



# Human rights

**In the Gulf Region and Neighbouring Countries**

**2022 Annual Report of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights**

**2022**



Gulf Centre for Human Rights

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## Human Rights in the Gulf Region and Neighbouring Countries

Gulf Centre for Human Rights

Annual Report 2022

March 2023



Cover photos of a gathering, organised in 2022s, in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, in solidarity with detained women/human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

## ABOUT GCHR

### MISSION

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) is an independent, non-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO) that provides support and protection to human rights defenders (HRDs) in order to promote human rights, including but not limited to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

### WHERE WE WORK

GCHR is based in Lebanon and documents the environment for HRDs in the Gulf region and neighbouring countries, specifically Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. On occasion, GCHR covers violations in other countries in the region, such as Egypt or Palestine. GCHR was founded in 2011.

### VISION

To have vibrant civic spaces in the Gulf region and neighbouring countries in which human rights are fully respected and HRDs, including journalists and Internet activists, can work free from oppression and fear.

### DONORS

GCHR's work in 2022 was funded by Sigrid Rausing Trust, the Open Society Foundation, the European Union, Tides Foundation, the Norwegian Human Rights Fund and IFEX, among other donors. We do not accept funds from any governments in the countries in which we work. Thanks to donor partners for their support for this Annual Report. See more at: [http://www.gc4hr.org/page/about\\_us](http://www.gc4hr.org/page/about_us).

### MEMBERSHIPS

GCHR is a member of IFEX, CIVICUS, FIDH, OMCT SOS Torture Network, the WHRD International Coalition, WHRD-MENA Network, Global Forum for Media Development, the UK Bar Human Rights Committee, the Arab Alliance for Digital Rights (AADR) and the Civil society coalition on Information and Democracy. GCHR's campaigns, joint actions and news are amplified and supported by these networks, including through the VUKA Coalition and the CIVICUS Monitor.

### DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to all human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), particularly women and members of minority groups across the MENA region who are under severe stress and threats for their work.

# Dedication

This report is dedicated to all human rights defenders in the MENA region, especially women defenders and members of minorities in the region, who are subjected to massive pressure and threats due to their work



# Contents

**6**

**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

**7**

**INTRODUCTION**

**8**

**PART I**

**ADVOCACY AND  
CAMPAIGNS**

**17**

**PART II**

**GCHR's  
THEMATIC  
AND COUNTRY  
REPORTS**

**22**

**PART III**

**GCHR's  
PRACTICAL  
SUPPORT TO  
HRDs AND CIVIL  
SOCIETY ACTORS**

**25**

**PART IV**

**COUNTRY  
SNAPSHOTS**

**35**

**PART V**

**REGIONAL  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OVERVIEW**

**36**

**PART VI**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main objective of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) is to foster a vibrant and safe civic space in which human rights defenders (HRDs) and other civil society actors are free to work for the protection and promotion of human rights. Throughout 2022, GCHR continued to support HRDs, independent lawyers, journalists, academics and online activists across the Gulf region and neighbouring countries through its core activities of documentation and research, monitoring and publicising cases of HRDs at risk, capacity building and protection and assistance.

Throughout 2022, GCHR, alongside its local partners and international allies, continued to play a vital role in ensuring that cases that might otherwise not receive the attention they deserve are brought to the fore in predominantly English-speaking media and advocacy circles. GCHR continued its work in coalition with partner organisations on campaigns for imprisoned HRDs including its co-founder Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja in Bahrain and Advisory Board member Ahmed Mansoor in the UAE.

In 2022, GCHR issued 100 appeals and 13 urgent actions as well as numerous joint statements and letters relating to WHRDs and HRDs in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE and Yemen, as well as Palestine and Egypt. GCHR also published nine reports, either alone or jointly with partners, covering a wide range of themes and countries such as patterns of torture, accountability and the application of Magnitsky sanctions, the specific challenges facing WHRDs and joint submissions to UN mechanisms. Furthermore, GCHR published five Periodic Reports on violations of freedom of expression and assembly in Iraq and three on Iraqi Kurdistan.

In December 2022, GCHR marked the conclusion of another busy and productive year by finally obtaining Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Consultative status after more than seven years of attempts that had been blocked by hostile states. On 07 December 2022, the UN ECOSOC Committee voted in favour of granting status to GCHR and another eight NGOs including the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). The EU issued a [statement](#) in support of the nine NGOs.



## INTRODUCTION

This annual report, which covers the period between 01 January 2022 and 31 December 2022, summarises GCHR’s activities advocating on behalf of HRDs, activists, academics, journalists, protesters and citizens so that they can exercise their human rights peacefully and free from oppression. In addition to documenting our advocacy efforts and activities, the report also covers the ways in which we have helped to strengthen the capacity of HRDs and other civil society actors working to peacefully promote and protect human rights throughout the region and neighbouring countries.

At the outset, GCHR wishes to recognise and pay tribute to its local, regional and international partners with whom it has continued to enjoy fruitful relationships in our mutual work to amplify and support the work of HRDs and civil society actors across the Gulf region and neighbouring countries.

Part I of this report summarises GCHR’s thematic and country-specific campaigns, advocacy before international organisations such as the United Nations and legal advocacy. Part II highlights the various thematic and country reports published by GCHR over the past year. Part III summarises the practical support GCHR has provided to HRDs and civil society actors throughout 2022. Part IV provides “snapshots” of the human rights situation in each of the countries we work in across the Gulf region and the report concludes with a regional human rights overview at Part V and recommendations for the coming year at Part VI.

**PART I**

# **ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNS**



# General Campaigns

Throughout 2022, GCHR demonstrated solidarity with HRDs, activists, civil society actors and fellow human rights organisations working to protect and promote human rights in the Gulf region and neighbouring



countries. GCHR, UNESCO and IFEX [co-organised](#) the Regional Conference in the Arab States on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, which took place in Tunisia from 02-04 November 2022. The events began on 02 November, the International Day to End Impunity, and included discussions, a photo exhibit and a training workshop for 15 young Tunisian journalists.

GCHR led almost 40 NGOs in a [joint statement](#) on the negative impact following President Biden's visit to MENA in July - with a focus on Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Iraq, Egypt and Palestine. The statement was published following the shocking news about a 45-year sentence handed to Nourah bint Saeed Al-Qahtani several weeks after the 34-year sentence against Salma Al-Shehab. These are the longest sentences ever imposed on any peaceful activist in Saudi Arabia and do not bode well for other activists in prison, including Dr. Lina Al-Sharif, for whom GCHR issued an [appeal](#) and organised a [joint action](#) with a coalition of 22 NGOs calling for her release..

In June 2022, GCHR held an important virtual meeting with 16 US State Department and MENA Embassy staff in which a representative of GCHR spoke of how HRDs in the region are suffering and expressed concern about the negative impact of President Biden's visit. The meeting was organised by both the Middle East Institute and the Foreign Service Institute.



On World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2022, GCHR [called for](#) more resources to protect journalists in the MENA region as well as worldwide. Journalists face great risks to carry out their work, both in the field and online, and are often attacked with impunity.

On 8 March 2022, International Women's Day, GCHR co-sponsored an event on [Women's Solidarity in Human Rights Activism: Storytelling from the Arab Peninsula](#). Members of GCHR's Advisory Board, exiled Emirati WHRD Jenan Al-Marzooqi and MEP Alessandra Moretti spoke at the beginning of the event about the need for EU member states to campaign for women's equality in the MENA region, and stated that "business should not prevail over human rights and justice." Participants spoke of the challenges of working in countries that do not protect women's rights.

On International Women's Day 2022, GCHR published a [PR](#) calling on MENA governments to "take serious measures to end the use of sexual and gender-based violence, curb online harassment of women, stop the use of surveillance to persecute WHRDs, stop reprisals against them and their families, and remove travel bans.

GCHR co-founded the [MENA Coalition to Combat Digital Surveillance](#) with Access Now in 2021. Other members are ARTICLE 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Front Line Defenders, Human Rights Watch,

Iraqi Network for Social Media (INSM), Jordan Open Source Association (JOSA), Masaar - Technology and Law Community, Red Line for Gulf, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and SMEX.

**Webinar**

**WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY IN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM: Storytelling from the Arab Peninsula**

**OPENING REMARKS**  
MEP  
Alessandra Moretti

**Tuesday 8 March 2022**  
4.00 - 5.30 PM (CET)

**GUEST SPEAKERS**

- Hala Al-Dosari**  
Saudi human rights activist, scholar, and writer.
- Jenan Almarzooqi**  
Emirati activist and daughter of Abdul Salam Darwish.
- Habiba Al-Hinal**  
Omani activist and founder and Executive Director of the Omani Association for Human Rights (OAHRC).
- Radhya Al-mutawakel**  
President of the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights.

**MODERATORS**

- Weeam Youseff**  
Programme Manager at GCHR
- Julia Legner**  
Director of Advocacy at ALCOR

Webinar ID : 823 5963 3233  
Passcode : 687038

# Regional Campaigns



In October 2022, GCHR and I<sup>4</sup>C MENA launched the WeActTogether campaign. Partnering on this project are the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights (IOHR), and SimSim - Participation Citoyenne, focusing on three countries: Morocco, Iraq, and Bahrain to articulate the contributions of civil society to their societies. The WeActTogether online campaign aims to present positive stories of the work of CSOs and activists based on a mapping survey, [public opinion surveys](#) and [media analysis](#) of the portrayal of CSOs and activists - all featured on the campaign website at <https://acttogether.org/>. The campaign also created the twitter handle, #WeActTogether and uploaded videos on GCHR's [YouTube](#) and new [Instagram](#) account. The campaign has increased GCHR's social media reach considerably, with almost 5 million people viewing the videos and campaign images.

## Country-Specific Campaigns



On 2 June 2022, GCHR's Co-Founder Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja received the Martin Ennals Award 2022 for human rights defenders at a moving ceremony in Geneva attended by his family and GCHR colleagues. Al-Khawaja's wife Khadija Al-Mousawi and daughters Zaynab and Maryam were present at the emotional ceremony in Geneva, where a [film](#) was shown about him. GCHR is coordinating with a coalition of colleagues and his family in the #FreeAlKhawaja campaign to help free him, and get him urgent medical treatment.



When the Dubai Expo opened in October 2021, GCHR and over two dozen partners launched a six-month campaign to highlight the repression in the country and counter the UAE's false narrative of "tolerance" and "openness". The campaign started with the Alternative Human Rights Expo, a cultural human rights event, and a petition and letter to the UAE authorities to #FreeEmiratiActivists. Next, GCHR and partners worked on a campaign to #FreeBahrainiPrisoners. The campaign culminated in March 2022 with an event to mark International Women's Day. GCHR gathered partners along the way, who continue to meet regularly to brainstorm on joint advocacy for women's rights and to free jailed HRDs in the region, or help end their persecution. GCHR and partners are planning another Alternative Human Rights Expo in 2023.

# UN Advocacy



At every session of the UN Human Rights Council, GCHR organises and co-hosts several events, and carries out advocacy with member states and UN mechanisms. At the 51st session, GCHR organised an event calling for the release of HRDs in Bahrain, for which it also made [a joint submission](#) to Bahrain’s Universal Periodic Review with ADHRB, BCHR and FIDH.



At the UNHRC 50th session in June/July 2022, GCHR [organised](#) two side events on human rights violations in Bahrain and the UAE, participated in the UAE’s review at the UNCAT, and carried out advocacy for a resolution on Syria and issued a call for action on Saudi Arabia by the UNHRC with Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI), and ALQST for Human Rights, as part of a long-term advocacy effort to push for action on Saudi Arabia.

In May 2022, GCHR, ALQST, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch held a [joint online](#) event on 'Unrelenting repression: Human rights concerns in Saudi Arabia'. Over 50 participants attended including at least 24 UN diplomats (Portugal, Iceland, Finland, Greece, Ireland, UK), who were the target audience ahead of the UN HRC's 50th session. In a [joint oral statement](#) before the UN Human Rights Council 49, ALQST, ISHR and GCHR highlighted the disturbing pattern of Saudi violations, and [reiterated our call](#) on the Council to establish a monitoring mechanism on the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.

On 30 March 2022, GCHR organised an online consultation between the UN Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism Fionnuala Ní Aoláin and 26 HRDs from the MENA region, including speakers from 16 countries. They discussed the use of anti-terrorism laws to persecute HRDs, and made recommendations to the UN SR, to feed into her report. GCHR is organising another UN Consultation with 4 UN Special Rapporteurs and two dozen HRDs from the region focused on digital rights in March 2023.

In 2022, GCHR finally got Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Consultative status after having been blocked for over seven years from getting accreditation. As part of advocacy efforts, GCHR's Executive Director travelled to New York ahead of the vote and GCHR joined [the International Service for Human Rights \(ISHR\)](#) on the [#OpenTheDoors2NGOs](#) campaign.

# Legal Campaigning

Throughout 2022, GCHR has continued to seek innovative ways to seek justice for the murder, torture and surveillance of HRDs across the region, including Emirati HRD Ahmed Mansoor and Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.



On 27 April 2022, GCHR, ADHRB and Deighton Pierce Glynn (DPG) [organised an event](#) at the UK House of Commons in London on [Torture in Bahrain: Justice, Accountability and the UK Magnitsky Sanctions Regime](#). The in-person event was chaired by MP Andy Slaughter, Labour MP for Hammersmith and Shadow Solicitor General. On GCHR's instructions, DPG wrote a report on "Accountability for Torture in Bahrain - A Call for Magnitsky Sanctions", which was launched at the event. The report is now online in English and Arabic on GCHR's website and you can also watch the video of the event [here](#)

On [behalf of GCHR](#), French human rights lawyer William Bourdon [lodged an official](#) complaint with the Prosecutor's Office in Paris in June 2021 against Emirati Major General Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi in the case of the unlawful arrest and subsequent torture of Mansoor, a member of GCHR's Board. [Another complaint](#) was filed in January 2022. The complaints are based on the concept of universal jurisdiction and sought to bring Al-Raisi to justice while he was in France for his Interpol duties. Major General Al-Raisi [was in Lyon](#) from 6 March 2022 and Bourdon's office immediately sent information to the Prosecutor's Office, which opened an inquiry through its unit for crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. On 18 March 2022, GCHR's Executive Director went to France to testify about Al-Raisi's crimes, where he provided details of the UAE's practices of torturing and persecuting HRDs. Al-Raisi was not arrested but the accusations were sufficient to lift Al-Raisi's diplomatic immunity.

GCHR also filed another legal case in France under universal jurisdiction against Saudi General Ahmed Al-Assiri. [The case](#), which also has the assistance of William Bourdon, seeks to hold Al-Assiri responsible for the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018. GCHR has provided testimony on the case to the French Public Prosecutor. Al-Assiri escaped conviction in the Saudi trial against the team responsible for the murder. GCHR also engaged William Bourdon and Vincent Brengarth to join a case [against the Israeli software company NSO Group](#), whose Pegasus hacking software is responsible for surveillance harm caused to human rights defenders in the MENA region and beyond. Those targeted by Pegasus software include Ahmed Mansoor and many human rights defenders whom GCHR works with in Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. While GCHR's case was not accepted by the French courts, other NGOs and journalists have ongoing cases against NSO Group in France and elsewhere.

**PART II**

**GCHR's**

**THEMATIC**

**AND COUNTRY**

**REPORTS**



In 2022, GCHR published ten reports, either alone or jointly with partners, covering a wide range of themes and countries.

### MENA Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) Forum Report

On 29 November 2022, to mark [International WHRDs Day](#), GCHR and the Innovation for Change MENA Hub launched [a report](#) and [videos](#) from the MENA Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) Forum which took place from 15-17 September 2022. The Forum was held as part of a civil society building project by the two NGOs that took place during 2020-2022.



### No to Impunity

To mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists which takes place on 02 November, GCHR published a report entitled, '[No to Impunity](#)'. The report highlights the grave human rights violations that journalists in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continue to face, including murder by governments or armed groups, usually with total impunity. Countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, Palestine and Yemen continue to be classified among the most dangerous places for journalists.



### Patterns of Torture in Iraq

On 06 October 2022, GCHR published a report analysing the main [patterns of torture in Iraq](#). The key patterns that emerge are: the systematic perpetration of torture in places of detention; the fostering of a culture of impunity through a reliance on forced confessions and a lack of effective investigations into allegations of torture; and the targeting of women and the LGBTIQ+ community.



### **Kingdom of Bahrain: Joint Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review 41st Session of the UPR Working Group**

On 30 September 2022, GCHR, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) published a [joint submission](#) to the UN UPR review of Bahrain. The joint submission assessed Bahrain's implementation of recommendations received during the 3rd UPR cycle and provided a number of follow-up recommendations

### **Mission to Qatar Report on Migrant Workers**

GCHR released a [report](#) following a mission to Qatar, which documented the gross violations of the civil and human rights of foreign workers, beginning from their departure from their countries of origin when they were chosen to travel and work in Qatar, and continuing upon their arrival and during their work. The Qatari government refuses to compensate workers, especially those who were killed during the construction of the World Cup stadiums.

### **Prison Conditions in Bahrain**

On 08 July 2022, GCHR published a report on [prison conditions in Bahrain](#). The report documents the conditions facing the 132 individuals sentenced to varying prison terms in 2021, including nine life sentences. Furthermore, the authorities arrested 173 individuals in 2021 in relation to pro-democracy activities. The report describes the spread of disease in Bahraini prisons, the denial of medical treatment to prisoners, the ineffectiveness of oversight bodies and abuse of alternative sentencing and the torture perpetrated against detained WHRDs.

### **Joint Submission on the United Arab Emirates to the 74th Session of the UN Committee Against Torture**

On 26 June 2022, GCHR, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the International Campaign for Freedom in the UAE (ICF UAE) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) published a [joint-submission](#) to the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) on the UAE. The submission was originally made in advance of the UAE's expected review in April 2021 which was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report highlighted the widespread practice of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in prisons in the UAE, the lack of redress for victims of torture and the UAE's response to reports of torture against HRDs. It also addressed recommendations to the UAE

### Accountability for Torture in Bahrain: A Call for Magnitsky Sanctions

On 01 June 2022, GCHR published a [report on accountability for torture in Bahrain](#) which was prepared on its instructions by Deighton Pierce Glynn Solicitors (“DPG”), a leading law firm specialising in civil and human rights based in the UK. The scope of GCHR’s instructions to DPG was to investigate and analyse a set of evidence in relation to allegations of torture and mistreatment by officials in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and in particular the evidence of three Bahraini witnesses, and to consider potential accountability mechanisms. The report finds that there are accountability mechanisms within Bahrain on paper but they are ineffective; there is no evidence of perpetrators being effectively punished or deterred, and mistreatment is continuing. Various avenues for accountability include so-called ‘soft law’ mechanisms, cases brought under the principle of universal jurisdiction and the exclusion of perpetrators from the UK. Finally, the report considers the potential of the ‘Magnitsky’ sanctions approach, which was recently introduced in the UK (after the USA) and is also being used by the EU and other states. The report considers whether the evidence available in relation to Bahrain would justify the use of such sanctions in relation to Bahraini officials.



### They Will Not Shoot Down Our Dream: Challenges Faced by Human Rights Defenders in Iraq Following the “October Popular Movement”

On 05 May 2022, GCHR issued a [report on the challenges faced by HRDs in Iraq](#) which is based on research carried out during a mission to Iraq in early 2022. The mission to Iraq found that human rights defenders, journalists and activists still hold onto hope for an end to the extreme human rights violations, but urgently need international support to help promote human rights, press freedom and accountability.

### **Patterns of Torture in the United Arab Emirates**

On 11 February 2022, GCHR released a [report analysing patterns of torture in the UAE](#). The report examines examples of the UAE authorities' reliance on torture in consolidating an oppressive climate. The key patterns of torture that emerge are: the use of arbitrary arrest, detention and enforced disappearances to perpetrate torture with impunity; the punishment and further torture of those who dare to speak out about their conditions of detention and; the complicity of companies and the international community in the systematic perpetration of torture in the UAE.

**PART III**

**GCHR's PRACTICAL  
SUPPORT TO  
HRDs AND CIVIL  
SOCIETY ACTORS**



**Protecting Human Rights Defenders is Protecting Peace,  
and Freedom in the Middle East will Prevail**

### **Training Workshop during the Regional Conference in the Arab States on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**

During the Regional Conference in the Arab States co-organised by GCHR, UNESCO and IFEX and held in Tunisia on 02-04 November 2022, 15 young Tunisian journalists participated in a training workshop.

### **MENA WHRDs' Forum**

Partnering with the Innovation for Change MENA Hub, GCHR organised the MENA WHRDs Forum for 60 WHRDs from the region in Istanbul from 15-17 September 2022, as part of the I4C MENA project. The event started with introductions by GCHR and I4C staff, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women Reem Alsalem, followed by interviews by Diana Moukalled, Co-founder and managing editor of Daraj media with Bahraini WHRD Ebtisam Al-Saegh, Marwa Fatafta of Access Now, Jordanian lawyer Hala Ahed, Moroccan journalist Sanaa El-Aji and an Iraqi WHRD who remains anonymous. It was followed by two days of training workshops, with innovative aspects of well-being and self-care, including creative activities. To mark [International WHRDs Day](#), GCHR launched a [report](#) and [videos](#) from the event published during #16DaysOfActivism. Following up, GCHR organised online workshops for MENA WHRDs to provide legal and psychosocial support, as well as providing online resources and organising a [Podcast with Daraj with Dr. Hala Al-Dosari: Gulf Activists Are at Risk of Imprisonment and Death](#).



### **Facilitation of Consultations between HRDs and UN Special Rapporteurs**

On 30 March 2022, GCHR organised an online consultation between the UN Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism Fionnuala Ní Aoláin and 26 HRDs from the MENA region, including speakers from 16 countries. They discussed the use of anti-terrorism laws to persecute HRDs, and made recommendations to the UN SR, to feed into her report. GCHR is organising another UN Consultation with four UN Special Rapporteurs and two dozen HRDs from the region focused on digital rights in March 2023.

### **GCHR's Partnership with UNESCO's Global Media Defense Fund**

In 2022, for the second year in a row, GCHR partnered with UNESCO's Global Media Defense Fund to support the work of investigative journalists in the MENA region to investigate impunity for crimes against journalists.

# **PART IV**

# **COUNTRY**

# **SNAPSHOTS**



# BAHRAIN

In 2022, GCHR published two urgent actions and eight updates on Bahrain, including about its co-founder Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja.

## In the Spotlight

GCHR's advocacy on Bahrain throughout 2022 focused on raising awareness of the treatment of prisoners of conscience in Bahrain. In particular, GCHR has repeatedly [called for the freedom of prisoners of conscience](#) and for [accountability](#) for those who tortured human rights defenders, activists and medics in Bahrain, using the concept of universal jurisdiction.



In this regard, GCHR continued to provide updates on the cases of prominent Bahraini human rights defender and co-founder of GCHR Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja who has been arbitrarily detained in Bahrain since 2011 in retaliation against his role in the peaceful democracy movement protests, as part of a group of human rights defenders and activists collectively known as the "Bahrain 13".

In June 2022, Al-Khawaja [received the Martin Ennals](#) Award for human rights defenders at a moving ceremony in Geneva attended by his family and colleagues. However, despite this important accolade recognising his significant contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, in 2022, Al-Khawaja suffered from [reprisals](#) and a deterioration of his prison conditions. In September 2022, GCHR reported that the [Jaw Prison administration is currently targeting Al-Khawaja and other prisoners of conscience](#) in Bahrain with reprisals. For example, on 17 September 2022, Al-Khawaja was cut off during a call with his family, and he was not allowed to obtain the necessary medical care in retaliation for his demand for his rights and the rights of his fellow prisoners. These reprisals escalated to judicial harassment, with Al-Khawaja [convicted](#) in November 2022 in two cases for his activism in prison, including protesting against unjust treatment in Jaw Prison.

GCHR has also reported on the case of prominent opposition figure and human rights defender and another member of the “Bahrain 13” [Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace](#) who had undertaken a hunger strike since July 2022 in protest against the confiscation of his research, and poor treatment, and who was denied adequate medical treatment for all his health conditions.

GCHR welcomed the European Parliament’s urgency resolution [calling](#) for the release of Al-Khawaja, Al-Singace and other HRDs on 15 December 2022

## EGYPT

In 2022, GCHR published one update on Egypt and signed a joint appeal expressing solidarity with a prominent CSO and imprisoned human rights defender.

### In the Spotlight

On 11 January 2022, GCHR announced its solidarity with the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, as it [announced its closure](#). GCHR also signed a [joint action](#) in solidarity with imprisoned human rights defender Alaa Abdel-Fattah, who was on hunger strike during the COP27 in Egypt in November 2022.

## IRAN

In 2022, GCHR published one urgent action and two updates on Iran, which focused on the appalling treatment of WHRDs and civil society activists in Iran. In recognition of the worsening situation in the country, the CIVICUS Monitor, of which GCHR is a partner, [added Iran](#) to its civic space Watch List in February 2023.

### In the Spotlight

In an urgent update from May 2022, GCHR reported that [WHRD Narges Mohammadi was taken back to Qarchak Prison](#) on 12 April 2022 after being released on medical furlough following heart surgery in February 2022. Since then, she has been taken to court and handed additional sentences.



In September 2022, GCHR called for a [thorough, independent, impartial, and transparent investigation](#) into the death of 22-year-old woman Mahsa Amini, also known as Jina Amini or Zhina Amini, whilst she was visiting the capital Tehran with her family who are from Saqqez in Iran's western Kurdistan region. On 16 September 2022, Amini died in Tehran under suspicious circumstances, potentially due to police brutality after her arrest by the morality police for wearing an “improper hijab”.

Amini’s brutal killing [ignited a protest movement](#) in Iran that has been met with a violent crackdown against demonstrations and supporters of women’s rights. In October 2022, GCHR [reported](#) that a remarkable number of women human



rights defenders, journalists, reporters, activists, lawyers, civilians and children have been targeted, intimidated, arrested, beaten and killed during the first three weeks of protests, including at least two dozen journalists. They include journalist Niloufar Hamedei, who first revealed the circumstances surrounding Mahsa Amini’s death, and Elaheh Mohammadi, who was arrested after she covered Amini’s funeral in Saqqez.

## IRAQ

In 2022, GCHR published five Periodic Reports on human rights violations in Iraq, three reports on Iraqi Kurdistan, one update and reports on [patterns of torture](#), the [documentation of over a dozen cases of torture](#) in Iraqi prisons and the [challenges facing human rights defenders](#).



### In the Spotlight

GCHR's leading work reporting on human rights violations in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan that might otherwise not receive coverage continued throughout 2022. In particular, GCHR's thorough Periodic Reports covered hundreds of cases of HRDs, journalists, academics, public officials, clerics and other civil society activists who have been assassinated, attacked, kidnapped, disappeared, arbitrarily arrested and detained with impunity. To give but one particularly alarming example, in its [22<sup>nd</sup> Periodic Report](#) on Human Rights Violations in Iraq published on 13 May 2022, GCHR reported the extremely concerning case of four protesters sentenced to death in a trial that relied on forced confessions extracted by torture. The four protesters are Kazem Hadi Kazem, Muhammad Attia Hussein, Abbas Ali Aziz and Hussein Saddam Hashem.

Violent and often lethal attacks by the security forces on protesters calling for democratic accountability, an end to corruption and better public services remain a critical issue since the beginning of protests in October 2019. However, despite the brutal treatment of peaceful human rights defenders and activists, a report following a GCHR mission to Iraq [highlighted](#) that human rights defenders, journalists and activists still hold onto hope for an end to the extreme human rights violations, but urgently need international support to help promote human rights, press freedom and accountability.

## الأردن

In 2022, GCHR published five updates on Jordan, with a focus on violations of the right to freedom of association and assembly.



### In the spotlight

Throughout 2022, GCHR reported on how attacks on unions, especially the Teachers' Syndicate, as well as the arbitrary arrests of trade unionists, journalists, students, civil society activists, and political activists have been [transforming Jordan into an increasingly repressive state](#).

Furthermore, GCHR's research in 2022 has demonstrated that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Jordanian government has been [cracking down even more so on journalists](#) by [passing new legislation](#) further limiting freedom of expression inside the Kingdom.

Jordan's increasingly oppressive approach to freedom of expression was also evidenced by the [arrest and detention of WHRD Sumaya Abu Nabaa](#) in connection with a post she published on social media about the killing of 21-year-old nursing student Iman Rashid, who was killed on 23 June 2022, on the campus of the Applied Sciences Private University.

In 2022, Jordanian women have also gathered to [protest the recent amendments to the Child](#) Rights Law that exacerbate the discrimination already facing women through Jordan's custody laws.

## KUWAIT

Throughout 2022, GCHR published 12 updates on Kuwait, many focused on Bedoon rights.

### In the Spotlight

Much of GCHR's advocacy on Kuwait over the past year focused on the [treatment of Bedoon](#) citizens who are still [denied the full enjoyment of their civil and human rights](#).

GCHR has also continued to raise awareness of the cases of Bedoon rights defender, [Mohammed Al-Barghash](#); President of the Kuwait Association for Information Security (KAIS) and Professor of the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering at Kuwait University [Dr Safaa Zaman](#); writer,

blogger and activist [Anwar Al-Rasheed](#); blogger [Mesaed Al-Musaileem](#); HRD [Abdulahakim Al-Fadhli](#); and writer [Mona Kareem](#).

## OMAN

In 2022, GCHR published eight updates on Oman with its partner the Omani Association for Human Rights (OAHR).

### In the Spotlight

In 2022, GCHR reported on the arrests and targeting of internet activists, journalists and HRDs. Cases raised include those of journalist and HRD [Mukhtar Al-Hinai](#); engineer and internet activist [Ahmed Muslim Al-Kathiri](#); internet activist [Abu Al-Yasa Al-Rawahi](#) and; businessman and environmental activist [Dr Ahmed Issa Qatan](#).



## QATAR

In 2022, GCHR published 14 updates on Qatar, including on migrant rights surrounding the FIFA World Cup. GCHR also published a mission report to the country.

### In the Spotlight

2022 saw the continuation of [grave violations of citizens' civil and human rights](#) in Qatar, including the targeting of HRD [Abdullah Al-Maliki](#) with [threats of the death penalty](#), and the use of [arbitrary travel bans](#) against citizens without any clear legal basis for doing so. In 2022, a '[National Campaign for Travel-Banned Citizens](#)' was established to raise awareness of this oppressive practice.

The hosting of the [FIFA World Cup](#) in Qatar in 2022 drew further attention to the widespread nature of human rights violations in Qatar, including against [migrant workers](#). GCHR released a [report](#) following a mission to Qatar, which documented the gross violations of the civil and human rights of foreign workers.

# SAUDI ARABIA

In 2022, GCHR published 19 updates on Saudi Arabia, and joined or led a number of joint actions. GCHR reported on the alarming length of prison sentences for Internet activists and WHRDs, who will spend three or four decades in prison.

## In the Spotlight

GCHR's reporting on Saudi Arabia throughout 2022 demonstrates that the authorities' vicious crackdown on HRDs, WHRDs and civil society actors continues unabated.

A few of the cases that GCHR has continued to raise throughout the past year include those of Yemeni journalist on trial [Ali Mohsen Ahmed Abu Lahoum](#); the trial of [10 Nubian Egyptians](#); the [politicised execution of 81 citizens](#); and the ongoing arbitrary detention of human rights lawyer [Waleed Abu Al-Khair](#). GCHR reported on



attacks against imprisoned HRD [Dr Mohammed Al-Qahtani](#), who has not been heard from since October 2022 after his family complained about the attacks, and was due for release in November 2022. GCHR also reported on and joined joint actions about the arbitrary detention of and [terrorism charges](#) facing [Dr Lina Al-Sharif](#) for her social media activism; and the appalling 34-year prison sentence handed down to WHRD [Salma Al-Shehab](#) and the [45-year prison sentence](#) for Internet activist [Nourah Al-Qahtani](#) for their peaceful online activities.

# SYRIA

The extremely dangerous and oppressive situation facing Syrian civil society continues to make it difficult to gain first-hand accounts of human rights violations from Syria. In 2022, GCHR published one update on Syria.

### In the Spotlight

On 18 April 2022, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad [ratified the Cybercrime Law No. 20 of 2022](#), which includes penalties ranging from one month to 15 years in prison, while fines range from 200,000 to 15 million (approx. 26,700 EUR) Syrian pounds for a group of acts classified by the law as cybercrimes. GCHR condemns this vaguely-defined law, which violates the right to freedom of expression and threatens digital rights and online privacy.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

In 2022, GCHR published eight updates on the UAE and a report on patterns of torture, with a focus on its Board member Ahmed Mansoor, and the many prisoners held past the end of their sentences.



### In the Spotlight

In 2022, GCHR reported on the State Security's [retaliation](#), including by means of ongoing [solitary confinement](#), against prominent HRD Ahmed Mansoor. Mansoor has been held in the notorious Al-Sadr prison near Abu Dhabi serving a 10-year prison sentence handed down on 29 May 2018, by the State Security Chamber of the Abu Dhabi Court of Appeals following a grossly unfair trial on spurious charges.

GCHR has also called for the release of human rights lawyer [Dr Mohammed Al-Roken](#), who completed his arbitrary sentence in retaliation against his peaceful and legitimate work defending Emirati prisoners of conscience on 17 July 2022. He has been held long past his sentence, along with many other HRDs.

GCHR has also continued to raise awareness of the [UAE94](#) and called for their release, along with all other prisoners of conscience in the UAE. GCHR has also highlighted that the security authorities in the UAE continue to target WHRD [Jenan Al-Marzooqi](#), the daughter of the well-known Emirati prisoner of conscience Abdulsalam Mohammed Darwish Al-Marzooqi, due to her peaceful human rights activities.

## YEMEN

In 2022, GCHR published 11 updates on Yemen, many of which focused on harsh prison conditions and unjust prison sentences.

### In the Spotlight

GCHR continues to shed light on the appalling treatment of [journalists](#) (some of whom have even faced the [death penalty](#) in 2022), [internet activists](#) and [WHRDs](#) in Yemen and advocate for the release of imprisoned actress and model [Entisar Al-Hammadi](#), sentenced to five years in prison. Four journalists, Abdulkhaleq Ahmed Amran, Akram Saleh Al-Walidi, Al-Hareth Saleh Hamid and Tawfiq Mohammed Al-Mansouri, are [suffering greatly](#) in prison. Since their arrest in 2015, they have been sentenced to death, then transferred off death row in 2020 - giving them false hope that they would be freed, and are now appealing their sentence while they suffer in very poor detention conditions.



**PART V**

**REGIONAL**

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**OVERVIEW**



Similarly to previous years, arbitrary arrest and detention remain one of the most pervasive forms of repression used against peaceful HRDs across the MENA region, and HRDs and other civil society actors continue to face torture and ill-treatment, particularly in places of detention, with impunity. To counteract this lack of transparency and accountability, in 2022, GCHR has continued to direct its efforts towards reporting on the widespread nature of impunity in the region and attempting to tackle it through innovative legal actions such as cases brought under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Another alarming trend is the concerted efforts of Gulf countries with atrocious human rights records to consolidate their already significant economic and geo-political power by projecting a progressive image on the world stage. One example of this is the publicity generated by Qatar during the FIFA World Cup despite its appalling human rights record. In this regard, GCHR remains vigilant of any increase in oppression and silencing of HRDs and civil society actors that may result from the holding of the COP28 in the UAE from 30 November – 12 December 2023.

The past year has also seen a worrying crackdown on women's rights, particularly in Iran where peaceful protesters continue to bravely demand women's rights and a freer society in spite of the authorities' oppressive tactics, including the arrest of 20,000 and charges resulting in imprisonment and the death penalty.

Finally, as evidenced by the cases documented in the Country Snapshots, the systematic silencing of men and women HRDs, journalists, internet activists, peaceful protesters and other civil society actors through arbitrary arrests and detentions, judicial harassment, enforced disappearance, attacks, threats and assassinations, has been a recurring theme.

# PART VI

# RECOMMENDATIONS



**In light of these patterns of oppression across the region, GCHR recommends that:**

1. Governments across the MENA region repeal vague and punitive legislation that exerts a chilling effect on or even criminalises peaceful human rights work, freedom of expression and freedom of association.
2. Governments across the MENA region enact legislation on human rights, freedom of expression and assembly and information technology in line with international human rights norms.
3. Governments across the MENA region repeal archaic and oppressive laws limiting women's freedom and enact progressive, rights-protecting legislation fit for the modern era.
4. Authorities across the region tackle impunity by enabling thorough, transparent and independent investigations into the perpetration of attacks, assassinations, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture and ill-treatment against HRDs, civil society activists, journalists, lawyers and academics.
5. The international community cease to embolden the region's governments in committing human rights violations with impunity by pandering to the efforts of oppressive countries to sanitise their image on the world stage.



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