



## **EUSR for Human Rights – Newsletter – April 2026**

In April, violations of **international humanitarian law** (IHL) were rampant. Women and children were not spared. Journalists and medics were targeted. **Civic space** continued to close. Human rights defenders continued to face risks. Yet, we also saw progress on **transitional justice**. **Elections** took place in precarious contexts. Some **political prisoners** walked free.

In April, I engaged actively on the situation in **Sudan**, including the rampant sexual violence in Darfur as well as constant attacks against humanitarian workers. With the third **International Sudan Conference** held in Berlin, I am pleased that there is more international attention on the. There is now an urgent need to engage with both warring parties, while never losing sight of the hundred thousands of civilians in Sudan who need immediate and tangible assistance, but also justice and accountability.

I am closely monitoring the human rights situation in **Ethiopia**, including the [latest developments](#) in **Tigray**. I regret that I was unable to carry out my long-planned visit to **Ethiopia** during the last week of April, and I hope to be able to find a new date as soon as possible.

IHL in the Middle East, including in **Iran**, **Lebanon** and the **Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)**, continued to be my focus in April. I also raised these issues in my appearance in Dutch talk show [Buitenhof](#) and radio show [BNR Nieuwsradio](#). Many of these issues were also discussed during the **Foreign Affairs Council** on 21 April, followed by a meeting of the **Global Alliance for the Two-State Solution** and the **Ad Hoc Liaison Committee**, which had the aim of bringing the two-state solution back to the centre of international discussions. **Ukraine**, too, remained high on the agenda.

I had the opportunity of participating in **Türkiye**'s premier international event, the [Antalya Diplomacy Forum](#). The event saw the participation of many high-level representatives from Europe, Middle East, Central Asia and Africa, giving me the opportunity to broadly engage on the need to protect the multilateral space and the rules-based order. I underlined the need for the respect of international human rights and IHL, which I also emphasized in my **media engagements** with **Bloomberg**, **NTV Haber** and **Anadolu Agency**.

In my continued attempt to prioritize future generations, I also appeared in the podcast "[Who rules the World](#)" by UN Youth Delegates from the EU, and held a EU Seminar on "Human rights and wrongs" at the **University of Leiden** under the able moderation of Professor **Vera Sceanovic**.

### **BILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS**

While attending the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, I was glad to meet **Deputy Foreign Minister of Türkiye Mehmet Kemal Bozay**. We discussed the importance of diplomacy in solving current crises, the situation in Ukraine and the Middle East, Türkiye's commitment to Council of Europe standards and other human rights related issues.

In Antalya, I also sat down with **Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Yermek Kosherbayev**, whom I thanked for the country's efforts to comply with the EU's sanctions imposed on Russia. The EU and Kazakhstan share a deep commitment to the international rules-based order. In that context, I also

offered the EU's support on human rights issues, including on the issue of non-discrimination. Equal treatment of all, including of LGBTIQ+ persons, is a principle Kazakhstan has committed to respecting.

In Antalya, I met again with **Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Hind Kabawat**. We discussed my upcoming visit to Syria in June, focusing on transitional justice and accountability, gender equality and women's rights as well as civic space and media freedom. The Minister told me about her efforts to establish an inter-agency committee to address the issue of **children** taken from their mother's during the Assad era, as well as projects to support the return of displaced populations to their communities. We also discussed the registration of both local and international NGOs.

In Brussels, I met **Lebanese Minister of Justice Adel Nassar**, including on the ongoing war from the perspective of human rights and IHL. We further took stock of the issues we had covered during my visit in November. The Minister outlined the immense dilemma of Iran's ongoing influence in Lebanon, Hezbollah's domestic role, as well as ongoing violence by Israel, including the **de facto occupation of 55 villages** in the south of Lebanon.

The Minister outlined several legislative reforms that are progressing despite the ongoing situation. He hoped to see the **abolition of the death penalty** soon, which would mark a significant development on a regional scale. We discussed the recent conclusion of the investigation of the **Beirut Port explosion**, the file of which had now been transferred to the Public Prosecutor. I also raised the importance of ensuring **domestic accountability pathways** for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since October 2023. I was pleased to hear that shortly after the visit of the Minister, Lebanon deposited its instrument of accession to the **Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction**. The south of Lebanon is highly contaminated by remnants of war.

After some time, I met again with the **Tanzanian ambassador** to ask him about the Tanzanian government's plans to address the situation following the elections in late October 2025. The ambassador assured me that the report of the investigative commission, presented to the public on 23 April, aims to clarify the circumstances leading to the violence, advance reconciliation, adopt necessary legislative reforms, and hold those responsible to account. I will continue to follow up on this crucial matter with the Tanzanian authorities.

I raised again the situation of the **Maasai**, following the publication in early March of two reports by commissions established by the President of Tanzania. I was disappointed to hear that the Ambassador confirmed that the government intends to continue its policy of relocations, emphasizing the relocations are strictly voluntary.

In April, I also met with the **Tunisian Ambassador**. We discussed the overall EU-Tunisia partnership from a human rights perspective. I also raised the cases of **Saadia Mosbah**, **Sonia Dahmani**, the "conspiracy against the state" case and **Ayachi Hammami** more specifically, as well as the case of judge **Anas Hmedi**, President of the Tunisian Judges Association (AMT) sentenced to one year in prison on 6 April.

I regretted to find out that on the day of my meeting with the Ambassador, the appeals court had decided to uphold the conviction of Dahmani for the exercise of her legitimate rights, and risks to be arrested any moment. Meanwhile, the [suspension](#) of the activities of the **Tunisian Human Rights League** (LTDH), one of the oldest and most iconic human rights organizations in the region and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, confirms a negative trajectory for human rights in Tunisia.

## MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS

As part of the **EU-Organization of American States (OAS) High-Level Political Dialogue** in Brussels on 22 April, I had the opportunity to exchange with the **Secretary-General of the Organisation of American States, Albert Ramadin**, on human rights developments in the Americas as well as our inter-regional cooperation. As the OAS is undergoing reforms to be fit for purpose in a shifting political landscape, human rights remain central. Secretary-General Ramadin and I fully agreed that addressing challenges ranging from organised crime to poverty reduction through human rights-based policies is the only way to ensure long-term and equitable changes.

In the margins of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, it was a pleasure to connect with the **Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O'Flaherty**. We discussed advancing the common cause of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the EU's neighbourhood, including in accession contexts. I also see the Commissioner's presence in Antalya as a meaningful signal of **Türkiye's** engagement with its Council of Europe commitments.

### **INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

While I was pleased to see a formal ceasefire announced between the **United States** and **Iran**, the situation across the region continues to be dire. In Iran, the population is torn between a constant threat of war and internal repression. 28 people have been executed for political reasons since 18 March 2026, while **Amnesty International** and **Human Rights Watch** have emphasized that most early warning indicators for the commission of mass atrocities have been met. In April, we also marked a full decade of detention and death row for Swedish-Iranian **Dr. Ahmadsreza Djalali**, whose release I have been calling for since I started in this role. I expressed my alarm about the [critical medical condition](#) of Nobel Peace Prize Winner **Narges Mohammadi**, and was relieved to hear about her release on bail on 11 May 2026.

Israel's bombing campaign against **Lebanon** on 8 April, "**Black Wednesday**", was unprecedented, killing hundreds of people in one day, commencing shortly after the ceasefire had been brokered. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [documented](#) patterns of attacks on civilians in populated areas and residential buildings and other conduct that may amount to serious violations of IHL. While there is now a formal ceasefire in place also for Lebanon, extended for three weeks on 23 April, we continue to see daily violations in the south of the country. The deadly attacks against peacekeepers, mostly attributed to Hezbollah in the past month, are serious violations of international law.

I made a [statement](#) about the killing of journalist **Amal Khalil**, which we were all able to follow in real time, as rescuers were unable to save her. I discussed the alarming situation of journalists in humanitarian contexts and beyond with **Jodie Ginsberg**, Chief Executive of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The targeting of journalists and medics is a violation of IHL. Like the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), I am extremely concerned about incendiary rhetoric, including threats to annihilate "a whole civilization" or to target civilian infrastructure. This is why I decided to launch a [video series](#) on IHL in the context of the Middle East, with four videos in total.

The situation in the occupied **West Bank** is deteriorating. An updated [mapping](#) by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded 925 **movement obstacles** across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, representing the highest number on record in 20 years. In addition, In April, the Israeli Security Cabinet decided to approve the establishment of **34 new settlements**, in addition 68 settlements that the government had already cleared since its formation. There has been an 80 per cent increase in settlements since this government is in power. Moreover, the **E1 settlement plan** threatens to separate **East Jerusalem** from the West Bank.

A new EU and UN [assessment](#) found that the past two years of hostilities have caused human development to have been set back by 77 years in **Gaza**. Meanwhile, humanitarian access to Gaza continues to be impeded, although the reopening of the Zikim Crossing has brought some relief, but private sector trucks still represent the majority of those who have access to the Strip. The issue of so-called **dual-use items** continues to be a severe impediment to aid delivery.

Israeli operations in **Syria** have intensified in April. According to the Register Center for Human Rights, in April alone, there had been 254 violations by Israel in Syria, 213 of them occurring in **Quneitra**. Violations have increased sharply since the US-Israel war on Iran. Patterns, many [confirmed](#) by OHCHR, include near-daily incursions and raids, areal actions, home demolitions, home searches, detentions (including of children), checkpoint operations and the spraying of unidentified chemical substances across agricultural and grazing lands. I also read with concern an OHCHR [update](#) on significant numbers of killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, deportations of detainees, and uncovered mass graves in **northeast Syria**.

In **Ukraine**, too, violations of IHL occur on a daily basis, including drone and long-range missile strikes against civilian objects. On 26 April, Ukraine's Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant lost all off-site power for the 15<sup>th</sup> time since the beginning of the war. Meanwhile, the EU launched its **20<sup>th</sup> round of EU sanctions** against Russia, including 120 individual listings.

## **JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

In April, the **Coalition for the ICCs presented a** deeply troubling [report "Criminalising Accountability"](#) on the impact of US sanctions against persons working for or with the International Criminal Court. On this occasion, I gathered key actors working within the EU Institutions for a direct exchange with individuals and organizations directly impacted by the sanctions, including **Issam Younis**, Director of **Al Mezan Center for Human Rights** and **Francesca Albanese**, UN Special Rapporteur on the OPT. It is unacceptable that they are targeted for the legitimate work of pursuing international justice.

I also published a [video](#) on my discussions with the **Palestinian NGOs**. The attention on the impact of the sanctions on Palestinian NGOs has been insufficient. Due to the sanctions, organizations are unable to carry out their indispensable monitoring and reporting on ongoing violations, which is, indeed, the intended impact of such sanctions. The EU does not recognize the sanctions. We are committed to ensuring the independence and operations of the ICC. This means ensuring that anyone working for or with the ICC cannot be withheld a bank account, health insurance or be prevented from continuing their work. That is why I continue to raise awareness of the situation. It is essential for the EU to be prepared to use all options on the table to support the ICC when necessary. The announcement of the incoming Hungarian government on the ICC is encouraging in this regard.

As the unrelenting full-scale aggression by **Russia** continues, **Ukraine** and the EU are doing all they can to secure justice for all the victims and survivors. I had the pleasure of contributing to an event hosted in Brussels by the **International Centre for Transitional Justice** on the **National Action Plan on Transitional Justice**, which the Government of Ukraine committed to developing by the end of the year. The plan will further support the important work already done.

This month marked a historic moment for Syria, as the first two transitional justice trials started in Syria: **Atej Najib**, former Security Chief in Daraa governorate accused of detentions and torture in the early days of 2011 and **Amjad Youssef**, accused of his leading role in the 2013 Tadamon massacre. The moment is significant for all victims and survivors, and represents a tangible step towards justice and accountability. Nevertheless, many civil society organizations, victims and survivors have expressed their concerns regarding the ability of the authorities to guarantee **fair trial rights**. Others have

expressed concern about the possibility of perpetrators facing execution. Moreover, the Syrian Penal Code does not include **elements of international crimes**, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Justice cannot be performative. It is essential to understand transitional justice in a holistic manner, where judicial pathways are one of the many options to ensure justice for **victims and survivors**. Other options include public apologies, community reconciliation, truth seeking, memorialization, legislative reforms to guarantee non-recurrence and many others. It is key for all victims and survivors to be able to have a say in what justice means to them, including in the building of a comprehensive transitional justice strategy for Syria. I will discuss these issues during my upcoming visit to the country.

My team also met with **Amnesty International** on the situation in **Libya**. Amnesty expressed concern about accountability for violations by militias, including concerns that public prosecutors are unable to investigate such cases or to preserve evidence. Many of the detention centres remain controlled by militias while thousands are arbitrarily detained, often without legal basis or having already served their sentences. There are weekly reports of enforced disappearances, and the situation has been further exacerbated by tribal tensions. Amnesty emphasized that as Libyan authorities continue to be unable or unwilling to prosecute violations, the role of the **ICC** is essential. Eight Libyans with outstanding ICC arrest warrants remain at large.

#### **CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT**

In April, representatives from **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** presented their [latest report](#) to me detailing findings on sexual violence in **Darfur, Sudan**. The number of victims of sexual violence treated by MSF—including children under the age of 18 and even those under the age of five—is beyond comprehension. Reports of drone strikes by the **Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)** and the **Rapid Support Forces (RSF)** targeting civilian areas—including healthcare facilities—across Sudan. I commend organizations like MSF and many others, which, despite all the hardships and dangers they face, persevere in their efforts to provide humanitarian aid to those in need.

A [report](#) by **UN Women** demonstrates that across the OPT, repeated displacement, overcrowded and unsafe shelters and other factors have led to a heightened risk of gender-based violence. A **UNFPA report** reported on a rise in harmful coping mechanisms, including child marriage, across the OPT. On the other hand, a **West Bank Protection Consortium** report found that sexualized and gender-based violence in a coercive environment contributes to the forcible transfer of Palestinian communities, with more than 70% of displaced households identifying threats to women and children, especially sexualized violence, as a decisive reason for their departure.

UN experts, too, [expressed concern](#) that “Israeli sexual violence has become embedded in Palestinians’ daily lives under occupation,” a phenomenon the international community should take seriously. I have also been informed by civil society that the sexual violence perpetrated against Palestinian girls is leading to many of them dropping out from education, as well as early marriages.

In parallel to the opening of the two high-profile transitional justice trials in Damascus, the **District Court in The Hague** has resumed hearings in a criminal case against a Syrian man accused of **committing crimes against humanity, specifically torture, sexual violence and rape**, in his capacity as Head of the Investigation Department of the National Defence Forces in the city of Salamiyah. This represents not only a major moment in the history of Syria, but it is also the first prosecution of sexual violence as a crime against humanity in the Dutch legal system, under universal jurisdiction.

**Palestinian children** continue to be disproportionately impacted by the violence in both the West Bank and Gaza. According to OCHA, between 14 and 20 April, two Palestinians, including one child,

were killed in separate incidents in Jerusalem and Hebron. On 21 April, four Palestinians, including two children, were killed. In **Al Mughayyir** village, an Israeli settler opened fire near a school, killing a Palestinian child and injuring two others. On 23 April, a 15-year-old child died in Nablus after Israeli forces shot him with live ammunition during a raid. The education of children is being attacked, too: on 21 April, we saw the demolition of a **donor-funded Al-Maleh school** in the West Bank. This comes at a time where the **Death Penalty Bill** recently passed by the Israeli Knesset does not include exemptions for juveniles.

The horrific images of the past few weeks of children having been bit by rodents in their sleep in **Gaza** are just the tip of the iceberg of the suffering children are experiencing in the Strip. Not even aid providers have been spared: in April, two **UNICEF contractors** were killed while delivering drinking water in northern Gaza, demonstrating an increasing disregard for the sanctity of IHL, and thereby the protection of humanitarian personnel. If not even children deserve protection, humanity has little hope.

### **RULE OF LAW, DEMOCRACY, CIVIC SPACE AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

While continuing to wage its senseless aggression on Ukraine, **Russia** continued to persistently use national security and public safety frameworks as a basis for curtailing freedom of expression, stifling human rights defenders, and eroding the space for civil society.

In April, I also closely followed political developments in **Kyrgyzstan**, and remain attentive to their implications for human rights. The authorities should take concrete steps to align with their international commitments on fundamental freedoms and non-discrimination, which are also part of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements signed with the EU.

This month the human rights situation in **Pakistan** was again raised to the attention of my Office by prominent NGOs. In the centre of this discussion were the stark realities facing marginalized communities in Pakistan. Systemic discrimination, entrenched social exclusion, and severe socio-economic disparities - including alarming labour exploitation - remain pervasive. While independent statutory bodies do crucial advocacy work, their efforts require genuine, sustained political backing to effect real change. It is imperative that Pakistani authorities urgently advance comprehensive legal reforms to dismantle these structural inequalities. The EU stands resolutely with the courageous advocates fighting to protect the fundamental rights and dignity of all individuals.

I was pleased that **local elections** were organized in the **West Bank** and parts of Gaza, demonstrating a high level of professionalism and competence of the Central Elections Committee (CEC) despite the ongoing situation as well as budgetary constraints. Voter turnout remained stable in the West Bank, at 53 per cent, demonstrating Palestinians are eager to participate in democratic processes. Despite a real impact of the occupation on political sovereignty, local elections play an important role to ensure representation, service delivery and accountability.

Some months ago, I met with French-Algerian **Nassera Dutour**, President of the Algerian NGOs **Collectif des Familles des Disparus** and **SOS Disparus**. Unfortunately, I was informed that on 16 March, the Algerian authorities suspended the operations of SOS Disparus. This comes after the expulsion of Ms. Dutour in 2025, and is representative of a broader pattern of shrinking civic space in Algeria. I have also been informed of the case of [poet Hirk Mohamed Tadjadit](#), who received three additional criminal charges on 20 April, in addition to his sentences of 2022. The new charges could also lead to the death penalty. I call for his immediate and unconditional release.

The Directors of the **Heinrich Boell Foundation in Central America as well as Chile, Bolivia and Peru** shared with me their impressions of how environmental policies are being dismantled in several

countries. I also met with Sacharov fellow and **Director of Citizen and Freedom, Carolina Barrero**, who provided updates on her work on civil and political rights in **Cuba** and the situation of political prisoners. In my [interview](#) with her on the **freedom of association**, she shared her own views why it is so central to her work.

In April, I also had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the **French Bar Association (*Conseil National des Barreaux*)** to discuss especially their activities in third countries. We discussed how lawyers and advocates also serve as human rights defenders, including by upholding the rule of law, securing access to justice for all, and uncovering possible human rights violations. I was made aware of a [new convention](#) adopted by the **Council of Europe** aiming to protect lawyers. The convention comes in a context of an increase in attacks, including harassment, threats and physical attacks, as well as interference in the exercise of lawyers' professional duties. The Convention is open for accession by all states, including non-members of the Council of Europe, and I encourage its widest possible ratification.

With **CPJ**, I also discussed the case of **Ahmed Shihab-Eldin**, an American-Kuwaiti journalist of Palestinian descent, forcibly disappeared in March. While I was pleased to see his acquittal on 23 April, I regret the news of him being stripped of his Kuwaiti citizenship, which raises further concern about both press freedom and crackdown on dual nationals in the country.

On 24 April 2026, Editor-in-Chief of independent news site Tunisian Press, **Zied el-Heni** was arrested, after having faced repeated judicial harassment tied to his public commentary, and he was sentenced to one year in prison on 7 May. I call for his immediate and unconditional release. In April, my team also met with family members of French-Tunisian radio journalist **Mourad Zeghidi**, who had been sentenced to three and a half years in prison on money laundering charges. Sentences based on economic misconduct seem to have become commonplace for human rights defenders, and I call upon the Tunisian authorities to remove the charges for the exercise of Mr. Zeghidi's legitimate rights, along with the charges against fellow presenter on the programme, **Borhen Bsaies**.

In April, my team continued to engage with civil society on the human rights situation in Egypt, including on concerns that **pre-trial detention** is often used as a default option, rather than a last resort. I look forward to the entry into force of the new Criminal Procedures Code, which will introduce alternatives to pre-trial detention. Meanwhile, I call for also all of those exceeding the current maximum pre-trial detention period to be released.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND POLITICAL PRISONERS**

In **Belarus**, the Lukashenko regime continued its two-track game – releasing some political prisoners (including the Polish-Belarusian journalist, **Andrzej Poczobut**) while simultaneously deepening repression through new laws and designations. These include the anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda law, designating the Lithuania-based European Humanities University an "extremist organisation" and invalidating the passports of persons formerly detained on political grounds and forcibly expelled from Belarus following their releases in 2025 and 2026. UN experts also expressed [grave concern](#) over allegations of prolonged incommunicado detention and detention conditions at a **Navapolatsk Correctional Colony**.

I was horrified to learn about the brutal acid attack on prominent **Indonesian** human rights defender **Andrie Yunus** this past March. Such deliberate violence, which caused severe and potentially permanent injuries, is entirely unacceptable and demands swift, genuine accountability. I am deeply concerned by the recent decision by Indonesian authorities to transfer this case to a military court. Under established international human rights standards, serious crimes committed against civilians

must be adjudicated in civilian courts to ensure impartiality, transparency, and public trust. The Indonesian government must ensure comprehensive and independent investigation - such as a Joint Fact-Finding Team - that uncovers the full truth and holds all perpetrators accountable. The protection of human rights defenders is a cornerstone of democratic governance, and this case represents a critical test of Indonesia's commitment to the rule of law.

In mid-April, I also noted the release of prominent **Chinese** human rights lawyer **Yu Wensheng** after serving a three-year sentence for the alleged offence of 'inciting subversion of state power'. As highlighted in the recent [EEAS Spokesperson's](#) statement, his initial detention in 2023 alongside his wife, Xu Yan, occurred on his way to an engagement with the EU Delegation in Beijing - a matter that remains of deep concern to us. While I **welcomed** his release, I reiterate it is only a genuine gesture if it includes the full restoration of civil rights. I strongly urge the Chinese authorities to fully respect the rights of both Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan, ensuring their freedom of movement and communication without any further surveillance or restrictions.

I have been made aware of the case of **Sayed Mohamed Almosawi**, who has died in custody in **Bahrain** after having been forcibly disappeared on 19 March. According to Human Rights Watch and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), his body bore signs of torture. I call upon the Bahraini authorities to ensure an impartial and independent investigation of Almosawi's death, and to ensure measures to address torture and ill-treatment in prisons.

While I was pleased to hear about the releases of **Sherif Al Rouby** and **Nermin Hussein**, as well as the lifting of **Hoda Abdel Wahab's** travel ban in Egypt, I remain deeply alarmed by the re-arrest on 6 April of **Ahmed Douma** for the exercise of his legitimate rights. I also heard reports on his hearing, where the court did not allow his legal representatives, family members nor EU observers to be present. As defence lawyers did not have access to his case file, the hearing was postponed to 13 May.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE**

I was both disappointed and disturbed to learn about the last-minute postponement of **RightsCon** – the world's leading conference on human rights in the digital space - planned to take place in Lusaka, **Zambia**, from 5 to 8 May. Not only is this a missed opportunity to bring together policy makers, civil society and individuals working on human rights online. The hosting by Zambia of this important gathering would also have been an important step to put the spotlight on Africa as well connectivity as an enabler for human rights.

The assessment that foreign interference would have influenced the Zambian government's decision to postpone the holding of the Conference is most concerning. The EU has a longstanding cooperation with the organiser, **Access Now**, including on internet shutdowns. I stand ready to support and attend RightsCon when and where the conference is rescheduled.

## **RIGHTS OF PERSONS OF THE MOVE**

I have been informed by civil society of an intensified crackdown in **Egypt** against persons on the move, including a campaign of arbitrary arrests and mass deportations, particularly of Sudanese nationals. I was told that over 300 migrant and refugee children are currently detained, while ten of them have already died in custody. Civil society is concerned that the **2024 Asylum Law** may normalize such practices, considering the vague criteria introduced by the law.

My team also discussed with civil society the importance of ensuring safe, voluntary, dignified and well-informed returns to **Syria**, where there continue to be regular flare-ups of violence, including of a sectarian nature. A major concern continues to be **housing, land and property rights**, particularly

for female-headed households. The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** recent legal needs found that accessing rights continues to be a main barrier for returns.

Civil society told my team about the risks faced by persons on the move in **Libya**. They continue to be deported, and risk falling into the hands of human traffickers. It was reported to me that 250 migrants from Nigeria and Niger had been transferred to a hotel in military vehicles, and 100 of them were consequently sold in a nearby market to work in farming. 70 per cent of them were children, sold for USD 200 each. This pattern, in addition to sexual violence and recruitment into militias, is common in both in the east and west of the country. I was also told about violent interceptions at sea, and warned about the risks of EU-Libya cooperation on migration management.

In **Lebanon**, the ongoing war has further exposed the precarious situation of **migrant workers**. With over one million people internally displaced, already fragile protection systems are under immense strain. Despite formal commitments to non-discrimination, migrants continue to face significant barriers in accessing shelters, healthcare, and other essential services. In this context, community-led initiatives remain vital, often filling critical gaps where institutional responses fall short. During my visit in November, I also raised my concerns regarding the **Kafala (sponsorship) system**, and called for its abolishment on human rights grounds.

#### **FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF**

I am alarmed about the crackdown on the **Baha'i community** and other minorities in **Iran**. I continue to engage on the cases of **Peyvand** and **Borna Naimi**, two young cousins and members of the Baha'i community. Peyvand was arrested on 8 January, while his cousin Borna was detained on 1 March. They have both faced mock executions, torture, solitary confinement and other ill-treatment, in an attempt to force them to confess crimes they have not committed. The ongoing war has exacerbated the crackdown against minority communities in Iran.

Over **40 per cent of the Baha'i community in Qatar** is at imminent risk of expulsion. More specifically, I have also been made aware of the case of **Moin Yeganeh**, a Baha'i in **Qatar**, who has been detained and is facing likely deportation. Mr. Yeganeh was born in Qatar, and his family has lived there for three generations. Civil society estimate that they have been deported for no reason other than his faith, noting that Baha'is have faced systematic discrimination in Qatar for decades. In a recent development, we have seen the cancellation of the residence permits of Baha'i individuals serving in official roles in the Baha'i community. Those stripped of their residency do not have another home, and I call upon his immediate and unconditional release by the Qatari authorities.

Also in **Egypt**, the situation of the Baha'i has deteriorated. I have been informed that the authorities have tightened restrictions, refusing to legally recognize Baha'i marriages, a case I have also raised with the Egyptian authorities. In relation to the case of **Eman Nour**, a recent official memorandum adopted a negative stance towards the Baha'i community, contending it is not a heavenly religion but a "corrupt doctrine", with implications on civil status issues. Restrictions include access to pensions, inheritance, family registration, health insurance, spousal residency for non-Egyptian partners, and passing the Egyptian nationality.

In April, **Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)** soldiers have destroyed **Christian symbols** in southern Lebanon, including smashing of a Jesus statue in **Debel**. Reports indicate a pattern of damage to churches and statues during military operations, with at least seven churches impacted and a priest killed. In parallel, we are seeing increased restrictions on worship for both Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem's Old City. **Church leaders** from the OPT explained to my office that the military permits to access religious sites in Jerusalem for Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are themselves a

violation of their basic rights. Moreover, on 28 April, a 48-year-old **French Catholic nun** was subjected to a violent and unprovoked assault in Jerusalem's Old City, where she was pushed to the ground and kicked by a man.

In mid-April, I held a highly constructive meeting with **Marion Lalise, EU Special Coordinator on Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred**. Our discussion reaffirmed a fundamental principle of our human rights diplomacy: the European Union's external credibility relies entirely on our internal consistency. To effectively champion the rights of minorities abroad and counter accusations of double standards, we must resolutely combat the alarming surge in anti-Muslim discrimination, faith-based hatred and racism within our own borders. This is especially urgent in today's highly polarized information environment, where disinformation is increasingly weaponized to fracture societal cohesion.

## **BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

April was a busy month for my **engagements with business actors** on their role in human rights. The EU has undergone intense policy development on corporate sustainable due diligence. As we move towards implementation of key legislation, including the **Forced Labour Regulation** and the **Corporate Sustainable Due Diligence Directive**, engaging strong and constructive business actors willing to lead the way will be crucial.

The EU is the unrivalled regional leader on standard setting for responsible business conduct. As I travel the world, I continuously hear how this is already trickling down as businesses down the supply chain are getting ready to meet standards to enter the EU market. I also hear how governments are looking into supporting their business communities' competitiveness, including by considering similar domestic legislation.

As I met with representatives of business alliances such as **Responsible Business Alliance, Amfori, UN Global Compact** and **Global Business Initiative**, it was clear that they are ready to provide the support needed to ensure supply chain risk reduction. I was also delighted to speak to **Secretary General of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), Roberto Suárez Santos**, about why and how we need to [work together](#) between business and the EU in the closing of the **IOE Annual Business and Human Rights Forum** here in Brussels.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

In May, I will engage with the **Political and Security Committee (PSC)** of the Council of the EU, outlining the main results of my mandate until now, and also informing them about my priorities for the coming period. I will also do the same with Directors from EU capitals in the **Council's Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM)**, who will travel to Brussels. Another highlight will be **High-Level Meeting of the International Coalition of the Return of Ukrainian Children**.

*Kajsa Ollongren*

*EU Special Representative for Human Rights*

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