government corruption.
36. In April, human rights defender Abdulla Fairouz was detained on charges of insulting the judiciary on social media. Fairouz is Secretary General of the Kuwaiti Movement for Justice and Development (NEBRAS) and a member of the Bedouin Committee at the Kuwait Society for Human Rights. His

arrest and subsequent detention were reportedly based on blog posts and Twitter updates criticizing a judge for handing down sentences against defendants who had not been notified of the relevant hearings. He had also publicly advocated for the introduction of a law to allow for complaints to be made against the judiciary. On 29 May 2013, the Kuwaiti Criminal Court sentenced blogger Sara Al Driss to 20 months in jail on the basis of four posts she made on her personal Twitter account that were said to have undermined the status of the Emir and tarnished the authority of the Royal Family.

37. 2013 saw an obvious crackdown on protests by the Kuwaiti authorities. In March, human rights defender Mohammed Al-Fadhli was charged with “resisting police arrest” and sentenced to a one-month suspended sentence, following his participation in a protest in July 2012 demanding equal rights for the Bedoon community, who continue to be denied their rights as equal citizens in Kuwait. In April, opposition leader Musallam Al-Barrak was arrested, detained and sentenced to five years in prison for insulting the Emir and challenging his power. According to reports, during his arrest, police violently raided Al-Barrak’s home and tied up and physically assaulted his brother. A spontaneous demonstration to protest against his arrest was met with excessive force, including the use of smoke and tear gas. Sulaiman Binjassim, a member of the National Committee to Monitor Violations, (NCV), an organization that documents violations of freedom of expression in Kuwait, who was monitoring the protest, was assaulted, arrested and interrogated without a lawyer.
38. In September, a travel ban was imposed on human rights defender and member of the NCV Rana Al-Saadoun. In November, Al-Saadoun, together with two other members of the NCV, Abdullah Al-Rafdi and Munther Al-Habeeb, appeared before the Kuwaiti Criminal Court, accused of “Insulting the head of State (the Emir), challenging the authority of the prince, and repeating a speech in a public place.” The charges related to a speech delivered by a leader of the opposition, Musallam Al-Barrak, on 15 October 2012 during a protest against corruption. Al-Rafdi and Al-Habeeb both publicly re-read the speech on 16 April 2013 and Rana Al-Saadoun had published the speech on YouTube on 27 April 2013.

OMAN

39. Human rights defenders continue to be harassed and targeted in Oman for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Numerous political prisoners remain behind bars, many of whom were arrested following widespread protests in 2011 and who faced charges including “defaming the Sultan”, “illegal gathering” and violations of cybercrimes laws. Protests were forcibly dispersed in 2013 and protestors arrested and detained. Activists were subjected to continuous intimidation including regular arbitrary arrest and detention without charge, ill-treatment and torture in detention and criminal trials that did not meet international standards of fair trial. GCHR

documented systematic torture in secret detention centers, including mock execution, beating, hooding, solitary confinement, abuse and humiliation.

40. Many human rights defenders who were targeted throughout 2013 had participated in the 2011 protests and continued to be active in calling for reforms in Oman, both online and on the streets. Defenders were often denied access to lawyers while they were in pre-charge detention, charged in the latter half of their detention and given access to legal advice only at their first court appearance. Courts refused to hear complaints of torture and ill-treatment or to order investigations into reports of torture.
41. Examples of human rights defenders who have been targeted include the following. Saeed Jadad, a long-standing and prominent human rights defender, was held incommunicado for eight days by the security services in January and subjected to a regime of hooding, cuffing and interrogation. His interrogators referred to his calls for reform at rallies in 2011 and threatened him saying: “if you stop you can have a normal life, if not you should worry about your children’s future.”
42. Human rights activist and blogger Khalfan Al-Badwawi, an engineer by training, has been harassed for the past two years because of his support for calls for reform. In March 2013, Al-Badwawi was arbitrarily detained for the third time. His car was forced to a halt by four unmarked vehicles on a road in the capital, Muscat. He was surrounded and dragged from the car. He was then hooded and taken to a detention centre and held incommunicado in solitary confinement for five days before being released without charge. On 7 November 2013, Al-Badwawi was arbitrarily arrested for the fourth time and held incommunicado overnight at an undisclosed location. Al-Badwawi was forced to leave Oman in December 2013, as a result of sustained harassment.
43. Human rights defender Dr Salih Al-Azri, a doctor and director of a microbiology program in the Omani Health service, employed by the Ministry of Health, was arrested and detained incommunicado for six days in April 2013. Dr Al-Azri is an active human rights defender and blogger who supported the protests in 2011 and has been at the forefront of the promotion of freedom of expression in Oman. During his detention, he was handcuffed, hooded and kept in solitary confinement with loud music and strong light for 24 hours a day. His interrogators threatened that unless he signed a confession they would say that he was a member of Al-Qaeda. He told GCHR: “They were trying to frame me. They showed me Facebook posts I hadn’t written criticizing the Sultan. I went on hunger strike the whole time I was there. I collapsed and was taken to hospital. I refused IV fluids. I knew my rights. What is happening in Oman is against human rights.”
44. The Sultan issued a pardon in July 2013 to 14 citizens convicted in relation to their participation in a demonstration in 2011, demanding political reforms. The pardon created a short-lived optimistic atmosphere in Oman for human rights defenders but the pattern of harassment has continued. The

Omani Intelligence Agency arrested human rights defender and blogger Sultan Al-Sa'adi immediately following the pardon. Soon afterwards, Internal Security Agents arbitrarily arrested two other activists, Ibrahim Al-Hadabi and Rashid Al-Miqbali, following a raid on their homes by security forces. Ibrahim Al-Hadabi was released after one day in detention while Rashid Al-Miqbali was detained for over 30 days.

45. On 18 July 2013, prominent human rights defender Saed Jadad was summoned to appear before the public prosecutor's office in Muscat, on charges of undermining the reputation of the state. Jadad was instrumental in organizing and leading pro-reform protests in Dhofar in 2011. He is an active blogger and has signed several petitions calling for reform in Oman. Earlier in July, Jadad was arrested at his family farm in Salalah and detained for two days. He was charged with resisting the authorities. He was also arrested in January and held in solitary confinement for eight days, demonstrating a clear pattern of ongoing harassment.
46. Protests against the government continued to be aggressively repressed. Police used tear gas to disperse demonstrations in Liwa, North West Oman, that were held to protest against the environmental degradation and significant health problems caused by oil refineries, aluminum smelting and mining operations located in close proximity to the town. Several people were injured, including elected Shura Council member, Talib Al-Maamari, who had expressed support for the protestors and had spoken at large gatherings. He is now serving a four-year sentence for defaming the country, banditry and illegal gathering. Saqr Al-Bulushi, an elected member of the Municipal council who also supported the campaign, was similarly imprisoned for banditry and illegal gathering, in clear violation of his rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

QATAR

47. Restrictions on freedom of assembly and freedom of expression remain of concern in Qatar. GCHR documented some harassment of human rights defenders but the criminalization of dissent, the lack of independent media and the paucity of authorized human rights NGOs continues to make it difficult to access information on the human rights situation in Qatar. Article 134 of the penal code remains in place which criminalizes criticism of the Emir or Vice-Emir.
48. In May, the Cabinet approved a draft cyber crime law. According to Human Rights Watch, state media announced that the law will "punish[...] anyone who infringes on the social principles or values or otherwise publishes news, photos, audio or visual recordings related to the sanctity of the private and familial life of persons, even if they were true; or infringes on others by libel or slander via the Internet or other information technology means." This follows the draft media law of 2012 that sought to impose prohibitive financial sanctions on journalists if they criticized any Gulf Cooperation

Council state. Neither law has yet been enacted but both exemplify a worrying trend, both within Qatar and in the wider region, of governments seeking to curb criticism, dissent and calls for reform by imposing restrictive domestic laws that do not comply with their international human rights obligations.

49. On 28 January 2013, 150 activists including Mohammed Issa Al-Baker and Mansoor Rashed Al-Matroushi submitted a letter to the Interior Ministry seeking permission to hold a peaceful demonstration in front of the French embassy to protest against French military intervention in Mali. When their request was refused, the activists submitted a letter to the French embassy on 6 February 2013. From that date onwards, Mohammed Issa Al-Baker, a member of the Board of Directors of the Adel Organization for Human Rights, which is registered in Geneva, and Mansoor Al-Matroushi, a volunteer with the same organization, began receiving phone calls asking for information about their human rights activities. This was followed with a request to report to state authorities for questioning. They refused to do so, on the basis that it was not required under law and no arrest warrant or formal summons had been issued. They were both detained in March 2013 and both went on hunger strike in April 2013 to protest against their detention. Both were released without charge following 28 days of detention and informed that a travel ban had been imposed on them. No reasons were given for the travel ban.
50. In a further high profile example of the repression of freedom of expression in Qatar, the poet Mohammed Ibn Al-Dheeb Al-Ajami remains in prison for writing a poem deemed critical of the authorities. He was charged with incitement to overthrow the regime. In February, his sentence was reduced from life imprisonment to 15 years, a sentence that remains wholly disproportionate but was nonetheless upheld by the highest Court in Qatar in October 2013.

SAUDI ARABIA

51. Saudi Arabia continued to attempt to silence peaceful dissidents and human rights activists through arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution in trials that do not meet international human rights standards throughout 2013. Violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly continued unabated. Authorities repeatedly refused to allow the registration of human rights organizations and subsequently targeted those that applied for legal status. Because Saudi Arabia does not have a penal code, prosecutors and judges can essentially create charges, at their own discretion, to target critics of the government. Spurious charges abound, such as “going beyond the realm of obedience” and “communicating with foreign entities.” Many activists faced prosecution under Article VI of the Cyber Crimes Act of 2007 and so called counter-terrorism measures were used against those peacefully exercising their human rights. Article VI relates to websites of “terrorist

organizations' and forbids unlawful access to websites or information systems with 'the intention of obtaining data jeopardizing the internal or external security of the State or its economy.' The government refused to allow visits by the seven UN Special Rapporteurs who have been requesting access to the country since 2009. Saudi Arabia has yet to sign and ratify core UN human rights treaties and agreements such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

52. The clampdown on human rights organizations included ordering the dissolution of one of the most prominent human rights organizations in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), in March 2013. The Court also ordered the seizure of its assets for failing to obtain a permit to register the organization as a non-governmental institution. Dr. Abdullah Al-Hamid and Dr Mohammed Al-Qahtani, co-founders of the ACPRA, were sentenced to 11 years and ten years respectively with a travel ban of equal duration to come into effect at the end of their prison sentences. The charges against them included "refusing to submit to the will of the King," "incitement" and "communicating with foreign entities." In January 2013, GCHR had expressed concern for the wellbeing of Sheikh Suliaman Al-Rashudi, a prominent human rights defender, lawyer and former judge, as well as head of the ACPRA. He had been held in solitary confinement since December 2012. On 7 July 2013, the Administrative Court issued its decision to refuse permission to register Adala Centre for Human Rights as a legal entity. This followed more than a year and a half of continuous attempts to register the human rights organization, which included 13 court appeals.
53. Human rights lawyer and the head of the organization Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (MHRSA), Walid Abu Al-Khair, was sentenced to three months in prison in October for signing a statement on behalf of MHRSA calling for political reforms. The application by MHRSA to register as an organization and receive a permit for its activities was frozen by the Interior Ministry following a direct order from the King. On 4 December 2013, Walid Abu Al-Khair filed an objection to the ruling. Al-Khair is also facing a parallel trial that includes charges of "[u]rging international organizations to take action against the Kingdom and making false and undocumented statements to harm the reputation of the Kingdom, establishment of an unauthorized association, MHRSA, and supervising it, and the production, storage and dissemination of information that would prejudice public order."
54. Restrictions on freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia in 2013 included regular harassment against journalists and those who used social media to express their opinions. For example, in April, Iman Al-Qahtani, a prominent critic of the government, was forced to close down her Twitter account as a result of continuous harassment by members of the security forces, including threats of jail and threats against her family. Al-Qahtani works for a number of newspapers in Riyadh and the UK newspaper, *The Guardian*, has published her work. She has reported extensively on human rights activists in detention and she reported on the trial of the leaders of ACPRA. She has also written on

Saudi women and their political role in society. In a further example of the ongoing harassment against her, Al-Qahtani was stopped at Dammam airport in July 2013 by the authorities and prevented from travelling abroad.

55. The punishment of human rights defenders through unfair and clearly disproportionate sentences remained a clear feature of the Saudi authorities' crackdown on dissent. In July 2013, Raef Badawi, co-founder and editor of the website Liberal Saudi Network, an online forum established to foster political and social debate in Saudi Arabia, was sentenced to seven years and three months imprisonment in addition to 600 lashes for charges that included "setting up a website that has the name of 'liberal'," "insulting Islam through electronic channels" and "going beyond the realm of obedience." Badawi was arrested on 17 June 2012 following an announcement by the Liberal Saudi Network that 7 May 2012 was to be a "day of liberalism" in Saudi Arabia.
56. On 17 June 2013, the Special Court on State Security and Terrorism in Jeddah sentenced human rights defender Mikhlif Al-Shammari to five years in prison, a ten-year travel ban and a ban on media publications. He was charged with "attempting to discredit the Kingdom in the eyes of the internal and external public opinions," falling under Article VI of the Cyber Crime Law and "stirring sedition among the people." Also In June, human rights defender, Dr. Abdulkarim Al-Khoder was sentenced to eight years in prison, to include a five-year suspended sentence and a travel ban for ten years on charges that included disobeying the ruler, attempts to cause chaos through the organization of protests and demonstrations, tarnishing the image of the state by publishing false information and distributing it to foreign organizations, and collaboration in the founding of an unlicensed association (the ACPRA).
57. Others charged under the Cyber Crimes Act include Fadhel Al-Manasif in November 2013, who faced charges that included "setting up a human rights organization." Two other members of ACPRA, Issa Al-Hamid and Omar Al-Saeed have been subject to ongoing judicial harassment. Al-Hamid is subject to an ongoing investigation, which so far has included seven hearings. Al-Saed was sentenced in December to four years in prison, three hundred lashes, and a travel ban for four years after serving his sentence. Fawzan Al-Harbi, a founding member of the ACPRA, was charged under the Cyber Crimes Act in December, including for the "preparation of statements that criticized the Saudi government, accusing the judiciary and the executive of false charges, questioning the fairness of government procedures, inciting citizens against the security forces, and calling for public action against the state authorities." He is currently in detention, awaiting trial.
58. GCHR expressed support in October for the campaign that advocated for all women's right to drive. Saudi Arabia remains the only country in the world that forbids women from driving. GCHR expressed concern that some campaigners were subject to harassment by the authorities and documented at least one case where a female driver and her companion, human rights defender Eman Al-Nafjan,

were asked to sign pledges at police stations to declare that they would neither drive nor ride in a car with a female driver. Human Rights Watch reported that of 50 women who got behind the wheel on the day of protest on 26 October, 18 were pulled over by police.

SYRIA

59. Civil society activists, humanitarian aid workers, writers, journalists and lawyers continue to be specifically targeted for their human rights work in Syria. GCHR received reports of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture at the hands of both government security forces and armed opposition groups throughout 2013. Tens of thousands of civilians including peaceful protestors, civil society and political activists, aid workers, journalists, physicians and lawyers were detained, at times incommunicado, at times as hostages, in conditions that fell far short of international standards. Thousands of detainees have died as a result of torture, neglect and, in some extreme cases, starvation. In November 2013, GCHR joined 40 other human rights organizations in expressing concern for the fate of those detained by all parties in Syria.
60. Increased international attention to the gross human rights violations in Syria during 2013 included investigations and reports by the UN Commission of Inquiry, the latest of which focused on enforced disappearances. The UN Human Rights Council passed three resolutions calling on all actors to the conflict to respect international human rights and humanitarian law. In May, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 67/262, condemning “massacres, arbitrary executions, extrajudicial killings, the killing and persecution of protestors, human rights defenders and journalists, arbitrary detention, [and] enforced disappearances.” The resolution called on the Syrian authorities to release all persons arbitrarily detained, publish a list of all detention facilities, ensure that all conditions of detention comply with international law and allow access to independent monitors. The authorities failed to implement the above resolution and GCHR continued to receive reports of arbitrary detention and torture throughout the year.
61. Kidnappings and enforced disappearances remain rampant. On 2 October 2013, GCHR marked the first anniversary of the disappearance of prominent Syrian human rights lawyer Khalil Ma’touq, director of the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research. Ma’touq was arrested together with his colleague in October 2012 and his whereabouts remain unknown. Despite reports that Ma’touq has been seen in government-run prisons, the government continues to deny knowledge of his location. Houssam Youssef, a young activist who had been documenting human rights violations near his home, went missing in September 2012. GCHR received reports that he was being tortured in detention in February 2013. Award-winning Syrian human rights defender and writer Razan Zaitouneh was abducted, along with her husband Wa’el Hamada, and two colleagues, Nazem

Hamadi and Samira Khalil, on 9 December 2013 from a joint office for the Violations Documentation Center (VDC) and the Local Development and Small Projects Support (LDSPS) in the Eastern Damascus suburb of Douma. The VDC is an independent non-governmental organization that has been documenting human rights abuses committed by the Syrian government since the conflict erupted. The LDSPS provides humanitarian assistance, in particular to medical centers. The location of all four human rights defenders remains unknown.

62. Arbitrary arrest by Syrian security forces continued to be used to deter human rights defenders from carrying out their human rights activities. Humanitarian workers targeted during the year included volunteers with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Mohammed Atfah and Suhaib Hassan Swaidan, who were both arbitrarily arrested, allegedly subjected to torture and held incommunicado in February and June respectively. Lawyers targeted included human rights lawyer Faiq Hweigah, who was arrested in June by Syrian authorities. The director of the Syrian Democratic Institute, Abdulhadi Sheikh Awad, was arbitrarily detained in December 2013 and denied access to lawyers and to his family. No charges had been brought against him at the time of writing.
63. The Syrian authorities continued to use anti-terrorist legislation to target and deter human rights defenders from their work. Activists were detained and prosecuted before the Syrian Anti-Terrorism Court, a special court set up in July 2012 by the Syrian government that fails to comply with international standards. For example, Mazen Darwish, Hussein Ghareer and Hani Al-Zitani, members of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), were arrested on terrorism charges and their case was assigned to the Terrorism Criminal Court, pursuant to article 7 and 8 of the Anti-Terrorism Law enacted by the Syrian authorities on 28 June 2012, following a year spent in arbitrary detention. On 27 January 2014, their trial was postponed for the sixth time, and is now due to be heard on 3 March 2014. GCHR understands that no evidence has been presented against them thus far and GCHR remains seriously concerned for their physical and psychological health.
64. Journalists have been clearly targeted in attacks by state and non-state actors. Examples include the case of journalist and director of the Ana Foundation of New Media in Raqqa, Rami Al-Razzouk, who was kidnapped by a group of armed men at a checkpoint between the cities of Raqqa and Toubqa on 1 October 2013. On 7 November 2013, according to eyewitnesses, a group of unidentified armed men kidnapped broadcaster and civil rights activist Abdulwahab Almullah, who was a co-founder of the Aleppo News Network and the Aleppo Reporters Union.
65. Throughout the year, GCHR called upon the Syrian government and on all parties to the conflict to guarantee in all circumstances the rights of human rights defenders in Syria to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

66. The human rights landscape in the UAE in 2013 was dominated by the highly criticized trial of 94 activists, known as the UAE 94, which led to 69 convictions in July and sentences of up to 15 years. GCHR, along with a coalition of NGOs, published two reports documenting the human rights violations associated with the trial, including credible allegations of torture and a clear lack of due process rights. This trial was emblematic of the wider human rights situation in UAE in 2013, which saw the continuation of severe restrictions on freedom of expression, unfair trial standards and ill-treatment in detention. Human rights defenders, including lawyers, and their families continue to be targeted by authorities through harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and detention. Assertions of “national security” were used as a pretext by the authorities to stifle dissent and repress activists calling for democratic reforms and respect for human rights.
67. The UAE 94 were arrested following a broader crackdown on freedom of expression and opinion in 2012. Among the defendants were civil society activists including jurists, professors of law, practicing lawyers and human rights defenders. Some defendants were members of Al-Islah (the Reform and Social Guidance Association), a non-violent movement advocating for political reforms. Charges included “communicating with individuals and international and foreign entities and establishments based outside the State in order to distort the image of the State,” seeking “to disseminate these fabrications through the members of the organization, the media and the social networking sites on the Internet” as well as “launch(ing), establish(ing) and run(ning) an organization seeking to oppose the basic principles of the UAE system of governance and to seize power.” These charges closely resemble accusations against human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, with a worrying emphasis on communication via social media and the Internet with “establishments based outside the State.”
68. Serious human rights violations associated with the trial included the following. At least 64 of the detainees were held at undisclosed locations for up to a year before the trial. Many of the detainees did not have access to legal assistance until late February 2013. At the first trial hearing, the defendants told the judge they had been seriously ill-treated during their months in detention. They described prolonged solitary confinement, exposure to continuous fluorescent lighting that made it difficult to sleep, inadequate heating, and being hooded when they were taken from their cells. 18 of the UAE 94 went on hunger strike in July and August in protest against ill-treatment, which included beatings by prison guards, restrictions on family visits and being barred from group prayer. The failure to investigate the allegations of torture puts the authorities in breach of their international obligations under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or

Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ratified by the UAE in July 2012. GCHR remains seriously concerned about the conditions of detention of those who remain in prison.

69. Abdulhamid Al-Kumaiti, a lawyer who represented 86 of the 94 defendants reportedly suffered harassment from state actors during the trial. An international legal observer mandated by a coalition of NGOs to attend the hearings, UK lawyer Melanie Gingell, was denied access to all hearings, despite having received assurances from the authorities that the trial would be a “public hearing by virtue of law” and that she would be granted access. No reasons were given as to why her access was denied. The international media were also barred from the proceedings. The rulings of the Federal Supreme Court are final, thus the 69 convictions and sentences of up to 15 years handed down in July cannot be appealed by the defendants, in clear violation of international standards of fair trial.
70. In November 2012, Federal Decree No.5/2012 on combating cyber crimes was adopted. Like similar laws across the region, this decree poses a serious threat to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. The law stipulates penalties of imprisonment for any person who derides or damages the reputation of the state or any of its institutions through a website or through any means of online communication. In April 2013, Abdullah Al-Hadidi was the first person to be sentenced under the Cyber Crimes Law for his Twitter updates on the trial of the UAE 94 and for expressing his concern that allegations of torture had not been investigated. Al-Hadidi was sentenced to ten months in prison, a sentence upheld by the Court of Appeal. Online activist Waleed Al-Shehhi was sentenced to two years in prison and a fine of 500,000 Emirati Dirham (USD\$136,000) in November 2013, under the same law. Al-Shehhi had been particularly vocal in supporting the UAE 94 and criticizing the fairness of the trial. On 11 December 2013, prominent blogger Obaid Al-Zaabi was arrested following the airing of an interview with CNN during which he commented on the case of a young American, Shezanne Cassim, who had been jailed in the UAE for making a parody video with his friends. Al-Zaabi’s whereabouts remain unknown.
71. On 25 December 2013, the Federal Court in Abu Dhabi sentenced human rights defender Mohammed Salim Al-Zumer to three years in prison and a fine of 500,000 Emirati Dirham (USD\$136,000) for insulting the head of state and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi by alleging that the state had paid a private military and security company, Blackwater, to establish a mercenary army to “suppress freedoms.” He was also convicted of damaging the reputation of the state security apparatus with allegations of torture. His complaints of torture were not investigated. The Court also sentenced, in absentia, human rights defender Abdulrahman Omar Bajubair, who lives outside of the UAE, to five years in prison. He was convicted of charges that include the management of a website, offending the honor of the judges of the Federal Court, and publicly damaging the reputation of the Court.

YEMEN

72. Yemen was an extremely dangerous place for human rights defenders in 2013, where they faced attacks, intimidation and harassment from both state and non-state actors. In June, GCHR published a report on the situation in Yemen following a Mission in April carried out by UK lawyer and member of GCHR's advisory board, Melanie Gingell. She concluded that the transitional period in Yemen is proving to be more dangerous for human rights defenders because of the complex political environment. Previously, it was clear that threats emanated from a corrupt and violent government. Now, those who report human rights violations and campaign for justice face increasingly unpredictable and intensifying attacks. According to Gingell, "These attacks range through assassinations and beatings, widescale online campaigns of abuse and intimidation and the use of court processes to repress legitimate journalism. There has been an overwhelming failure by the transitional government to prevent, investigate or punish these attacks."
73. By mid-April 2013, Freedom Foundation, a Yemen-based organization, had documented 109 attacks on journalists, including the following events in April 2013 alone. Mansoor Noor, a journalist reporting on a Southern Movement demonstration in Aden was shot by an unidentified gunman and subsequently had to have his leg amputated in hospital. On the same day, there was a failed attempt to blow up the offices of Yemen Shabab Television station and the *Al Masdar* newspaper. Husam Ashour, a news editor who consistently reports on alleged corruption in relation to a reconstruction fund, was convicted of insulting a public official and sentenced to three months' imprisonment and a fine of 300,000 Yemeni Rials (USD\$1400). He is appealing his sentence. Also in April, the editor of the daily paper *Al-Oula*, Mohamed Ayish, reported having received more than 30 text messages from Yemeni and foreign phone numbers threatening to kill him, cut off his hand or cut out his tongue. On 27 April, the camera crews of Al Jazeera and Sky News Arabia, while reporting on the Southern Movement demonstration in Aden, were physically assaulted, threatened with knives and had their cameras confiscated.
74. Mohamed Al-Abbsi, a high-profile journalist who focuses on exposing corruption at all levels of Yemen society, has faced ongoing harassment including criminal charges and attempts at intimidation. He has published over 2,000 documents in relation to the restructuring of the army, Al-Qaeda, money laundering and arms deals. Many of these documents are classified and are leaked to him from concerned workers in government departments. In March 2013, Al-Abbsi was charged with reputational damage in relation to his reports on corruption by a government-run organization set up to distribute funds to those injured in protests in 2011. In September 2013, Al-Abbsi published a

letter from the National Security Agency addressed to the Minister for Oil asking him to fire members of the Union of Oil and Gas who were calling for a general strike to demand better living conditions with the excuse that they posed a threat to national security. The day after the publication of the letter, Al-Abbsi was chased by what is believed to have been a government vehicle. In what GCHR believes to be a further example of his ongoing harassment, also in September, Al-Abbsi and the Editor of the *Al-Neda'a* newspaper, Sami Ghalib, were denied a visa to visit Sweden. They had been invited to give testimony before the Swedish Parliament and to speak at the University of Copenhagen on the human rights situation in Yemen.

75. In March 2013, human rights defender Khaled Ayish, the president of the National Forum for Human Rights in Yemen, faced an attempted assassination following numerous threats to his life. In November 2013, armed men attempted to assassinate Abdullah bin Amer, the publisher and editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Masapress (Evening Press)*. On 18 November 2013, the warehouse of two newspapers, *Aloulaye* and *Al-Sharea*, were burned by two masked men riding a motorcycle who fled after they set fire to the building.
76. GCHR has also documented how social networks, such as Facebook, are being hijacked by groups in Yemen to intimidate activists and those who stand up for their rights. Hundreds of people have been known to target the Facebook pages of anti-corruption campaigners, rights activists and those expressing independent views by bombarding their pages with abusive messages. This abuse often consists of accusations of un-Islamic behavior and, at times of, apostasy. The latter accusation is particularly serious because the punishment for apostasy is considered, by many, to be death. Many female activists described this to GCHR as “social execution.” Human rights defender and teacher Magad Al-Hadad is one example of someone who has faced a Facebook campaign of abuse. Al-Hadad, who owned and ran a school up to 2011, lost her school following her participation in the 2011 protests and her decision to stop wearing a veil in public. She believes rumors about her morals and religious commitment led to the removal of students by their parents and to the withdrawal of her license by the Ministry of Education. She now runs an NGO that focuses on education for women and the link between education and democracy. Following her public expression of support for a victim of a gang rape, she was subject to a campaign of abuse, including on Facebook.
77. Ahmed Said Hashid, a Judge for six years in Yemen and now a Member of Parliament, as well as a longstanding civil society campaigner for social justice, took part in the protest marches of 2011 and has faced ongoing harassment, including physical assaults, since then. While participating in a sit-down protest to highlight the unfair distribution of funds to those injured in the protests of 2011, Hashid was attacked with iron bars and nearly killed by men wearing riot squad uniforms. Hashid alleges this attack was a deliberate attempt to kill him but there has been no official investigation.

III. CONCLUSION

78. GCHR documented a clear clampdown on dissent, criticism and calls for reform across the Gulf region in 2013. Restrictions on the right to freedom of expression took the form of prosecutions under libel laws, defamation, trumped up security charges and charges under recent Cyber Crime Laws. Tightening restrictions on the use of social media reflect government recognition of the power of such platforms to immediately document and share information on human rights violations, provide a tool for organizing events, share experiences and call publicly for reform. Experiences in Yemen show that social media can also be hijacked to harass activists. Restrictions on freedom of association included the refusal to register human rights organizations and the subsequent prosecution and punishment of those seeking to operate within the confines of restrictive laws. Restrictions on freedom of assembly across the region saw prohibitions on holding or participating in demonstrations, the harassment of those who sought to participate in protests and the use of disproportionate force against those who dared to gather together peacefully to voice their human rights concerns. The intimidation and harassment of those who sought to defend human rights across the region included arbitrary arrests, detention, ill-treatment, systematic torture, prosecutions, trials and sentences that fell far short of international standards of fair trial and due process. In the worst cases, such as Syria and Iraq, human rights defenders were subject to enforced disappearances, systematic torture and execution.
79. It is obvious that this wave of repression against human rights defenders is a clear backlash against the growing confidence and expanding vision of human rights activists in the wake of the Arab Spring. People across the region are demanding their human rights. They want what the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her 2011 speech *The Tunis Imperative*, described as “meaningful participation in public affairs, a dignified life and freedom from fear and want.” It is for human rights defenders throughout the world, the international community in the form of its human rights institutions and in the form of both multilateral and bilateral relationships to mount and sustain pressure on the governments in the Gulf to abide by their domestic and international obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all of their people.