

**CONSEIL DES DROITS DE L'HOMME**, MARS 2007 | **HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**  
**More Business Than Usual: The Work Which Awaits the Human Rights Council**

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Since it was created in June, the **Human Rights Council** has devoted significant attention to three human rights situations – Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Darfur. It has also received and discussed reports on human rights abuses in about a dozen more countries, without making recommendations or taking any action.

In this first year of its existence, the Council is understandably preoccupied with institution building: establishing a “universal periodic review” in which the human rights records of all states will be considered, reviewing the system of independent experts which are responsible for reporting on human rights abuses, and developing its methods of work. But human rights violations haven’t been suspended while the Council focused on these tasks; in fact they have worsened in many locations. The Council’s attention to institution building has created a growing backlog of work that deserves the HRC’s attention.

Some states have argued that the HRC should not take up “country situations,” noting that the Commission on Human Rights’ decisions as to which situations it would take up were politicized. But the Council is required to “address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon.” The Commission’s failing was not that it addressed too many human rights situations, but too few. It was difficult, and remains so, to get an inter-governmental body to take on human rights abuses within powerful countries as easily as it can address violations in countries with less influence. This Council should do better than the Commission, both within its regular sessions, and through the universal periodic review.

Many states have noted that in addressing country situations the Council’s work must be premised upon cooperation, not condemnation. Human Rights Watch has urged the Council to put in place new ways of addressing human rights situations which allow for a graduated approach, with a range of approaches reflecting the diversity of situations in which the Council must engage.

But the Council’s desire to find new ways of working cannot mean that it pretends that human rights violations are not committed in specific places by identifiable people and institutions. And the HRC cannot delude itself into believing that all states are willing to cooperate to end such abuses – Turkmenistan, for example, has deliberately rejected such cooperation, as reflected by the fact that it has failed to allow visits by a record total of ten HRC experts. Such non-cooperation not only threatens the Council’s credibility, it is unfair to those states who meet their obligation to cooperate, despite the difficulties that such cooperation may sometimes pose for them.

It takes only a quick survey of the world today to see that there are dozens of human rights situations that would benefit from engagement by the HRC. To illustrate that point, this paper provides short summaries of serious human rights concerns in twenty-six countries. This list is by no means exhaustive (our annual report includes 74 countries). There are many other situations across the globe which merit the Council’s attention, and in which it could provide important

assistance. This group of twenty-six, however, includes situations which demand the engagement of the world's premier human rights body. Human rights victims and defenders in these countries and beyond await the Human Rights Council's attention and its action.

The twenty-six countries profiled are: Afghanistan, Belarus, Burma, Chad, China, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Israel/OPT, North Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United States, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe.

### **Afghanistan**

In 2006, more than 1,000 civilians were killed as a result of violence related to the insurgency; 15,000 families were displaced and over 200,000 children were unable to attend school. The violence prevented reconstruction and access to the most basic human rights such as clean water, education, and health care. The Taliban and other anti-government forces continue to attack aid workers, government officials, teachers, students, and schools. Regional warlords implicated in war crimes, some allied with the government, continue to perpetrate serious human rights abuses throughout Afghanistan. Afghan women and girls continue to suffer from entrenched discrimination throughout the country. They have among the highest rates of illiteracy, maternal mortality, and forced marriage in the world. There are few remedies available for gender-based violence and many women and girls confront severe restrictions on their freedom of movement. Afghanistan is again on the precipice of becoming a haven for human rights abusers, criminals, and militant extremists, many of whom in the past have severely abused Afghans, particularly women and girls.

### **Belarus**

The human rights situation in Belarus continued to deteriorate in the past year. A flawed presidential poll in March 2006 led to the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenka for a third term. The government has continued to stifle the media, enacting amendments to the criminal code that created new penalties for "discrediting Belarus" by "fraudulent representation" of developments in the country, and bringing libel suits against the few remaining independent newspapers in the country. The past year and a half have seen at least two independent journalists killed, with the authorities failing to initiate meaningful investigations. Political opposition leaders are subject to harsh persecution, with opposition presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison in July 2006 for his role in the protest rallies that followed the announcement of the outcome of the elections. The government severely restricts the activities of human rights groups, targeting in particular the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the only remaining registered human rights organization, which is facing politically motivated charges of tax evasion on tax-exempt grants from the European Union. In late January authorities arbitrarily cancelled the organization's lease in an apparent attempt to try to force its closure, but later restored it after international pressure. The government has persisted in its refusal to cooperate with UN Special Rapporteur Adrian Severin, denying him access to the country, and has failed to respond constructively to the concerns expressed in a joint statement by seven UN special procedures in the aftermath of the March elections.

### **Burma**

Human rights abuses are perpetrated widely and with impunity in Burma where basic freedoms are denied by the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). There are over 1,100 political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi and

other members of the political opposition. The National Convention to write a new constitution has dragged on for 14 years and is being written to entrench the military's hold on power and deny the free and meaningful participation of other sectors of the Burmese population. Military offensives against ethnic minorities displace hundreds of thousands of civilians, and women from ethnic groups have documented numerous cases of rape and sexual assault by Burmese military forces. Large-scale infrastructure and business developments such as dams and road building cause widespread displacement. Forced labor is widespread and systematic throughout the country. Burma is facing a humanitarian crisis in urban and rural areas as low government expenditure on health care and the restricted activities of international relief agencies makes the provision of assistance extremely difficult.

### **Chad**

Human rights abuses in eastern Chad have worsened as a result of the proximity of Darfur's conflict and the Chadian government efforts to repel a Darfur-based Chadian insurgency. Cross-border attacks on Chadian civilians by "Janjaweed" militias based in Darfur have escalated in both scale and intensity since early 2006. More than 120,000 Chadians have been displaced in the past year by cross-border militia attacks and escalating communal violence fuelled by the presence of armed groups linked to the Darfur conflict. There have been indiscriminate and targeted attacks by Sudanese militia on Chadian civilians left unprotected by the Chadian military. Darfur rebel groups have been responsible for the recruitment of refugees, including children, from the Sudanese refugee camps. Government security forces have been guilty of serious abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, beatings, arbitrary arrests, and rapes, which have been met by near total impunity. The government has restricted freedom of speech and the press, particularly after the government imposed a state of emergency in the east; journalists who are critical of the government have been arrested on charges of defamation, and in some cases have been held in detention even after their charges have been dismissed.

### **China**

Human rights conditions in China deteriorated significantly in 2006. Authorities greeted rising social unrest—marked at times by violent confrontation between protesters and police—with stricter controls on the press, internet, academics, lawyers, and nongovernmental organizations. Such controls make actual arrests—which draw unwanted international attention—less necessary in silencing critics. Despite greatly increasing demands for justice, dispute resolution, and vindication of constitutional rights, the court system provides minimal redress. The lack of judicial remedies further exacerbates social unrest. Several high-profile, politically motivated prosecutions of lawyers and journalists in 2006 sent an unambiguous warning to individuals and groups pressing for greater respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of Chinese citizens.

### **Colombia**

Colombia remains mired in a decades-long internal armed conflict, which continues to result in widespread abuses by irregular armed groups, including both guerrillas and paramilitaries, as well as by the Colombian armed forces. Allegations of extrajudicial executions of civilians by the Colombian army have increased in many areas of the country. Forced displacement of civilians remains a widespread problem; the internally displaced population in Colombia, at close to 3 million people, is one of the largest in the world. Colombia also has one of the largest populations of child combatants in the world; a majority of those children are recruited by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas, and subjected to horrific treatment while in their ranks. The FARC also uses landmines

and other indiscriminate weapons regularly. Both the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas continue to engage in hostage-taking. The paramilitary demobilization process continues to present serious problems and could easily result in widespread impunity for crimes against humanity and the legitimization of paramilitaries' mafia-like power. Serious questions surround the Colombian government's implementation of the Justice and Peace Law, including whether paramilitary commanders will serve their dramatically reduced sentences in prisons or under house arrest (where they can be in constant communication with their subordinates) and whether paramilitaries will be pressed to tell the full truth about their activities. Several victims' representatives and potential witnesses against the paramilitaries have been killed in recent months, and the government has established no meaningful witness protection plan.

### **Cote d'Ivoire**

In Cote d'Ivoire, the 2002-2003 armed conflict between the Ivorian government and northern-based New Forces rebels, and the four-year political and military impasse that followed, have resulted in a continuing stream of human rights abuses by all sides, an erosion of the rule of law, and a deterioration of critical sectors such as public education and healthcare. Extortion, torture, and arbitrary detentions by the Ivorian security forces, pro-government militias, and the New Forces continue in a climate of impunity. In government-held areas, security forces engage in systematic and widespread extortion, racketeering, and intimidation of business people, street traders, and taxi drivers, among others. Citizens from Northern ethnic groups, West African immigrants, opposition party members and other perceived rebel sympathizers are particularly singled out for these abuses. In the North, New Forces rebels regularly extort money and loot goods from civilians in areas under their control. Roadblocks erected by the New Forces are focal points for extortion and to a lesser extent rape and sexual harassment. Neither the government nor the rebel leadership has taken significant steps to discipline, investigate, or hold accountable those responsible for ongoing crimes, much less past atrocities during the 2002-2003 civil war.

### **Cuba**

Cuba remains the one country in Latin America that represses nearly all forms of political dissent. The government continues to enforce political conformity using criminal prosecutions, long- and short-term detentions, mob harassment, police warnings, surveillance, house arrests, travel restrictions, and politically motivated dismissals from employment. The right to fair trial is undermined by severe restrictions on the right to a defense. In early July 2006 the non-governmental Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation issued a list of 316 prisoners who it said were incarcerated for political reasons. Of the 75 political dissidents, independent journalists, and human rights advocates who were summarily tried in April 2003, 59 remain imprisoned. Serving sentences that average nearly 20 years, the incarcerated dissidents endure poor conditions and punitive treatment in prison. Human rights monitoring is not recognized as a legitimate activity, and human rights defenders face systematic harassment. The Personal Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Cuba has been denied access to the country, preventing her from carrying out her mandate.

### **DRC**

While the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) held historic elections in 2006 bringing to power Joseph Kabila as the country's first democratically elected president in over 40 years, human rights abuses continue with impunity. Police and soldiers used disproportionate force against unarmed demonstrators protesting

alleged election rigging in governor elections for the province of Bas Congo, killing more than 100 of them. Officials have also continued to harass, beat, and arrest journalists and members of civil society and the political opposition. In November 2006, former presidential candidate and prominent opposition member Marie-Thérèse Nlandu and a number of her staff were arrested based on allegations they had attempted to start an insurrection. In eastern Congo, both government soldiers and armed groups continue to kill, rape, and otherwise injure civilians. The judicial system has failed to keep up with recent cases and made little effort to address thousands of violations of international law stemming from Congo's five year war. More than a dozen militia leaders credibly accused of war crimes were granted high rank in the national army. For example, in July 2006 former warlord Peter Karim, who in the previous month had killed a UN peacekeeper and taken seven others hostage, was named a colonel in the Congolese army in an attempt to broker a peace deal.

### **Egypt**

After a brief and limited opening in 2005, in the past year Egypt again cracked down on internal dissent, jailing the first man to run against incumbent Hosni Mubarak in the 2005 presidential elections, beating and detaining participants in peaceful demonstrations for judicial independence and clean elections, and detaining and beating independent journalists. Egypt has detained more than a thousand members of the nonviolent Muslim Brotherhood, the country's largest opposition movement, and put many of its senior leaders on trial before military courts, after civilian courts dismissed all charges against them. Torture remains endemic in Egyptian detention facilities, thanks to a culture of impunity fostered by laws that allow security forces to detain suspects incommunicado for prolonged periods of time. In April 2006, the government renewed emergency rule, which has been in place continuously since 1981, for another two years. Egyptian human rights organizations estimate that up to 10,000 people remain in prolonged detention without charge under the terms of the law.

### **Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian government continues the heavy-handed suppression and punishment of any form of political dissent as reintroduced following the 2005 elections. Dozens of opposition politicians, journalists, civil society activists, and newly elected parliamentarians remain in detention in Addis Ababa, charged with treason and genocide, among other alleged offenses. While most international attention remains focused on the trials in Addis Ababa, security forces and civil officials continue to wage campaigns of repression and brutality in many parts of the country. In Oromia and Amhara states, authorities use concerns about armed insurgency and terrorism to justify the torture, imprisonment, and sustained harassment of their critics. Reports of extrajudicial executions and torture also emerged from Somali state, but access to the region has been restricted by the military and by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) insurgency, making these reports impossible to confirm. The government has taken no meaningful action to address widespread atrocities committed by Ethiopian military forces in Gambella state, bordering Sudan. A government-sponsored commission of inquiry set up to investigate December 2003 violence in Gambella resulted in a whitewash. Since late-2006 Ethiopian military support to the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia in southern Somalia has resulted in the detention of large numbers of Ethiopian Oromo, Ogadeni, and foreign nationals by Ethiopian forces. There are serious concerns about the whereabouts and conditions of detention of many of these individuals.

## **Guinea**

Human rights abuses are perpetrated widely and with impunity in Guinea, where citizens are subjected to numerous forms of brutality, including torture, assault, and theft by the state security forces. Security forces have crushed strikes organized to protest worsening economic conditions with inappropriate and excessive use of force, constituting a significant impediment to the ability of Guinean citizens to exercise their rights to freedom of speech and assembly. A brutal crackdown in early 2007 resulted in the deaths of more than 110 demonstrators and the wounding of hundreds of others by gunshot. Guinean police have subjected criminal suspects, including children, to torture and ill-treatment in order to extract confessions. Once individuals are transferred from police custody to prison to await trial, many are left to languish for years in cramped cells where they face hunger, disease, and sometimes death. The government has largely failed to tackle the impunity that often follows serious human rights abuses, particularly those abuses committed by security forces.

## **Haiti**

The government of President René Prével continues to grapple with the security situation in Haiti. Armed gangs from the capital's slums operate with total impunity, terrorizing the population through kidnappings, murders, and rapes. While recent joint MINUSTAH and Haitian National Police operations have resulted in the arrest of dozens of suspected gang members in the last month, Haiti's weak and dysfunctional justice system is largely unable to handle these cases. Allegations of corruption and abuse continue to plague the national police force, and police lawlessness continues to be a major contributor to overall insecurity. Arbitrary arrest and detention is common, with over 90 percent of the prison population still awaiting judicial determination of their case. Prisons are dangerously overcrowded, and prisoners often lack access to water, sanitary facilities, and health care. Women's rights continue to lag. Concrete steps to ensure the protection of women and girls against sexual and domestic violence and abuse and exploitation are yet to be taken and the law offers no protection to women and young girls in domestic servitude—also known as *restavek*—who often live in conditions akin to slavery. Abortions, even in cases of rape, incest or for medical purposes, remain illegal.

## **Iran**

Iran executes more people annually than any other nation but China. In an alarming development, the number of publicly known executions rose 70 percent from 2005 to 2006. Iran also executes more juveniles annually than any other nation. Under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Ministry of Information has substantially increased its surveillance of dissidents, civil society activists, and journalists. Iranian authorities systematically suppress freedom of expression by closing newspapers and imprisoning writers, journalists, and editors. The government has shown no tolerance for peaceful protests and gatherings; it has imprisoned peaceful dissidents and subjected them to torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings, sleep deprivation, and mock executions. Judges often accept coerced confessions. In 2006 two prisoners held for their political beliefs, Akbar Mohammadi and Valiollah Feyz Mahdavi, died in suspicious circumstances in prison. There is no mechanism for monitoring and investigating human rights violations perpetrated by agents of the government. The closure of independent media in Iran has helped perpetuate a culture of impunity.

## **Iraq**

The ongoing armed conflict and violence in Iraq has meant that the vast majority of Iraqis today live in virtually complete insecurity. The conflict has become

increasingly sectarian in nature and Sunni and Shi'a armed groups target civilians from each other's communities. Fighting between United States and Iraqi armed forces and insurgent forces has resulted in an unknown number of civilian deaths and injuries. In October 2006, a Johns Hopkins-MIT mortality study estimated that since 2003, 650,000 Iraqis had died as a result of the war—600,000 of them in violent deaths; this figure was far higher than previous estimates. While the Iraqi government and the United States have announced several security plans to curb the violence and bring armed militias under control, including a decree imposing virtual martial law in Baghdad and a surge in US troops, respectively, little has been done to curb the abuses emanating from forces affiliated with the government. Evidence continues to implicate Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense personnel in systematically torturing and sometimes killing detainees in their custody; government investigations have failed to prosecute those allegedly responsible. In addition, new martial law provisions give military commanders authority to conduct warrantless arrests, monitor private communications, and restrict civil society groups in Baghdad.

### **Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories**

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories there was a deterioration in the human rights situation in 2006 with the Israeli army killing 660 Palestinians, including 141 minors. At least half of those killed were not participating in any hostilities at the time of their death. Palestinian armed groups killed 17 Israeli civilians in 2006 as a result of one suicide bombing inside Israel and several shooting and other incidents against Israeli settlers in the West Bank. After the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier in June, there was also an increase in Israeli military operations into and against the Gaza Strip where the army destroyed houses and infrastructure, including the electric generating facilities and around 280 homes which housed around 1770 people. At varying times the Israeli army states that its operations in Gaza were to free Corporal Shalit and to act against armed groups and their infra structure, including groups firing rockets toward Israel. In violation of international law, Israel continues to build the wall, mostly inside the occupied West Bank, and to expand settlements, especially those between the wall and the Green Line. On both sides of the Israeli-Gaza divide civilians paid the heaviest price. Israel fired thousands of artillery shells, in a stated bid to counter Palestinian rocket fire, into and around civilian areas in the Gaza Strip during most of the year, killing over 50 Palestinian civilians, while Palestinian armed groups continued to fire "Qassam" rockets into residential areas of Israel, killing two civilians. Inside the OPT, warring Palestinian factions have frequently clashed in the streets, killing hundreds of Palestinians in late 2006 and early 2007. Both Israeli and Palestinian officials have fostered a culture of impunity for violent abuse, with Israel only occasionally prosecuting low-ranking soldiers and the Palestinian Authority rarely if ever holding anyone to account.

### **North Korea**

North Korea remains one of the world's most closed societies. There is no organized political opposition, labor activism, or independent civil society. Freedom of expression, information, and religion are almost non-existent. There is now a one-year minimum prison sentence for anyone caught crossing the border. Arbitrary arrests, lack of due process and fair trials, and executions are common. Many Koreans die in prison because of mistreatment, malnutrition, and lack of medical care. Thousands languish in forced labor camps, where torture is endemic. Access to food and other basic services is provided according to a classification scheme based on the government's assessment of an individual's and his or her family's political loyalty. North Korea continues to block access by international human rights

organizations. It has not responded to repeated requests in the past three years by the UN Special Rapporteur on North Korea to engage in dialogue.

### **Russia**

Russia's rights record is generally poor but of particular concern is Chechnya, where impunity persists for torture, killings, and enforced disappearances, to which civilians are subjected on a regular basis and on a massive scale. There has been a dramatic increase in credible reports of torture perpetrated by forces under the effective command of Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov and a law enforcement branch known as ORB-2. Termed by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights during his visit to the region in February as "systematic," torture in Chechnya is commonly perpetrated in unofficial, illegal places of detention. Enforced disappearances remain a hallmark of the conflict and have risen to a level that constitutes a crime against humanity. Despite mounting concerns about the abusive actions of pro-Russian Chechen forces, the federal government continues to endorse their leadership and refuses to take concrete action to investigate allegations of wrongdoing. In allowing the security structures controlled by Kadyrov to operate with effective impunity, the Russian government has abdicated its responsibility to protect the rights of Chechen citizens of the Russian Federation. Seven recent rulings by the European Court of Human Rights have found Russia responsible for serious abuses in Chechnya, and hundreds more are pending. In October last year the Russian government prevented a long-awaited visit to the region by the UN special rapporteur on torture by refusing to allow unannounced visits to places of detention and private interviews with detainees. It has also persisted in its failure to grant access to the country for the UN Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi law does not protect many basic rights and the government places strict limits on freedom of association, assembly, and expression. Saudi Arabia executed 18 persons already in the first two months of 2007, often after unfair trials, and, in one case, possibly extrajudicially. Arbitrary detention, mistreatment and torture of detainees, restrictions on freedom of movement, and lack of official accountability remain serious concerns. Saudi women continue to face serious obstacles to their participation in society. Many foreign workers, especially women, face exploitative working conditions, including fraudulent promises, unpaid wages, locked dormitories, and sometimes physical and sexual abuse. Saudi secret police monitor, intimidate, interrogate, and detain dissidents and those suspected in involvement with the Iraq insurgency. The latter rarely are brought to trial and remain detained for years. The Saudi criminal justice system imprisons thousands for debt or unpaid damages, does not afford indigent defendants a lawyer, and prevents defendants from mounting an effective defense. The media environment has gradually diversified and improved, but the government regularly bans writers from publishing, censors all printed material in the kingdom, removes professors and students from universities, and issues foreign travel bans on dissident voices.

### **Sri Lanka**

The human rights situation in Sri Lanka has deteriorated drastically since major military operations between the government and the armed opposition Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) resumed in April 2006. Both the LTTE and state forces have violated international human rights and humanitarian law, with large numbers of extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate attacks on civilians and schools, hospitals and public spaces, "disappearances," and abductions or arbitrary arrests. Nearly 15,000

refugees have fled to neighboring India and over 200,000 persons are internally displaced from fighting in northeast Sri Lanka. Camps occupied by internally displaced persons have been militarized by pro-government armed groups and the state is forcing civilians to return to their homes ignoring security and humanitarian needs. The Karuna group, with the open support of state forces, and the LTTE continue to recruit child into their forces. The humanitarian situation in many parts of the country is dire. Civil society groups have come under attack since President Mahinda Rajapakse took office in November 2005, particularly through unproven allegations of complicity with the LTTE. The failure to make the Constitutional Council operative and the unilateral appointment of commissions for the police, public service, and human rights has robbed national institutions involved in human rights protection of their independence and much of their legitimacy.

### **Sudan**

In Darfur, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced by increased fighting in 2006 and joined the almost two million displaced people already residing in camps around Darfur. Sudanese government forces and allied "Janjaweed" militias were responsible for serious abuses of civilians, including killings, torture, and rape and sexual assault of women and girls. Some rebel factions have also been responsible for serious crimes against civilians in Darfur. Patterns of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and other abuses by Sudanese military and security forces remain widespread in Darfur and other areas of the country. Freedom of expression continues to be restricted, and there was a sharp rise in arbitrary arrests, harassment, pre-print censorship, and bureaucratic restrictions of Sudanese and international media in late 2006. Rape and sexual violence continue to be pervasive throughout Darfur.

Humanitarian aid workers also have come under increasing attack by armed groups from all sides in the months following the May peace deal, with 12 humanitarian staff killed between May and August 2006. The insecurity has caused many international organizations to restrict their movements, particularly along the dangerous roads, jeopardizing the supply of relief to almost half a million of the more than four million people partially or wholly dependent on aid for their survival. The ruling National Congress Party has yet to make any meaningful effort to investigate or prosecute those individuals responsible for the most serious crimes in Darfur, despite establishing a national tribunal in mid-2005 allegedly for that purpose. Meanwhile senior Sudanese officials continue to state publicly that there will be no Sudanese cooperation with the International Criminal Court or with international efforts to deploy a robust protection force in Darfur.

### **Turkmenistan**

After 21 years of the Niazov regime, the human rights situation in Turkmenistan is abysmal in every area of civil, political, economic and social rights. The new government under Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov was elected in a vote that offered no real choice to voters and that was organized in a country that, after so many years of dictatorship, had absolutely no conditions for free and fair elections. While the government promised social and economic reform during the electoral campaign, Berdymukhammedov has repeatedly emphasized that he will continue the policies of Niazov, a worrying sign that some of the worst aspects of the Niazov government may remain in place. Political prisoners have not been released, and restrictions on freedom of movement that place individuals in politically motivated internal exile, or on a blacklist against leaving the country, remain unchanged. No fewer than eight UN special procedures have long awaited the required invitations to carry out visits.