

Exploiting the Wartime Context

Patterns of Repression in the Gulf Region
and Neighbouring Countries

EXPRESSION
DETENTION
NATIONALITY
RESIDENCE
RETURNS



SEPTEMBER 2026



Censored

Restricted

Blocked

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Executive Summary

This report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) examines restrictive and coercive measures reportedly taken by states in connection with the regional war, following the renewed escalation of hostilities on 28 February, 2026. It covers selected developments from that date until the time of writing in September 2026 in Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The report identifies three interconnected patterns: restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information; arrest, detention, and imprisonment for war-related media coverage, commentary, satire, or peaceful assembly; and measures affecting nationality, residency, deportation, or return. The documented measures range from the geo-blocking of entire accounts, internet shutdowns, and interference with broadcasts to lengthy prison sentences, incommunicado detention, deprivation of nationality, and restrictions preventing return.

Despite varying circumstances and legal grounds, national security and public order, alleged disinformation, defence concerns, and alleged sympathy with an enemy state were repeatedly invoked in several cases without sufficient publicly available information to identify the specific conduct targeted, the individual reasons, or the available avenues for review.

When these documented cases are examined collectively, they align with GCHR's assessment that governments have exploited this regional conflict to completely stifle public freedoms, particularly freedom of expression and access to information.

The consequences have been severe across these three patterns, especially when measures have resulted in prolonged imprisonment, statelessness, or the risk of statelessness, disproportionately affecting women and children, as well as other family members, and preventing individuals from remaining in or returning to the country in question. The report outlines the safeguards and remedial measures necessary to protect freedom of expression and access to information during conflict, prevent arbitrary deprivation of liberty and statelessness, protect family unity, and ensure independent review and effective remedies.

GCHR calls on governments to release people detained solely for peacefully exercising protected rights and to end arbitrary or disproportionate restrictions; technology companies to conduct human rights due diligence on government requests, notify affected users, provide meaningful and accessible appeal mechanisms, and restore accounts or content when restrictions appear to be unjustified; and international partners to press for urgent remedial measures where harm continues.

Introduction

Periods of armed conflict can place exceptional pressure on civic space and on the human rights safeguards governing the exercise of State power. Security concerns invoked during such periods do not, in themselves, displace States' human rights obligations. Where those concerns are used to restrict peaceful expression, impede independent scrutiny or justify coercive measures, they may intensify or extend repressive practices that pre-date the conflict.

The regional hostilities that form the context of this report entered a new phase on 28 February 2026, when a regional war involving several Gulf states [began](#), bringing the hostilities directly to the region. In the weeks and months that followed, GCHR documented a tightening of restrictions on public freedoms across the Gulf region and neighbouring countries.

In reports published on [19 March](#) and [02 April 2026](#), GCHR described the actions of authorities in a number of countries as exploiting the wartime context to suppress freedom of expression online and offline and to target individuals whose views did not align with official policies.

In a third report published on [16 September 2026](#), GCHR documented additional arbitrary measures, including deprivation of nationality, cancellation of residence status, expulsion and restrictions on return, in connection with the war and the resulting regional crisis.

The documented arbitrary measures varied in form, legal nature, and scope. Some restricted the dissemination, circulation, or receipt of information related to the war, including through controls affecting online platforms, internet access, and broadcasting. Others included more direct and harmful measures against targeted citizens, such as arbitrary arrest and detention, followed by imprisonment after sham trials on fabricated charges related to photography, media coverage, commentary, satire, peaceful assembly, alleged sympathy with a foreign state, religious activity, and the activity of a relative that was considered hostile. In general, the authorities targeted the peaceful activities of innocent citizens, deeming them a threat to national security and public order, and an impediment to the country's defence.

Assessing the combined impact of these measures on society at large and on the citizens targeted by them in particular, it can be said that they affected public access to information, freedom of movement, legal status, family life, and, in some cases, the ability to remain in or return to a country.

Scope of the Report

Cases were included where the available information indicated a connection between the State measure and the wartime context, including through the content concerned, the authorities' stated or reported reasons, or the documented circumstances in which the measure was applied to an individual or group. Timing alone was not treated as sufficient. The nature and strength of that connection differ between cases and are reflected in the assessment. Inclusion of a case does not, in itself, establish that a violation occurred; each case is assessed in light of its particular facts and under the applicable human rights framework.

Covering the period from 28 February 2026 to the time of writing in September 2026, the report examines selected developments in Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It encompasses individual cases, collective measures affecting larger groups and restrictions with broader consequences for public access to information.

Those affected include citizens, non-national residents and visitors; journalists, human rights defenders, researchers, activists, online commentators, content creators and religious figures; children and other family members; and media outlets and civil society organisations. The report seeks to identify recurring forms of repression documented during the wartime period and to assess the principal State measure in each case or group of cases.

The analysis draws on GCHR's documentation; interviews conducted by GCHR with affected individuals; official statements and records; communications from United Nations human rights mechanisms; and reporting by other human rights and press freedom organisations and reputable media outlets. Where individual decisions, charges, stated reasons, supporting evidence or avenues of review were not publicly available, the report identifies those limitations. The report focuses on the human rights implications of State measures reportedly connected with the wartime context. It does not assess the conduct of military operations or the compliance of the parties to the conflict with international humanitarian law.

The analysis is organised around three recurring and interrelated patterns: restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information; deprivation of liberty through arrest, detention or imprisonment; and deprivation of nationality, cancellation of residence status, expulsion or restrictions on return. These categories are analytical rather than rigid: a single sequence of events may engage more than one pattern, and cases are placed under the pattern corresponding to the principal State action under consideration. Together, these patterns provide a framework for examining the distinct yet overlapping human rights implications of the State measures documented in the cases reviewed.

PATTERNS OF REPRESSION



PATTERNS OF REPRESSION

01

Pattern 1: Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

Restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information constitute a recurring pattern of repression that intensified during the wartime period examined in this report. This pattern covers cases in which State authorities or public bodies restrict the publication, circulation or receipt of war-related information through geo-blocking and account restrictions, internet shutdowns, interference with broadcasting, compelled removal or correction of content, or prior restraints on publication. Although these measures differ in form and reach, their defining feature is interference with the ability of individuals and the public to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.

Cases are included under this pattern where the central measure is a restriction on expression or access to information, rather than deprivation of liberty. The right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas is recognised in [Article 19](#) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, for States parties to the respective treaties, in [Article 19](#) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and [Article 32](#) of the Arab Charter on Human Rights. The assessment considers whether the measure was provided by law, pursued a recognised legitimate aim, and was necessary and proportionate, taking into account its stated purpose, scope and connection to any specific threat invoked. Restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information are viewed as falling within the framework of Pattern 1.

Iran

GCHR [reported](#) that internet access in Iran had been almost completely shut down, leaving citizens unable to access social media while only the authorities and affiliated media outlets could operate online within the country. Filterwatch [reported](#) that the near-total nationwide shutdown of international internet access began on 28 February 2026, immediately following military strikes on Iran, while Cloudflare [recorded](#) traffic from Iran falling to well under 1% of previous levels.

Against this background, Iran International, a Farsi-language broadcaster, [told](#) the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on 15 March 2026 that attempts from within Iran to jam the satellite carrying its signal had forced the channel off air. CPJ also reported that Iranian authorities had threatened satellites and infrastructure linked to the broadcaster, while an IRGC spokesperson accused it of attempting to “wage psychological warfare against the Iranian people”. Taken together, the nationwide shutdown and reported interference with Iran International’s signal restricted access to war-related information on a sweeping scale, raising serious concerns that the measures sought to achieve an illegitimate objective that was unnecessary or disproportionate under the applicable freedom of expression framework.

Iraq

Al-Jazeera English was [ordered](#) on 29 March 2026 by the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) to remove a report concerning the bombing of Habbaniyah military camp or broadcast an official correction consistent with the Iraqi State's position. The warning, issued under Order No. 65 of 2004, alleged that the report contained inaccurate or misleading information and undermined State institutions, and stated that repeated breaches could lead to the suspension of the channel's activities in Iraq.

The same day, Al Arabiya Al Hadath was [ordered](#) to remove a report from all its platforms and publish an official apology. GCHR [identified](#) the CMC's series of decisions that day as part of the institutional obstacles confronting freedom of expression in Iraq. Compelling broadcasters to remove war-related reporting and publish official corrections or apologies, without the published notices identifying the specific statements said to cause harm, raises serious concerns that these restrictions are unnecessary or disproportionate under the applicable freedom of expression framework.

Jordan

The Jordanian Media Commission issued a circular on 03 March 2026 [prohibiting](#) the unauthorised publication of videos or information concerning the Kingdom's defence operations and warning of legal action. The Commission linked the measure to the regional armed conflict and referred to instances in which unauthorised individuals had allegedly published misleading or inaccurate material that could harm the security of the Kingdom. The circular called for media coverage to remain coordinated with the Military Media Directorate and the Public Security Directorate.

In its broader [documentation](#) of wartime restrictions in Jordan, GCHR reported an intensification of restrictions on public freedoms and dissenting voices, including online activists. The publicly available account of the circular does not identify the legal provision authorising the prohibition, its duration or the criteria governing authorisation to publish. The breadth of the prior authorisation requirement, coupled with the threat of legal action and the absence of publicly identified limits or authorisation criteria, raises serious concerns that these restrictions are unnecessary or disproportionate under the applicable freedom of expression framework.

Kuwait

GCHR [reported](#) that, in rulings issued on 23 April 2026, the State Security and Terrorism Crimes Chamber of the Criminal Court refrained from imposing punishment on 109 defendants, subject to their maintaining good conduct and deleting the tweets at issue. GCHR stated that the rulings concerned social-media users charged with offences including spreading false news, inciting sectarian strife and sympathising with a hostile State after publishing their personal opinions online. The requirement that the 109 defendants delete the tweets at issue as a condition of the court's decisions to refrain from imposing punishment, in cases concerning social-media expression during the conflict, raises serious concerns that these restrictions are unnecessary or disproportionate under the applicable freedom of expression framework.

Saudi Arabia



Yahya Assiri, a Saudi human rights defender, was among those whose Facebook accounts Meta geo-blocked in Saudi Arabia beginning on 30 April 2026 at the government's request, according to a [joint statement](#) signed by GCHR. The same measure affected the Facebook accounts of ALQST for Human Rights, Democratic Diwan and Saudi researcher **Abdullah Alaoudh**. The statement placed these restrictions in the context of tighter controls over information following strikes launched by the United States and Israel against Iran on 28 February 2026, and noted that Meta's public reports included "reporting on regional geopolitical conflicts and security developments" among content alleged to violate cybercrime laws. The account-wide restrictions, imposed at the Saudi authorities' request without identifying the

content targeted or the reasons for restricting each account, raise serious concerns, confirming that it has not met the legal requirements of necessity, and proportionality under the applicable freedom of expression framework.

United Arab Emirates



Marc Owen Jones, an academic and disinformation researcher, [reported](#) on 16 April 2026 that X had geo-blocked his entire account in the UAE while leaving it accessible elsewhere, pursuant to what the platform described as a legal order from the Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority. Skyline International for Human Rights [linked](#) the restriction to Federal Public Prosecution Decision No. AGO/2026/0291 of 31 March 2026, which reportedly cited the [Crimes and Penalties Law](#) and the [Cybercrimes Law](#). The decision also reportedly covered Roaa War Studies, Rassd and Misbar, which tracked Iranian attacks against Gulf states, and Clash Report, which shared footage of the strikes. The decision reportedly relied on allegations of coordinated posting, misleading information, harm to the State's reputation, hate speech and sedition.

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and partner organisations subsequently [reported](#) similar platform restrictions in the UAE and noted comparable geo-blocking on X. The use of blocking entire accounts based on vague claims and allegations, simply because they post war-related information and personal opinions about it, raises serious concerns, confirming that the restrictions have sought to achieve an illegitimate and unrecognised objective, and were neither necessary nor proportionate under the applicable freedom of expression framework.

02

Pattern 2: Deprivation of Liberty: Arrest, Detention and Imprisonment

Arrest, detention and imprisonment constitute a distinct pattern of wartime repression documented in this report. This pattern covers cases in which individuals were deprived of liberty in connection with filming the effects of attacks, reporting on or commenting on the hostilities, sharing war-related information online, publishing satirical content, or participating in peaceful assemblies. It includes detention without identified charges, periods of incommunicado detention and prison sentences imposed following criminal proceedings. Although the circumstances, duration and outcomes differ, their defining feature is deprivation of liberty in connection with war-related expression, reporting or documentation, or participation in peaceful assemblies.

Cases are included under this pattern where deprivation of liberty, rather than a restriction on expression or access to information alone, is the principal measure. The prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention is recognised in [Article 9](#) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, for States parties to the respective treaties, in [Article 9](#) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and [Article 14](#) of the Arab Charter on Human Rights. The assessment considers the legal basis and stated reasons for the deprivation of liberty, its connection to the exercise of freedom of expression or peaceful assembly, access to judicial review and, where relevant, applicable fair-trial guarantees. Related measures involving deprivation of liberty, including arrest, detention, and imprisonment following unfair trials, are assessed within the framework of Pattern 2.

Bahrain

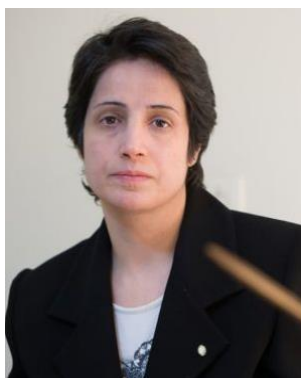
Sayed Baqer Al-Kamel, a freelance photojournalist, was [arrested](#) on 01 March 2026 in a raid on his home after posting footage of a high-rise building on fire in Seef in the aftermath of a reported Iranian attack on Bahrain. His arrest occurred amid a broader wartime crackdown in which GCHR [reported](#) that more than 200 people had been detained for expressing views about the war on social media or participating in peaceful demonstrations. On 28 April 2026, the High Criminal Court [sentenced](#) him to ten years' imprisonment. The reported charges included promoting content deemed supportive of Iran, filming and sharing images of sensitive infrastructure, and unlawfully publishing defence-related material. The reported reliance on conflict-related filming and publication as a basis for his conviction and ten-year sentence raises serious concerns, confirming that his imprisonment was arbitrary, imposed in response to his practice of journalistic expression.





Sheikh Mohammed Sanqour, a prominent Bahraini religious scholar, was among religious figures arrested on 09 May 2026. GCHR [reported](#) that the Bahraini authorities announced the arrest of 41 religious scholars following widespread raids on their homes, on allegations including espionage and raising funds to finance terrorist operations carried out by foreign entities. A joint statement by human rights organisations [identified](#) Sanqour among those detained and reported that Article 27 of [Law No. \(58\) of 2006 with Respect to Protecting the Society from Terrorist Acts](#) was the reported basis for the arrests. The statement further reported that the authorities linked the cases to alleged connections with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and expressions of sympathy with or support for Iranian attacks. On 31 May, GCHR [reported](#) that the Public Prosecution had begun interrogating the 41 arrested defendants and ordered their pretrial detention pending investigation, together with the disclosure of their bank accounts and the freezing of their funds. The reported use of counter-terrorism powers in a wartime operation against religious figures, without publicly available information identifying the individual conduct attributed to Sanqour or objectively verifiable evidence substantiating the authorities’ claims, raises serious concerns, confirming that his deprivation of liberty was arbitrary, and that the necessary safeguards to prevent arbitrariness were not observed.

Iran



Nasrin Sotoudeh, an Iranian human rights lawyer and women’s rights defender, was [arrested](#) at her Tehran home by Ministry of Intelligence agents on the night of 01–02 April 2026 and taken to an unknown place of detention, according to GCHR. At the time, the available reporting did not identify the reason for her arrest or any charges brought against her. On 31 March 2026, before her arrest, she had criticised the authorities’ failure to protect civilians, including the lack of shelters during recent strikes during the war. Front Line Defenders reported that she was [released](#) on bail on 13 May 2026 following a hearing on a new charge of “propaganda against the State”, reportedly based in part on statements concerning the armed conflict involving Iran, and other countries. The timing of the arrest and the reported reliance on conflict-

related statements in the subsequent charge raise serious concerns, confirming that her deprivation of liberty is linked to the exercise of freedom of expression, and that it was arbitrary under the applicable legal framework.

Iraq



Mohammed Mubarak, an Iraqi environmental activist and university political science student, was [arrested](#) by security forces in Nasiriyah on 01 March 2026 after posting a social-media video expressing fears for his family amid the escalating regional conflict. In its report published on 14 April 2026, GCHR [stated](#), citing local sources, that he remained in the custody of the National Security Service in Dhi Qar Governorate. The reported connection between his detention and conflict-related expression raises serious concerns, confirming that his deprivation of liberty was arbitrary, and imposed in response to his exercise of freedom of expression.

Jordan

Hiba Abu Taha, a Palestinian-Jordanian journalist, was [arrested](#) on 03 March 2026 in connection with social-media posts [reportedly](#) expressing support for Iranian strikes on sites in Jordan. GCHR reported that an Amman court subsequently sentenced her to two years' imprisonment under Article 17 of the Cybercrime Law for publishing material deemed capable of inciting sedition or discord or threatening social peace, and that her lawyer was prevented from presenting her defence. The reported connection between her sentence and conflict-related expression, together with the reported denial of an opportunity to present her defence, raises serious concerns confirming, that her imprisonment was arbitrary, imposed in response to her exercise of freedom of expression, and that the necessary safeguards for a fair trial were not observed.



Kuwait



Ahmed Shihab-Eldin, a Kuwaiti-American journalist and human rights defender, was [arrested](#) on 03 March 2026 while visiting his family. Before his arrest, he had commented on publicly available videos and images concerning the Iran war. According to [United Nations experts](#), his whereabouts remained unknown for four days, during which he was held incommunicado without access to his family or lawyer. He was [charged](#) with spreading false information, harming national security and misusing a mobile phone. On 23 April 2026, a judge acquitted him of spreading false information but refrained from pronouncing punishment on the remaining two charges, subject to a six-month pledge of good conduct. He was [released](#) after 52 days in detention. The timing of his arrest following his conflict-related commentary, the nature of the charges and

his four-day incommunicado detention raises serious concerns, confirming that his deprivation of liberty was arbitrary, imposed in response to his exercise of journalistic expression, and that the necessary safeguards to prevent arbitrariness were not taken into account.



Bader Nasser Al-Hussainan, a Kuwaiti comedy content creator, was [arrested](#) on 07 March 2026 after posting a satirical video on Snapchat. The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) reported that the video showed Al-Hussainan and two others wearing military helmets and exchanging humorous advice on staying safe during the wartime emergency. According to information received by GCHR from a source close to him, he was prosecuted over content alleged to harm military preparedness, cause public fear and affect public resilience during wartime. On 18 June 2026, on appeal, the State Security Court overturned the first-instance ruling and [sentenced](#) him to three years' imprisonment. The reported use of a satirical video about wartime safety as the basis for his arrest and imprisonment raises serious concerns, confirming that his deprivation of

liberty was arbitrary, imposed in response to his exercise of freedom of expression.

On 15 March 2026, the Emir issued [Decree-Law No. 47 of 2026 on Combating Terrorism Crimes](#). GCHR [reported](#) that local observers had raised concerns regarding the timing of the new legislation and further noted that provisions of Decree-Law No. 47 contained vague terms capable of being used by security authorities to target dissenting opinions and accuse those expressing them of terrorism. Amnesty International subsequently [documented](#) arrests under the new law and reported that at least one defendant faced charges under it. Separately, GCHR [reported](#) that, on 22 March and in the following days, security forces raided approximately 27 homes and arrested dozens of citizens on allegations including sympathising with and spying for a foreign State and publishing social-media opinions alleged to harm State security. GCHR further reported that, on 24 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a circular adding the names of ten recently arrested citizens to [a terrorism list](#), resulting in the freezing of their movable and immovable assets. Those affected were reportedly not afforded legal recourse or an opportunity to defend themselves against the alleged terrorism charges. The breadth and reported application of the new counter-terrorism law during the wartime crackdown raise serious concerns regarding the use of counter-terrorism powers in connection with expression and the procedural safeguards available to those affected. The reported inclusions on the terrorism list and the asset freezes imposed on recently arrested citizens also raise serious concerns, confirming the lack of sufficient safeguards and review mechanisms to challenge these arbitrary measures.

Qatar

Saeed Ziad, a Palestinian columnist and media commentator, was [arrested](#) on 14 March 2026 under a warrant issued by the Ministry of Interior's Cybercrime Department and released on 20 March 2026. His arrest was reportedly connected to tweets and commentary concerning the Iran war. His detention occurred amid a broader wartime crackdown in which GCHR [reported](#), citing local sources, that journalists and online activists had been arrested for expressing views that diverged from official policy. The reported connection between Ziad's detention and conflict-related commentary raises serious concerns, confirming that his deprivation of liberty was arbitrary, imposed in response to his exercise of freedom of expression.



Saudi Arabia



Amjad Ali Bhat, an Indian specialist nurse, was [detained](#) by security officers at his workplace in Dammam on 25 March 2026. According to his subsequent account, officers questioned him about a post he published on his Facebook page. He said that, when he asked what charges he faced, he was told that he would learn them later, and that he was held for approximately three months without contact with his family. As of 06 April 2026, neither his family nor his employer had [received](#) any formal charge or official explanation for his detention. He was subsequently released and [returned](#) to India on 17 July. The reported connection between his detention and conflict-related expression, together with his account that he was not informed of any charge when he asked and was denied family contact, raises serious concerns about his detention, confirming that it was arbitrary, imposed in response to his exercise of freedom of expression, and that the necessary safeguards to prevent arbitrariness were not taken into account.

United Arab Emirates

GCHR [reported](#) that dozens of residents, journalists and tourists had been arrested for publishing information about the war or photographing its effects. On 14 and 15 March 2026, the Attorney-General ordered the arrest and expedited trial of [ten individuals](#) and [a further 25](#) over war-related material that the authorities described as misleading, fabricated or harmful to national defence. The official statements said that the material included authentic footage of air-defence interceptions and their aftermath, as well as material alleged to have been fabricated, and that both groups were detained pending proceedings. The available official record does not specify the particular conduct attributed to each individual, nor does it explain why detention was necessary in each case. Detainees were not afforded any genuine opportunity to access their families or lawyers, or to receive a fair trial. In such dire circumstances, the use of arrest and pretrial detention in connection with both genuine and allegedly fabricated evidence raises serious concerns, confirming that most detentions were arbitrary, and imposed in response to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

03

Pattern 3: Deprivation of Nationality, Cancellation of Residence Status, Expulsion and Restrictions on Return

Deprivation of nationality, cancellation of residence status, expulsion and restrictions on return constitute a distinct pattern of wartime repression documented in this report. This pattern covers cases in which State authorities withdrew nationality from individuals or members of their families, cancelled residence status while persons were abroad, expelled non-nationals or otherwise prevented return, in circumstances reportedly connected with war-related expression, alleged sympathy with a foreign State, religious work or the activities of a relative. Although these measures differ in form and consequence, their defining feature is the use of nationality, residence or removal powers to exclude individuals from a country, prevent their return or exert pressure on them through their families.

Cases are included under this pattern where the principal measure affects nationality, residence status or the ability to remain in or return to a country, rather than deprivation of liberty or a restriction on expression alone. The applicable framework protects the right to a nationality, the right to return to one's own country and, for lawfully present non-nationals, procedural safeguards concerning expulsion. Relevant standards include [Articles 13\(2\) and 15](#) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, for States parties to the respective treaties, [Articles 26\(2\), 27\(2\) and 29\(1\)](#) of the Arab Charter on Human Rights and [Articles 12\(4\) and 13](#) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Where children are directly affected, [Articles 3, 7 and 8](#) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provide additional safeguards.

Revoking citizenship, cancelling residency status, deporting, and preventing return, based on fabricated or vaguely unsubstantiated alleged charges, proves that a serious violation of human rights has occurred.

The assessment considers the person's legal status, the legal basis and stated reasons, whether the grounds were individualised, the procedural safeguards available, any risk of statelessness, and the effects on children and family life. Deprivation of citizenship, cancellation of residency status, deportation, and ban on return are all assessed under Pattern 3.

Bahrain

On 27 April 2026, the Bahraini authorities [revoked](#) the nationality of 69 citizens. The authorities invoked [Article 10\(3\)](#) of the Bahraini Nationality Law and attributed the measure to alleged glorification of or sympathy with hostile Iranian acts, or contacts with external parties. GCHR reported that at least 46 of those affected were rendered stateless and that approximately 33 were children, including 10 infants, the youngest of whom was 19 days old. The following day, those affected were required to surrender their official documents and sign forms confirming the revocation of their nationality and their impending deportation. After attempts to deport some of them to Iran failed, the authorities placed affected families in a hotel before deporting some to Oman. The extension of nationality revocation to dependants, including children, the resulting statelessness and the [reported](#) absence of prior notice or access to judicial review raise serious concerns, confirming that these measures are arbitrary under the applicable legal framework.



Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ansari, Sayed Mohammed Al-Hashemi and Sheikh Ahmed Amrallah, three prominent Bahraini clerics, were [reportedly](#) deported within a single week. Contemporaneous [reporting](#) stated that the three had been deprived of Bahraini nationality before their deportation, in the immediate aftermath of [the nationality revocations](#)

announced on 27 April 2026. A later joint statement signed by GCHR [reported](#) that, during the broader wartime crackdown, some Shia religious leaders faced deportation proceedings linked to their religious work. The publicly available sources reviewed do not include the individual decisions or identify the grounds, procedures or avenues of review applicable in each case. Viewed against the broader targeting of Shia religious activity, the reported deprivation of nationality and subsequent deportation of the three clerics raise serious concerns, confirming beyond any doubt that they are being targeted on fabricated charges, and that the measures taken against them are arbitrary under the applicable legal framework.

Kuwait

Ahmed Shihab-Eldin, a Kuwaiti-American journalist and human rights defender, left Kuwait on 24 April 2026 following his [release](#) from detention in connection with reposting war-related images. On 29 April 2026, Shihab-Eldin and his sisters, **Lara** and **Loma**, were stripped of their Kuwaiti nationality, as subsequently reported by GCHR. The publicly available sources reviewed do not provide the individualised facts or reasons relied upon underlying the decision to Shihab-Eldin and his sisters. The close temporal sequence between his detention in connection with war-related expression and the subsequent loss of nationality raises serious concerns, confirming that he was targeted in retaliation for his professional journalistic work, and that the resulting deprivation was arbitrary under the applicable legal framework.





On 04 May 2026, the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Citizenship decided to revoke the nationality of **Nayef Rakhees Dhahi Al-Fadhli**, the father of **Fawaz Al-Kathiri**, a Kuwaiti political opponent living in exile, along with several family members. GCHR reported that the decision was subsequently approved by the Council of Ministers under Article 13 of the Kuwaiti Nationality Law. Amnesty International [reported](#) that the resulting decree provided no reasons and that, before the

measure against his father, Al-Kathiri had published videos criticising the arrest of individuals over war-related social-media posts. A source close to the family [told](#) GCHR that Interior Minister Fahd Al-Yousef had previously threatened Al-Fadhli five times with nationality revocation unless he silenced his son. Al-Kathiri also told GCHR that those affected held no other nationality, would mean that the measure rendered them stateless. The reported threats, extension of the measure to relatives, absence of stated reasons and risk of statelessness raise serious concerns, confirming that the deprivation of nationality, used to pressure an opponent living in exile through his family, constitutes a serious violation under the applicable human rights framework.

United Arab Emirates



Yash Bhardwaj, an Indian stand-up comedian, [said](#) that Dubai Police summoned him on 19 March 2026 over a satirical video about Google Maps malfunctioning in Dubai during the war. According to Bhardwaj, the authorities treated him as a perceived national security threat, detained him for 47 days and [deported](#) him to India on 05 May. India Today noted that Dubai authorities had not publicly responded to his account. The available reporting does not identify Bhardwaj's immigration status, the legal basis for his deportation or any official reasons for the measure. The reported sequence of his summons over the video, detention and deportation raises serious concerns, confirming that his deportation was linked to his sarcastic

remarks about the war, and was arbitrary under the applicable legal framework.

In interviews conducted for this report, several Iranian residents told GCHR that their UAE residence permits had been cancelled while they were outside the country, preventing their return. In a statement issued on 02 April 2026, the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs [rejected](#) what it described as inaccurate media claims concerning the residency status of the Iranian community, but did not address the individual cases reviewed by GCHR. The reported cancellation of residence status while the affected residents were abroad, with the effect of preventing their return, raises serious concerns, confirming that the measures were arbitrary, and not accompanied by sufficient procedural safeguards under the applicable legal framework.

Conclusion

The cases reviewed indicate that, in a number of countries, the wartime context was invoked, or otherwise formed part of the documented circumstances in which restrictive or coercive State measures were taken or applied. In some cases, authorities expressly relied on national security, defence-related concerns or alleged support for a hostile State; in others, the connection was indicated by the content targeted or the documented circumstances in which the measure was applied. The nature and strength of that connection varied across the cases. Considered together, however, the cases are consistent with [GCHR's broader documentation](#) indicating that authorities in several countries used wartime conditions to intensify restrictions on public freedoms, particularly freedom of expression and access to information.

The measures differed substantially in their legal form, reach and consequences. They ranged from account-wide geo-blocking, internet shutdowns, interference with broadcasting and compelled removal or correction of reporting to arrest, detention, prosecution and imprisonment.

In a number of other cases, the measures involved deprivation of nationality, cancellation of residence status, expulsion or restrictions on return. These forms of State action did not constitute a uniform sequence or share a common legal basis, but they sometimes overlapped within the same course of events. Taken together, their effects extended across multiple dimensions, affecting public access to information, freedom of movement, legal status and family life.

National security, public order, alleged disinformation, defence concerns, and alleged sympathy for a hostile state were repeatedly cited as reasons for the measures examined. Such reasons cannot justify widespread violations of citizens' civil and human rights, which contravene applicable human rights standards.

In several cases, the publicly available information did not identify the specific content or conduct said to justify the measure, disclose the individual basis for a measure directed at a particular person, or provide sufficient information to permit a full assessment of its compatibility with the applicable human rights framework. In others, authorities cited a legal provision or stated purpose, but significant questions remained concerning how the provision was applied, the scope of the measure and the safeguards available. Therefore, the cases cited illustrate the importance of examining the substance of official justifications, how they are applied, and their precise details, rather than simply relying on them. This is a complex task because these countries lack transparency and can be considered closed to independent human rights organisations.

Concerns regarding procedural safeguards were similarly recurrent. In a number of cases, safeguards were reportedly denied, or the publicly available information did not establish that they had been provided. These concerns included the failure to disclose the reasons for the arrest or the charges against those arrested, incommunicado detention or detention at an undisclosed location, restrictions on presenting a defence, and the absence of an identified opportunity to challenge restrictions, detention, nationality decisions, residence cancellation or removal. The consequences were particularly severe where measures resulted in prolonged imprisonment, affected children and other relatives, caused or risked statelessness, or prevented individuals from remaining in or returning to the country concerned. Measures concerning nationality, residence and removal may therefore carry consequences extending well beyond the immediate wartime period.

Security concerns arising during armed conflict do not displace the distinct legal requirements and procedural safeguards applicable to the measure concerned. Restrictions on expression, deprivation of liberty and measures affecting nationality, residence or return must each be assessed under the human rights standards applicable to that form of State action. Across these different contexts, clear legal bases and reasons, individualised grounds where measures are directed at particular persons, procedural safeguards appropriate to the measure, and access to independent review and effective remedies remain essential protections against arbitrary or disproportionate State action.

Given the documented and ongoing violations of the rights of innocent civilians, there is a clear need for continuous human rights scrutiny of the measures that the governments concerned have claimed are related to the context of war. The following recommendations outline corresponding steps to prevent further serious harm, address the consequences of arbitrary measures already imposed, and preserve civic space during periods of conflict.

Recommendations

To the governments concerned

The following recommendations apply to each government insofar as the corresponding measures are documented or remain relevant in relation to that State:

1. Release all persons detained or imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising rights protected under applicable international and regional human rights law and standards, and immediately quash any conviction, sentence, or punishment imposed for such rights;
2. Cease the use of criminal, administrative, or security measures to punish journalists, human rights defenders, researchers, activists, content creators, and others for peaceful media coverage, documentation, commentary, satire, or assembly in relation to the conflict. Also, repeal or amend provisions that permit arbitrary or disproportionate interference with such protected activities;
3. Ensure that any restrictions on expression or access to information are clearly provided for in law, serve a legitimate purpose recognized under international human rights law, and are necessary and proportionate;
4. Refrain from internet shutdowns, blocking entire accounts, interfering with broadcasts, forcibly removing or correcting media coverage, and imposing broad prior restrictions when less restrictive measures are sufficient to address the specific harm on which the claim is based. Restrictions that do not meet these requirements must also be lifted.
5. Ensure that every person deprived of their liberty is promptly informed, in a language they understand, of the reasons for their deprivation of liberty and any charges against them, and is enabled to communicate promptly and confidentially with their family and a lawyer. They must be brought promptly before a competent judicial authority and be able to challenge the legality of their detention. Incommunicado detention and detention in undisclosed locations must be avoided, and applicable fair trial guarantees must be respected;
6. Ensure that decisions concerning nationality, residence, deportation, or return are based on clear legal grounds, specific grounds determined on an individual basis, accompanied by written justifications, and are subject to effective review by a competent and independent judicial authority. Furthermore, such decisions must not be used to retaliate against the peaceful exercise of human rights or to exert pressure through measures targeting relatives, and statelessness must be prevented, particularly when children and other family members are affected;

7. Where violations are proven, access to effective remedies and appropriate redress for the harm suffered must be ensured, including compensation and guarantees of non-repetition, and perpetrators must be held accountable and impunity for those who commit such violations must be ended.

To social media platforms and other technology companies involved in implementing access or content restrictions

Consistent with the [*United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*](#), companies should:

1. Human rights principles must be applied to government requests to restrict accounts, content, or access to services. Vague, overly broad, or inconsistent requests should be refused, and the least restrictive measure necessary to address the specific harm, if any, should be applied;
2. Affected users should be promptly notified of the complainant, the legal basis, and the content in question. A viable and accessible appeals mechanism should be provided, including human review where appropriate. Accounts or content should be restored when restrictions are found to be unjustified;
3. Detailed and disaggregated transparency information should be published regarding government requests, including the complainant, the legal basis, the type and territorial scope of the restriction, and the number of accounts or content items affected.

To Local, regional, and international partners

1. To raise the cases and patterns documented in this report through bilateral and multilateral engagement, including through United Nations human rights mechanisms, and to press for urgent corrective action, particularly when citizens are facing detention, statelessness, family separation, or restrictions preventing their return.

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