

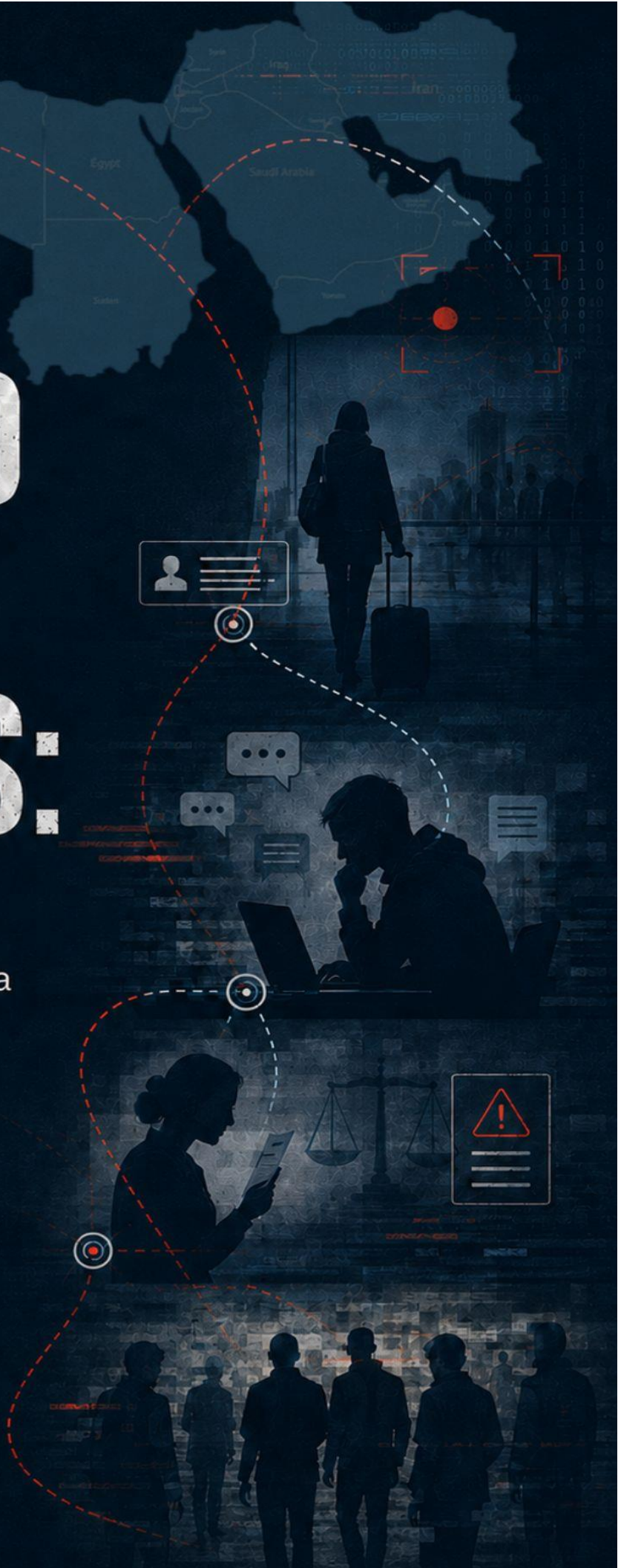
PURSUED BEYOND BORDERS:

Patterns of Transnational
Repression Linked to States in
the Middle East and North Africa



A report by the
Gulf Centre for Human Rights

JUNE 2026



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| Introduction and Scope | 3 |
| Methodology | 4 |
| Legal and Normative Framework | 5 |
| Patterns of Transnational Repression | 7 |
| ■ Pattern 1. Removal, Transfer and Risk of Refoulement | 7 |
| ■ Pattern 2. Direct and Indirect Transnational Intimidation and Reprisals | 10 |
| ■ Pattern 3. Misuse of Legal, Administrative and Security Measures | 12 |
| ■ Pattern 4. Transnational Digital Surveillance..... | 15 |
| Conclusion..... | 18 |
| Recommendations | 19 |

Executive Summary

This report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) documents how transnational repression linked to States in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) restricts and endangers the work of human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists, writers, academics, trade unionists, bloggers and other peaceful civic or political actors abroad, including through pressure on their relatives and associates. Drawing on more than twenty documented or credibly alleged cases connected to seven States in the region — the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Algeria — over the period 2022 to 2026, together with earlier cases that saw significant developments during that period, it relies on GCHR documentation, reports by other human rights and press-freedom organisations, United Nations communications and opinions, national court records and independent technical and forensic investigations. It does not seek to document every relevant case, and distinguishes documented conduct from conduct that is credibly alleged.

It focuses on four recurring patterns: removal, transfer and risk of refoulement; direct and indirect transnational intimidation and reprisals; misuse of legal, administrative and security measures; and transnational digital surveillance. Although the methods differ, they converge on a common aim: to silence, punish or deter peaceful activity carried out from abroad. The report sets out the safeguards required to protect those targeted, prevent refoulement and reprisals, curb abusive legal and security cooperation, ensure accountability and effective remedies, and prevent unlawful or arbitrary cross-border surveillance.

Introduction and Scope

Transnational repression unsettles a core assumption of protection: that leaving the territory of a State can place a person beyond the immediate reach of State-linked coercion. When State authorities, or actors operating with their consent, acquiescence or support, target or exert pressure on individuals abroad to silence, punish, restrict or deter the peaceful exercise of their rights, distance and borders may cease to function reliably as safeguards. The cases examined in this report indicate recurring forms of cross-border pressure affecting safety, liberty, legal status, family members, property, privacy, communications and the ability to continue peaceful public work.

Such conduct weakens the protective function of exile, asylum, residence abroad and engagement with international human rights mechanisms. Individuals who have sought or obtained protection may remain exposed to removal, intimidation, legal or administrative restrictions, digital surveillance or pressure on relatives and associates. Because these measures operate across jurisdictions, they may also engage the responsibilities of States of residence, asylum or transit, including where those States cooperate in transfers, fail to prevent foreseeable harm, or do not provide effective protection, investigation or remedy within their jurisdiction.

In the context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the cases reviewed in this report indicate how cross-border pressure connected to States in the region may reach individuals in countries of residence, asylum or transit. The persons affected include human rights defenders, journalists, writers, academics, trade unionists, bloggers, online commentators and peaceful political or civic actors, as well as family members or associates targeted as a means of exerting pressure on them. The report does not address repression within the region generally, but focuses on cross-border practices linked to the peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights.

This report examines a selection of more than twenty cases of documented or credibly alleged transnational repression connected to seven States in the Middle East and North Africa region: the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Algeria. It covers cases documented during the period 2022 to 2026, as well as earlier cases that were subject to significant developments during that period. It does not seek to document every relevant case, and its scope is shaped by the information available at the time of writing.

The report organises its analysis around four recurring and interrelated patterns: removal, transfer and risk of refoulement; direct and indirect transnational intimidation and reprisals; misuse of legal, administrative and security measures; and transnational digital surveillance. These categories are analytical rather than rigid: a single case may engage more than one pattern. Together, they provide a framework for examining how different tools of cross-border pressure may be used to restrict, punish, isolate or deter peaceful public activity beyond national borders.

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on information gathered and reviewed for its preparation. This includes documentation, reports and urgent appeals by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and other national, regional and international human rights and press-freedom organisations; first-hand information provided directly to GCHR in relation to one documented case; communications and opinions of United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Special Procedures and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; decisions, judgments and official records of national courts and authorities; and, for cases concerning digital surveillance, independent technical and forensic investigations. Where GCHR has directly documented a case, its documentation has been treated as a primary source.

Cases were included where the available information indicated conduct connected to the peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights and a credible cross-border character or effect. The required connection to a State within the report's scope may arise through alleged direct action by State authorities, support, acquiescence, encouragement or cooperation, or through a documented failure to prevent, investigate or remedy harm within its jurisdiction. Each case is examined under one of four patterns, according to the central tool through which the conduct was pursued: removal, transfer and risk of refoulement; direct and indirect transnational intimidation and reprisals; misuse of legal, administrative and security measures; and transnational digital surveillance. Where a case engages more than one pattern, it is placed under the one that best reflects its principal feature.

The report distinguishes documented conduct from conduct that is credibly alleged, and does not present allegations as established findings where the relevant facts or merits remain undetermined, including where judicial proceedings are ongoing, forensic findings are qualified, or attribution to a State is contested. The analysis reflects the information available at the time of writing and does not purport to be exhaustive.

Legal and Normative Framework

International human rights law protects the peaceful exercise of human rights, journalistic, civic, trade union and political activity, including when such activity is carried out from exile or across borders. Transnational repression raises serious human rights and legal concerns when State authorities, or actors acting with their consent, acquiescence or other support, use measures that operate across borders or produce cross-border effects to silence, punish, restrict or deter individuals because of such activity.

Because these practices operate across jurisdictions, the relevant concerns may arise in relation to the State of origin and, where applicable, States of residence, asylum or transit. The State of origin may be implicated where its authorities direct, request, facilitate or contribute to measures targeting persons abroad. States of residence, asylum or transit may also bear responsibilities where they remove or transfer a person to serious harm, facilitate cross-border pressure, or fail to take reasonable steps to prevent or investigate serious harm within their jurisdiction.

The relevant legal framework is grounded in applicable international human rights obligations and standards. For States parties to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), the Covenant provides the principal treaty framework. For States that are not parties to the Covenant, the standards reflected in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) provide an important normative framework. Where applicable, the [Convention against Torture](#) provides relevant treaty obligations, while the [United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) sets out standards relevant to the protection of defenders and their work.

The most acute legal concern arises where a person is removed, extradited, expelled, returned or otherwise transferred, or faces a credible risk of such transfer, to a place where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face torture, ill-treatment, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention or a flagrant denial of justice. In such cases, the prohibition of refoulement requires an individual and effective assessment of risk before any transfer takes place.

Where transnational repression takes forms other than removal or transfer, it may still interfere with protected rights through coercive, judicial, administrative, security or digital measures. Depending on the facts, such measures may affect liberty and security of person; fair-trial guarantees and the principle of legality; privacy and correspondence; freedom of expression, association and movement; protection against arbitrary deprivation of nationality; and protection of property.

For human rights defenders, journalists, trade unionists and peaceful civic or political actors, these obligations and standards are particularly relevant to protection against threats, retaliation and arbitrary interference with legitimate work. Accordingly, the analysis remains factual and cautious, identifying serious human rights concerns arising from documented or credibly alleged conduct without treating allegations as established findings where the facts or merits have not been finally determined.

Patterns of Transnational Repression

Pattern 1.

Removal, Transfer and Risk of Refoulement

Pattern 2.

Direct and Indirect Transnational Intimidation and Reprisals

Pattern 3.

Misuse of Legal, Administrative and Security Measures

Pattern 4.

Transnational Digital Surveillance



Patterns of Transnational Repression

Pattern 1. Removal, Transfer and Risk of Refoulement

Removal, transfer and the risk of refoulement constitute a serious pattern of transnational repression. This pattern covers cases in which human rights defenders, journalists, peaceful opponents or other individuals targeted for the peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights are deported, extradited, expelled, returned or otherwise transferred, or face a serious and documented risk of such removal or transfer, from a country of residence, asylum or transit to a State where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face torture or other serious harm, including enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention or a flagrant denial of justice.

This pattern is grounded in [the principle of non-refoulement](#), which prohibits States from removing or transferring any person to a State where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face such harm, and which requires an individual and effective assessment of that risk before any removal or transfer takes place. Responsibility may arise where a State carries out, facilitates, requests or otherwise directly contributes to such removal or transfer. Judicial, administrative, security or other measures related to the International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) fall under this pattern only where they are directly linked to deportation, extradition, expulsion, return or other transfer, or to a credible risk of such removal, transfer or refoulement.

Egypt



Mariam Mohamed El-Sayed Abdel Baset, an Egyptian opposition activist legally residing in Oman since 2021, [faced](#) a serious and foreseeable risk of forced return to Egypt, where she has reportedly been named as a defendant in Case No. 1871 of 2026 on broadly worded security-related charges linked by the Law and Democracy Support Foundation to her peaceful online activities. According to the Foundation, she was prevented from leaving Muscat Airport, verbally informed of an INTERPOL-related travel ban, questioned without legal counsel, and later held in a military medical facility following childbirth, registered as a “prisoner” without a publicly disclosed legal basis, before Omani authorities [allowed](#) her on 07 June 2026 to leave the hospital and return to her residence in Muscat with her newborn, while issues relating to restrictions on movement and travel documents remained unresolved. This risk was reinforced by the earlier [deportation](#) of her husband, **Ahmed Moussa**, to Cairo on 09 April 2026 under the same verbally invoked INTERPOL-related pretext. Her possible forced return raised serious concerns under the principle of non-refoulement, given the security-related proceedings she faces in Egypt.

Jordan

Daham Al-Amoush, a Jordanian engineer and online critic who had been living and working in Qatar, was forcibly [returned](#) from Qatar to Jordan with the assistance of INTERPOL after Jordanian authorities reopened an old criminal case against him in connection with his critical online writings, according to GCHR. GCHR reported that he was detained upon arrival without trial, repeatedly denied bail, and later began a hunger strike to protest his detention. His health deteriorated severely in custody, and he died in March 2026 following a detention-related medical crisis. His forcible cross-border return, followed by arbitrary detention and subsequent death, raises serious concerns regarding the misuse of INTERPOL channels and arbitrary deprivation of liberty.



Kuwait



Salman Al-Khalidi, a Kuwaiti blogger and activist defending the rights of the Bedoon community and prisoners of conscience, was [arrested](#) by Iraqi security forces at Baghdad International Airport on 01 January 2025 and handed over to Kuwaiti authorities at the Al-Abdali border crossing, despite having been granted political asylum in the United Kingdom on 29 December 2023. According to GCHR, his transfer followed multiple *in absentia* prison sentences [issued](#) against him in Kuwait in connection with his peaceful online expression and human rights activities. His handover by Iraq raises serious concerns under the principle of non-refoulement, as it exposed him to detention and enforcement of pre-existing *in absentia* sentences linked to those activities. GCHR reported that he was subsequently [sentenced](#) on 11 January 2026 to 15 years' imprisonment with hard labour.

Mesaed Al-Musaileem, a Kuwaiti blogger and online activist, was forcibly returned by Malaysian authorities to Kuwait on 31 May 2025 while seeking to re-register his protection file with UNHCR in Malaysia. According to GCHR, Kuwaiti authorities directly [coordinated](#) with Malaysian authorities in connection with his deportation; he was taken into custody upon return; and he faces pre-existing prison sentences in Kuwait amounting to at least 30 years in connection with his peaceful online expression and human rights activities. His forcible return by Malaysia raises serious concerns under the principle of non-refoulement, as it exposed him to detention and enforcement of pre-existing prison sentences linked to those peaceful activities.



Saudi Arabia



Abdulrahman Al-Khalidi, a Saudi human rights defender and advocate for detainees' rights, [faces](#) a continuing documented risk of deportation from Bulgaria to Saudi Arabia following an expulsion order issued by Bulgaria's National Security Agency in February 2024. According to GCHR, Al-Khalidi left Saudi Arabia in 2013, sought asylum in Bulgaria in 2021, and remains in detention after Bulgarian authorities issued a new [order](#) on 26 September 2025 extending his detention, despite a prior administrative court decision ordering his release. ALQST [reported](#) that Bulgaria's Supreme Administrative Court rejected appeals against his detention in July 2025 and February 2026. GCHR has [warned](#) that returning him to Saudi Arabia would violate Bulgaria's non-refoulement obligations, given the real risk of torture or other ill-treatment linked to his peaceful human rights activities.

United Arab Emirates



Abdulrahman Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian-Turkish poet, writer and political activist residing in Türkiye, was arrested by Lebanese authorities on 28 December 2024 at the Masnaa border crossing and extradited to the United Arab Emirates on 08 January 2025, despite a legal challenge before the Lebanese State Shura Council to halt the extradition. According to [a joint statement](#) by GCHR and other organisations, the extradition followed a request reportedly issued by the UAE Public Prosecution in connection with his public political expression. United Nations experts had [warned](#) Lebanon that he risked torture, ill-treatment or enforced disappearance if transferred; a subsequent November 2025 United Nations Special Procedures communication [raised](#) allegations of prolonged solitary confinement. His extradition by Lebanon, carried out despite this explicit warning, raises serious concerns under the principle of non-refoulement, including the prohibition on return to torture under Article 3 of [the Convention against Torture](#).

Dr. Khalaf Abdulrahman Al-Romaithi, an Emirati-Turkish businessman, human rights defender and member of the "[UAE94](#)" group residing in Türkiye, was [arrested](#) by Jordanian authorities at Queen Alia International Airport on 07 May 2023, released on bail, then re-arrested the following day and transferred to the United Arab Emirates. According to GCHR, the transfer [resulted](#) from cooperation between the Jordanian Intelligence Service and the UAE State Security Apparatus, despite his release on bail and pending judicial proceedings in Jordan. Human Rights Watch had [warned](#) beforehand that his return exposed him to serious risks of arbitrary detention, unfair trial and possible torture, particularly given his 2013 *in absentia* conviction in the "UAE94" mass trial. His transfer by Jordan, carried out despite those warnings, raises serious concerns under the [principle of non-refoulement](#), given the documented risks identified in advance.



Pattern 2. Direct and Indirect Transnational Intimidation and Reprisals

Direct and indirect transnational intimidation and reprisals constitute a documented pattern of transnational repression used to silence human rights defenders, journalists and peaceful opponents abroad, or to punish them for the peaceful exercise of their rights. This pattern may include threats, harassment, physical assault, abduction or attempted abduction, killing or attempted killing, as well as the targeting of family members, relatives or associates in the country of origin or residence when such targeting is used to pressure the person abroad or deter them from continuing their peaceful human rights, journalistic or political activities.

Cases are included under this pattern where the central tool is intimidation or reprisal and where there is a documented link between the targeting and the peaceful activity of the person concerned. Inclusion also requires reasonable grounds to attribute the act to the authorities of the State concerned or their agents, or to indicate that other actors allegedly operated with their acquiescence, consent or encouragement, or in a context of documented failure to prevent or investigate the violation. The mere occurrence of harm, threats or family targeting is not sufficient; there must be documented indications that the targeting served to intimidate, punish, isolate or influence the person's activities across borders.

Algeria



Amir Boukhors, also known as “Amir DZ”, is an Algerian opposition figure and online activist living in France, where he was granted political asylum in 2023. He was reportedly [abducted](#) near his home in Val-de-Marne on 29 April 2024 and released the following day. In April 2025, French prosecutors [indicted](#) three individuals, including an employee of an Algerian consulate in France, on charges including abduction, unlawful detention and illegal confinement in connection with a terrorist enterprise. The alleged abduction of an exiled opposition figure, together with the reported involvement of a consular employee of his State of origin, raises serious concerns regarding Algeria's obligations under articles 9 and 19 of the [ICCPR](#).

Ahmed Mansri, head of the Tiaret branch of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, left Algeria and applied for asylum with the UNHCR after facing arrest over his human rights activities. According to the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), his family later [faced](#) harassment and intimidation in Algeria. On 22 September 2024, security services in Ksar El Chelala apprehended his brother, searched the brother's home, detained the brother's wife and minor children, and later arrested Mansri's father and another brother. Family members were questioned about Mansri's whereabouts and who had assisted him in leaving Algeria, and authorities reportedly threatened to arrest family members if he continued publishing content deemed harmful to national interest and security. These reported acts raise serious concerns regarding Algeria's obligations under [ICCPR](#) articles 9, 17 and 19 and the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#).



Bahrain

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, a Bahraini human rights defender and advocacy director at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, was granted asylum in the United Kingdom. On 22 February 2024, his brother-in-law, **Hashem Al-Wadaei**, was reportedly arrested in Bahrain after a house raid and allegedly ill-treated in detention. In joint communication [AL BHR 1/2024](#), United Nations Special Procedures expressed concern that Hashem may have been targeted because of his family ties to Alwadaei, in measures apparently aimed at intimidating Alwadaei and impairing his cooperation with United Nations mechanisms. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention had previously found the detention of some of Alwadaei's relatives to be arbitrary and in reprisal for that cooperation ([Opinion No. 51/2018](#)). These reported acts raise serious concerns regarding Bahrain's obligations under ICCPR articles 7, 9, 17 and 19 and the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.



Egypt



Basma Mostafa, an Egyptian investigative journalist and human rights defender exiled in Berlin, was reportedly subjected to harassment, intimidation, surveillance and physical assault in connection with her journalistic and human rights work. In joint communication [AL EGY 6/2024](#), United Nations Special Procedures mandate holders expressed concern over alleged transnational repression in Germany and Switzerland by Egyptian State agents or actors apparently acting on behalf of, or with the acquiescence of, Egyptian authorities.

The allegations included threats, surveillance and physical attacks in Berlin, and incidents near Geneva in June 2024, where she was reportedly followed to her hotel in Versoix and later approached by a man claiming to be a police officer who said he could arrest her while she was in Geneva to engage with UN human rights mechanisms and OHCHR. These reported acts raise serious concerns under [ICCPR](#) articles 9, 17 and 19 and the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the [United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#).



Seif al-Islam Eid, an Egyptian researcher and podcast host living in exile, was reportedly subjected to pressure through the repeated targeting of his father, **Sobhy Ahmed Eid**, in Egypt in connection with his podcast and media activities abroad. According to [a joint statement](#) by the Committee to Protect Journalists and 18 human rights and press freedom organisations, his father was arrested on 22 October 2025 following a raid on his home in Alexandria, while other family members were questioned about Seif al-Islam Eid's activities abroad. The statement also documented a prior arrest on 30 April 2025, during

which his father was held for 18 days and interrogated about his son's work outside Egypt. These reported acts raise serious concerns under articles 9, 17 and 19 of [the ICCPR](#).

Pattern 3. Misuse of Legal, Administrative and Security Measures

This pattern covers cases in which legal, administrative or security measures are allegedly misused to pursue, punish, restrict or discredit human rights defenders, journalists and peaceful political or civic actors abroad. Such measures may also be used to exert pressure on them by affecting relatives, property, nationality, documentation or legal status in the country of origin, residence, asylum or transit. They may include politically motivated prosecutions, *in absentia* judgments, security or terrorism-related classifications, State security proceedings, nationality revocation, travel bans, denial or withdrawal of passports and official documents, consular restrictions, asset freezes and other financial or administrative restrictions connected to the person's peaceful human rights, journalistic, civic or political activities.

Cases are included under this pattern where the central tool of repression is a formal legal, administrative or security measure with a cross-border function or effect, other than removal, transfer or a credible risk of refoulement, including where such a measure restricts the person abroad or affects relatives, property, nationality, documentation or legal status in order to punish, pressure or silence them. Applicable standards may include, depending on the State concerned and the facts of the case, the rights to freedom of movement, fair trial, privacy, freedom of expression and association, the protection of property, the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality under international human rights law, and, where relevant, the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Algeria



Manar Mansri, an Algerian journalist and activist who fled Algeria in November 2018 and relocated to Türkiye in 2019, was placed in February 2022 on Algeria's national list of terrorist persons and entities, published in the [Official Journal](#), on the basis of her alleged affiliation with RACHAD, an Algerian opposition movement that the Algerian authorities designated as a "terrorist organisation" in 2021. According to the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), on 02 January 2023 the criminal court of first instance in Dar El-Beïda, Algiers, [sentenced](#) her *in absentia* to 20 years in prison and confirmed an international arrest warrant, in connection with alleged subversive acts during forest fires in Tipaza in November 2020 - events the same source notes occurred two years after she had left the country. Such acts are consistent with the misuse of terrorism listings and *in absentia* criminal proceedings to criminalise a journalist and activist in exile, raising serious concerns regarding Algeria's obligations under articles 14, 15 and 19 of the [ICCPR](#).

Hamza Kherroubi, an Algerian trade unionist living in Belgium since 2020 who is the spokesperson for the Confederation of Productive Forces Unions, was sentenced *in absentia* in Algeria in December 2023 to 20 years in prison on charges that, according to CIHRS, are [linked](#) to his union activities. The charges reportedly include establishing and managing a terrorist or sabotage group under article 87 bis of the Penal Code, recruiting for a terrorist organisation through information technologies, and spreading false news harmful to public order. Such acts are consistent with the misuse of *in absentia* proceedings and broadly framed counterterrorism provisions to criminalise an exiled trade unionist for peaceful labour and civic activity, raising serious concerns regarding Algeria's obligations under articles 14, 15, 19 and 22 of the [ICCPR](#).



Egypt

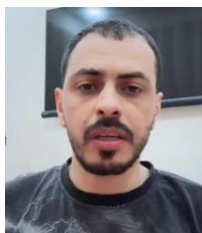


Taqadum Al-Khatib, an Egyptian academic and researcher in exile in Germany since 2013, was referred *in absentia* to trial in Case No. 29/2025 before the Terrorism Circuits of Badr Court, alongside 168 others, on charges including “joining a terrorist group.” According to [a joint statement](#) by human rights organisations, including EuroMed Rights, the prosecution is linked to his research and documentation on the Tiran and Sanafir case, concerning the transfer of sovereignty over the two Red Sea islands from Egypt to Saudi Arabia. The statement also documented the revocation of his doctoral scholarship, an order to return to Egypt, his dismissal while abroad, and repeated obstacles in obtaining official documents from the Egyptian Embassy in Berlin. These reported acts are consistent with the misuse of *in absentia* terrorism proceedings and consular restrictions to criminalise an academic in exile for peaceful research and expression, raising serious concerns regarding Egypt’s obligations under articles 12, 14, 15 and 19 of the [ICCPR](#).

Mohamed Soltan, a US citizen and human rights defender based in the United States, was sentenced *in absentia* to life imprisonment on 24 June 2025 by a Cairo terrorism court in Case No. 1766 of 2022. According to [a joint statement](#) by human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, the conviction forms part of a pattern of prosecutions against peaceful critics living outside Egypt and appears to constitute an act of reprisal for Soltan's advocacy on behalf of his detained father, Dr. **Salah Soltan**. Such acts are consistent with the misuse of *in absentia* proceedings before a terrorism court to punish a human rights defender abroad for peaceful advocacy, raising serious concerns regarding Egypt's obligations under articles 14, 15 and 19 of the [ICCPR](#) and the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the [United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#).



Jordan



Laith Aldararjeh, a Jordanian activist living in Tbilisi, Georgia, told GCHR that he left Jordan in 2022 following pressure and threats linked to his public and political activities. According to information provided to GCHR, after his Georgian asylum application was rejected in 2024, his passport was reportedly lost during the proceedings, and he therefore requested a replacement Jordanian passport to regularise his legal status or travel to a third country. He stated that Jordanian authorities refused to issue one and indicated that he could obtain only a return document to Jordan. GCHR reviewed an electronic response dated 12 February 2026 referring to a “legal ban” and directing him to the Civil Status and Passports Department’s Legal Affairs Department in Amman; he also reported being verbally informed that the refusal was linked to Jordan’s General Intelligence Department. In this context, the refusal raises concerns under article 12 of the [ICCPR](#).

Kuwait

Fawaz Al-Kathiri, a Kuwaiti political dissident and online activist living in exile, had his citizenship and that of his sons revoked by Kuwaiti authorities, according to GCHR. A year later, GCHR [documented](#) that, on 04 May 2026, authorities revoked the nationality of Al-Kathiri's father,



Nayef Rakhees Dhahi Al-Fadhli, and several other relatives under Nationality Law No. 15 of 1959, one week after seizing the family's movable and immovable assets. According to GCHR, the family held no other nationality and had not acquired citizenship through naturalisation or forgery. Such acts are consistent with the misuse of nationality measures and asset seizure to punish an exiled political opponent and pressure him through his family, raising concerns regarding Kuwait's obligations under [ICCP](#) articles 17 and 19 and the standards reflected in [UDHR](#) articles 15 and 17.

United Arab Emirates



Ahmed Mohammed Al-Shaiba Al-Nuaimi, an Emirati human rights defender living in exile in the United Kingdom, was sentenced *in absentia* on 02 July 2013 to 15 years in prison in the [UAE94 mass trial](#), which GCHR described as lacking fair-trial and due-process standards. On 13 September 2021, the UAE Cabinet added Al-Nuaimi and other exiled UAE94 defendants to the national terrorism list; United Nations experts [expressed](#) concern that the listing was adopted without access to evidence, an opportunity to defend themselves, or an effective appeal. On 08 January 2025, the authorities further [listed](#) eight companies registered in the United Kingdom on the national terrorism list, three of them registered to Al-Nuaimi, according to Human Rights Watch. Such reported acts are consistent with the misuse of *in absentia* proceedings, terrorism listings and related financial measures to constrain an exiled defender abroad, raising serious concerns regarding the standards reflected in articles 10, 11 and 19 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and article 12(2) of the [United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#).

Pattern 4. Transnational Digital Surveillance

Transnational digital surveillance constitutes a distinct pattern of transnational repression when state authorities, or actors acting with their acquiescence or support, use spyware, hacking tools, attempted unauthorised access to devices or accounts, communications monitoring, or arbitrary or unlawful collection of digital data to target human rights defenders, journalists or peaceful dissidents outside the state's territory. The defining feature of this pattern is not merely the use of technology, but the deployment of intrusive digital capabilities to monitor, identify, expose or undermine the ability of individuals to operate safely because of their peaceful human rights, journalistic or political activity abroad, including by mapping their contacts, sources, networks or private communications.

Cases are included under this pattern where the central repressive tool is documented or credibly alleged digital surveillance, attempted intrusion, unauthorised access, communications monitoring or arbitrary or unlawful collection of digital data, including on the basis of independent technical or digital forensic investigations. This pattern primarily engages the right to privacy and protection from arbitrary interference with correspondence, and freedom of expression - reflected, depending on the State concerned and the facts of the case, in articles 17 and 19 of the [ICCPR](#) or in articles 12 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - and, where relevant, the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Bahrain



Yusuf Al-Jamri, a Bahraini human rights blogger and activist based in the United Kingdom, was [identified](#) by Citizen Lab and Red Line for Gulf as having been targeted with NSO Group's Pegasus spyware. On 14 November 2024, the High Court of England and Wales [permitted](#) Al-Jamri to serve his legal claim against the Kingdom of Bahrain concerning alleged Pegasus attacks, following independent analysis indicating that his mobile device had been hacked in August 2019, with no final determination on the merits. Such reported acts are consistent with the use of intrusive digital surveillance to monitor and constrain an activist in exile because of his peaceful public activity, raising serious concerns regarding Bahrain's obligations under articles 17 and 19 of the [ICCPR](#) and the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the [United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#).

Dr Saeed Shehabi, a Bahraini opposition figure, and **Moosa Mohammed**, a Bahraini activist, both residing in the United Kingdom, have alleged before British courts that, from around September 2011, Bahrain's servants or agents used FinSpy spyware to infect their UK-based computers, access files and monitor communications and work concerning political prisoners in Bahrain. On 04 October 2024, the Court of Appeal dismissed Bahrain's state-immunity appeal, holding that alleged remote hacking of computers in the United Kingdom could constitute an act within the UK under the State Immunity Act 1978; the merits remain undetermined and Bahrain denies responsibility. Such reported acts are consistent with intrusive digital surveillance against exiled activists for peaceful political and human rights activity, raising concerns regarding Bahrain's obligations under articles 17 and 19 of the ICCPR and the standards reflected in article 12(2) of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.



Saudi Arabia



Yahya Assiri, a Saudi human rights defender and founder of ALQST for Human Rights, was targeted between 2018 and 2020 with Pegasus and QuaDream spyware while residing in the United Kingdom. According to GCHR, independent analysis by Citizen Lab confirmed that his devices had been infected and used to secretly gather and extract data, putting at risk the privacy of persons with whom he had communicated. GCHR further documented that, on 11 October 2024, the High Court of England and Wales granted Assiri permission to serve a legal claim against Saudi Arabia concerning misuse of private information, harassment and trespass to goods, finding an arguable case. Such acts are consistent with the use of intrusive digital surveillance to monitor and constrain a human rights defender in exile for his peaceful work, raising serious concerns regarding the standards reflected in articles 12 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in article 12(2) of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.



Ghanem Al-Masarir, a Saudi human rights activist and political commentator based in the United Kingdom, was targeted in June 2018 through the hacking of two iPhones with Pegasus spyware, as found by the High Court of England and Wales. In a judgment delivered on 26 January 2026, the Court granted summary judgment in his claim against Saudi Arabia, awarding damages exceeding £3 million and finding that his phones had been hacked with Pegasus and that this conduct was directed or authorised by Saudi Arabia or its agents. Such acts are consistent with the use of intrusive digital surveillance to monitor, expose and constrain a dissident in exile for his peaceful criticism and political activity, raising serious concerns regarding the standards reflected in articles 12 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in article 12(2) of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

United Arab Emirates



Rania Dridi, a Tunisian-born British journalist based in London, was [identified](#) by Citizen Lab as having had her mobile phone hacked with Pegasus spyware at least six times between October 2019 and July 2020. Citizen Lab [assessed](#) with medium confidence that the Pegasus operator designated SNEAKY KESTREL acted on behalf of the United Arab Emirates. On 20 March 2024, the High Court of England and Wales [permitted](#) Dridi to serve her legal claim against the United Arab Emirates concerning the alleged spyware attacks, finding an arguable case, while the merits remain undetermined. Such reported acts are consistent with intrusive digital surveillance against a London-based journalist, raising serious concerns regarding the rights to privacy and freedom of expression reflected in articles 12 and 19 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

Conclusion

The cases examined in this report show that transnational repression operates not through a single method but through a range of tools that are frequently combined. Across the four patterns, individuals faced forcible return or its threat, intimidation and reprisals, the misuse of legal, administrative and security measures, and digital surveillance. What links these otherwise distinct measures is a common objective: to silence, punish or deter the peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights from abroad.

These patterns also show that exile, asylum and residence abroad do not always provide effective protection. Many of those targeted had obtained refugee status, asylum or another nationality, or were actively seeking international protection, yet were still reached, while their relatives remained exposed in the country of origin. For these individuals, neither distance nor formal legal status consistently placed them beyond the reach of the State or State-linked actors that targeted them.

A defining feature of this conduct is its reliance on the apparatus of the State and on inter-State cooperation. Judicial processes, including *in absentia* prosecutions and extradition, and security measures, including terrorism listings and intelligence or police cooperation through INTERPOL-related channels, were used as means of pressure against individuals abroad. Administrative measures affecting nationality, documents and property, and digital surveillance tools served a similar function. Repression exercised through formal legal, administrative and security channels may be more difficult to contest and remedy than overt coercion.

The cases also indicate that responsibilities may arise across more than one jurisdiction. They may lie, in the first place, with the State alleged to have directed, requested or otherwise contributed to the targeting of individuals abroad, or pursued them through their families, property, nationality or legal status - most often the individual's State of origin, but in some cases a State that targeted a person who was not its national. They may also extend to States of residence, asylum or transit where these States transferred individuals who faced a real risk of serious harm - at times despite explicit prior warnings and through security or police cooperation - or failed to prevent, investigate or remedy intimidation, reprisals and surveillance within their jurisdiction. The documented death in custody in Jordan after a forcible return illustrates the gravity of the risks that such transfers and protective failures may entail.

Across these cases, aspects of the conduct have been examined by national courts and United Nations human rights mechanisms, and in several instances independent technical analysis has established the targeting. Yet many proceedings remain unresolved, effective remedies remain limited or unavailable in many of the cases, and individuals have continued to be targeted in connection with their cooperation with those mechanisms. Because the conduct is distributed across distinct tools and more than one responsible actor, an effective response cannot rest on any single measure or addressee. It requires specific and corresponding steps by States alleged to have directed, carried out, supported or acquiesced in the conduct, States of residence, asylum or transit, bodies engaged in police, judicial and security cooperation, actors involved in surveillance technology, and United Nations mechanisms and partners. The following recommendations are addressed to each accordingly.

Recommendations

To States alleged to be involved in transnational repression

1. Cease intimidation, reprisals and other coercive measures against human rights defenders, journalists, writers, academics, trade unionists and other peaceful civic or political actors abroad on account of the peaceful exercise of their rights, including pressure directed at their relatives or associates;
2. Withdraw and refrain from pursuing extradition requests, arrest requests, international notices or security cooperation requests linked to the peaceful exercise of protected rights or likely to expose the person concerned to a real risk of serious harm;
3. Review and rescind abusive *in absentia* proceedings and convictions, terrorism or security listings, nationality revocations, asset freezes, passport denials, document restrictions and consular measures used to pressure persons abroad or their relatives;
4. Cease and refrain from directing, authorising, financing or facilitating unlawful or arbitrary spyware use or other intrusive surveillance against human rights defenders, journalists and peaceful critics abroad;
5. Investigate credible allegations of such conduct promptly, independently and impartially hold those responsible to account where violations are established; and provide effective remedies, including lifting abusive or unlawful measures and restoring nationality, documents and property where relevant.

To States of residence, asylum or transit

1. Refrain from extraditing, expelling, returning or transferring any person to a State where there are substantial grounds for believing they would face torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, a flagrant denial of justice or other serious harm; carry out an individual risk assessment beforehand, and suspend any transfer where United Nations bodies or other credible sources have warned of such a risk;
2. Refrain from acting on extradition, security or administrative requests that are retaliatory or linked to protected activity, including those conveyed through intelligence or police channels;
3. Before any removal, inform the person of the reasons, ensure access to legal counsel and a real opportunity to challenge the decision, and guarantee access to asylum procedures; refrain from arbitrary or prolonged detention or penalisation solely in connection with pending protection claims;
4. Protect persons targeted on their territory, and investigate promptly and independently any threat, surveillance, abduction or attack against them, including where a foreign State or its agents are involved.

To States, INTERPOL and bodies involved in police, judicial and security cooperation

1. Prevent the use of extradition requests, INTERPOL notices and police or judicial cooperation to locate, detain, transfer or harass human rights defenders, journalists, trade unionists and other peaceful civic or political actors abroad;
2. Screen and reject requests, notices and cooperation that are politically motivated or linked to the peaceful exercise of protected rights, and establish the safeguards and independent review needed to detect such abuse;
3. Refrain from giving effect to any request, notice or cooperation that would lead to refoulement, arbitrary detention, an unfair trial or other serious harm;
4. Notify affected persons and provide an effective means to challenge abusive requests or notices and to obtain the deletion or correction of related records.

To States and relevant surveillance technology companies

States should:

1. Refrain from acquiring, deploying, authorising or facilitating spyware or other intrusive surveillance where there is a serious risk it will be used to target human rights defenders, journalists or peaceful critics unlawfully or arbitrarily;
2. Investigate such surveillance promptly and independently, and ensure accountability and effective remedies, including compensation, for victims;
3. Establish and enforce export, licensing and transfer controls on surveillance technology, and suspend or refuse transfers where there is a serious risk of misuse.

Relevant surveillance technology companies should:

1. Refrain from selling, licensing or servicing such technology where there is a serious risk it will be used against human rights defenders, journalists or peaceful critics, and conduct human rights due diligence to prevent, mitigate and remedy any misuse of their products.

To United Nations mechanisms and international partners

1. Continue to raise the documented cases and patterns with the States concerned, and seek clear, verifiable guarantees against refoulement, reprisals, the misuse of police and judicial cooperation, and unlawful surveillance;
2. Strengthen protective responses and follow-up for those who cooperate, or seek to cooperate, with United Nations mechanisms, including against reprisals aimed at their relatives;
3. Integrate transnational repression systematically into human rights monitoring, reporting and engagement, including the targeting of relatives and the misuse of counter-terrorism and police-cooperation channels;
4. Support affected persons' access to protection and effective remedies, and sustain independent documentation of transnational repression and its impact on exiled communities.

Contact us

Gulf Centre for Human Rights

-  Website: www.gc4hr.org
-  Email: info@gc4hr.org
-  Facebook: [/GC4HR](https://www.facebook.com/GC4HR)
-  Instagram: [/GC4HR](https://www.instagram.com/GC4HR)
-  X: [@GulfCentre4HR](https://twitter.com/GulfCentre4HR)
-  YouTube: [@gulfcentre4humanrights](https://www.youtube.com/@gulfcentre4humanrights)
-  Bluesky: [@gulfcentre4hr.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/gulfcentre4hr.bsky.social)
-  LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/gchr>



“

Exile must never mean the loss of one's rights. When repression crosses borders, protection must cross them too.”

— Gulf Centre for Human Rights