



## EUSR for Human Rights – Newsletter – May 2026

The last two weeks of May represented some of the most intense bombardment of **Ukraine** by Russia, pointing to the ever-escalating pattern of strikes on the civilian population. Meanwhile, this month, the international community has doubled down on supporting returns of **Ukrainian children** forcibly transferred or deported to Russia, and on operationalising accountability bodies such as the **International Claims Commission for Ukraine** and the **Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine**.

21 May marked the **Day of Solidarity with Political Prisoners in Belarus**. The EU cares deeply about their situation: we provide the largest support to families of political prisoners and to those who have been released. On 21 May in Prague, I was honoured to meet a former political prisoner, **Maria Kalesnikava**, who shared with me her experience of captivity. [I also observed the Day of Solidarity](#) by publicly highlighting the cases of political prisoners in particularly vulnerable situations: those with [disabilities](#), with [severe health conditions](#), [persons above 70 years old](#) and those who were [minors at the time of detention](#). They should all be released immediately and unconditionally on humanitarian grounds.

I am closely following developments in **Cuba**. The dire humanitarian situation, resulting in severe restrictions in access to food, healthcare and other basic rights is deeply alarming. The EU is acting to alleviate the situation for the Cuban people through increased humanitarian assistance. We remain convinced that the embargo is not the solution to address political repression in Cuba and advocate for a negotiated solution. Moreover, domestic reforms are not only necessary but the sole responsibility of the Cuban authorities. As High Representative **Kaja Kallas** clearly pointed out in the European Parliament this month, this is the time for Havana to act and implement political and economic reforms that will benefit its people with greater freedoms and opportunities.

The humanitarian and human rights situation in **Sudan** remains extremely dire. Reports of conflict-related sexual violence and attacks affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure continue to emerge. At the same time, worsening humanitarian conditions, including extreme temperatures and the approaching rainy season, increase risks for affected populations.

I have also been alerted about the **new epidemic of Ebola disease** in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and **Uganda**, which is further straining already fragile health systems amid years of conflict and displacement. The World Health Organization has [declared](#) it a **public health emergency of international concern**. Sustained support for organisations at the frontline is essential to scale up epidemiological and public health measures, ensure healthcare access, and sustain community engagement.

Where some conflicts receive significant international attention, other crises remain less visible. I remain deeply concerned by recent reports regarding large-scale killings of **Rohingya** civilians in **Hoyyar Siri, Myanmar**. Persons in vulnerable situations, particularly ethnic and religious minorities including the Rohingya population, continue to suffer disproportionately. These tragic reports indicate that unarmed civilians were deliberately fired upon while fleeing the violence. Survivors continue to be denied justice and face severe deprivation, underscoring the immediate need for safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

The relentless violence in **Lebanon** has continued, including the unspecified mass displacement orders on major cities like **Nabatieh** and **Sour**, which has led to a new wave of displacement of a population that has – in many cases – been displaced multiple times and experienced severe trauma. The scale of destruction observed, including widespread damage to residential areas and villages, raises concerns regarding proportionality and military necessity, particularly where entire areas are rendered uninhabitable. According to the Lebanese authorities, the death toll since the beginning of the recent wave of hostilities on 2 March has risen to over 3,400.

Also in **Iran**, the impact on the economy has been immense. UN agencies present in Tehran told my office that the conflict and the internet shutdown have also had a major impact on **economic and social rights**, including unemployment, deteriorated work conditions and wages, and access to healthcare. In addition to this, the [annual report](#) on the **death penalty** published by **Amnesty International** presents a bleak image on executions, which continue at a frequency never observed before, in addition to arbitrary arrests and abysmal detention conditions.

OHCHR [published](#) a new report on 18 May, providing an overview of the human rights situation in the **Occupied Palestinian Territory**. The report finds that hostilities precipitated a sharp deterioration of an already dire human rights situation. Notably, the unprecedented killing of Palestinians by Israeli military and security forces, and tightening practices over Palestinian lives, lands and territory, including resulting in mass displacement. The report outlines grave violations of international humanitarian law, both by Israel and Hamas, some of which may amount to international crimes. I discussed the findings of the report with **Ajith Sunghay**, Head of the OHCHR Office in the OPT. He gave a grim reading of the situation, [assessing](#) that there would soon “be nothing left to save”, even in the West Bank.

In May, I also [remarked](#) on the mistreatment of **Global Sumud Flotilla detainees** in Israel, urging them to be treated in line with international human rights law and released without delay. I further joined the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in calling for an independent and impartial investigation, and the facilitation of sufficient aid into Gaza.

I am concerned by the [decision](#) of the 36<sup>th</sup> Ankara Regional Court of Justice to annul the regular and extraordinary congresses of the **Republican People’s Party** (CHP) in **Türkiye**, along with previous charges, arrests and prosecutions and removals from office of elected officials, giving rise to serious questions regarding the rule of law, human rights and democracy in the country, a candidate country of the EU and a member of the Council of Europe.

In May, I spoke on the radio programme [Spraakmakers](#) and joined the Dutch podcast [GeopolitiekNu](#). Earlier in the month, I also appeared on the Dutch television programme [Café Kockelmann](#), discussing particularly violations of IHL worldwide, focusing on Ukraine. On the occasion of **the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia** (IDAHOT) on 17 May, I published a [video statement](#) highlighting a number of cases of concern, but also reasons for hope. Finally, I also published a [video interview](#) on what it is like to be an EUSR – let me know what you would like to know more about my work.

## CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

The **High-Level Meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children** held in Brussels on 11 May brought together representative of over 60 states to ensure that Ukrainian children unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred by the Russian Federation are at the centre of international attention, as well as to strengthen collective efforts to secure their safe return and their reintegration and rehabilitation.

I was invited to speak at this year's edition of **GLOBSEC Forum** in Prague. I participated in a [panel discussion](#) on children in Ukraine and another one on the [future of the EU](#). I was also invited by **Ambassador Stefan Lindström** from the GeoTech Center to appear on his **podcast** (*link forthcoming*), where we discussed engaging the younger generation in finding solutions to current geopolitical challenges. I also met with a [range of interesting stakeholders](#), including representatives of civil society and democratic forces, and took advantage of this opportunity to meet with Czech civil society. Finally, I visited [Radio Free Europa/Radio Liberty](#), where I was updated on the situation of their imprisoned journalists, including **Farid Mehralizada** who worked for the Azerbaijani Service until his detention on 30 May 2024. I also gave interviews to **Euromaidan Press**, **Czech Radio** and **Aktuality.sk**.

As a member of the Board of Recommendation, I attended the first **Next Gen: Security Conference** in The Hague, where established experts and emerging leaders came together to discuss the future of security. At a time of unprecedented pressures on long-standing certainties, from peace in Europe to the rules-based international order, this conference offered a critical space to redefine security beyond military power, emphasising the rule of law, human rights, and global cooperation. I was invited to speak in a panel discussion on [multilateralism under pressure](#), where I underscored that while the multilateral system urgently needs reform, it is far from obsolete; we must revitalise, not abandon, multilateralism. In the margins of the conference, I also met again with Belarusian opposition leader **Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya**.

#### **BI- AND MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS**

In the margins of the **High-Level Meeting on Ukrainian Children**, I was pleased to meet with the **Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Mariana Betsa**, **UK's Minister of State for Europe, Stephen Doughty** who has recently assumed the role of the UK's Principal of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for Ukraine, and the **UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict, Vanessa Frazier**. The **US Assistant-Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, Riley Barnes**, took part in the high-level meeting. I welcomed the US commitment to fund the search and rehabilitation of Ukrainian children. In a separate meeting, we discussed how to address the situation of political prisoners in various situations around the world, including Swedish citizen **Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali** and others in Iran.

I greatly appreciated the invitation to participate in the opening ceremony of the **87th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)**. As I was unable to attend in person, I had to record a [video message](#), addressing conflicts in the African region and the need to ensure accountability for violations in the context of such conflicts. I also emphasized the crucial role of the ACHPR in evolving and progressive jurisprudence, which serves as a model for justice on the African continent. I hope to be able to attend one of the upcoming ACHPR sessions in person.

#### **INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT**

As we marked **Europe Day** on 9 May, I also continued to [emphasize](#) the central role of human rights in our external action. After six months, I met again with Member States' representatives in the [Political and Security Committee \(PSC\)](#). I appreciated the open discussion and the ambassadors' keen interest in my work in defending human rights, IHL, and international criminal justice, both in third countries and at the multilateral level. All Member States stressed that human rights remain a strategic interest of the EU, despite the complex geopolitical situation and the shift towards transactional politics. Many Member States appreciated the participation of the UN High Commissioner Volker Türk in the Foreign Affairs Council, and spoke in favour of continuing this practice.

I continued my discussions with Member States at the **Council Working Party on Human Rights** (COHOM), gathering in its “capital format” the human rights directors from EU capitals in Brussels. There was a strong call for better coordination among Member States in international fora and for EU unity on human rights issues. We all agreed that the new **Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy** must be ambitious, backed by sufficient funding under the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), and must reflect current realities and be strong on IHL and accountability.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, POLITICAL PRISONERS, CIVIC SPACE**

On 31 May, I was reached by the devastating news of the death in custody of **Nicaraguan indigenous leader and political prisoner Brooklyn Rivera Bryan**. Rivera was forcibly disappeared by the Nicaraguan police on 23 September 2024. His family was denied any information about his situation during these nearly three years. Only days before his death, the Nicaraguan government published a communication and pictures showing Brooklyn Rivera in severe health conditions, connected to a respirator. I [call for](#) a transparent and independent investigation into his case. No one should meet Brooklyn Rivera's fate. The EU [demands](#) the end of repression and release of all political prisoners.

I have been closely following his case and also met with his daughter, **Tininiska Rivera**, together with officials from Commission and the EEAS earlier this month. Tininiska Rivera also brought to our attention the situation for the indigenous and afro-descendant populations on Nicaragua's semi-autonomous regions, where several political activists are detained. She called upon the EU to include individuals responsible for political repression on its sanctions list, ending any gold mining cooperation in Nicaragua, and to use the **EU-Central America Association Agreement** to call for the release of political prisoners.

This month, I also met with **Iris Murillo**, journalist and deputy director of **La Hora de Cuba**, who courageously reports about the political and social realities on the island despite recurring arrests, intimidation and threats. Such acts of repression must end for the people of Cuba to have access to information. Various interlocutors have also brought to my attention the situation of 16-year-old **Jonathan David Burgos**, detained since March this year for participation in protests. I have appealed to the Cuban authorities to release him, and am deeply concerned by information regarding his deteriorating health in prison.

I have also continued by exchanges with civil society and human rights defenders from **Venezuela** and met with **Oscar Murillo**, **Executive Director of PROVEA**, and **Laura Louza**, **Co-Executive Director, Acceso a la Justicia**. They pointed to the crucial role for the EU to support a democratic transition in Venezuela on the basis of the recommendations of the **EU Electoral Observation Mission in 2021**.

As Putin continued his brutal assault on Ukraine, human rights inside **Russia** kept deteriorating. There was no safety for Russians in exile either as transnational repression followed them across borders; something I discussed in May with Russian civil society and democratic forces, including with **Mikhail Khodorkovsky**.

This month, there have been several cases of concern in the context of Egypt. I [called upon the release](#) of Egyptian filmmaker and screenwriter **Omar Salah Marei** and others detained for the exercise of their legitimate lives. I further urged the Egyptian government to secure access to his lifesaving medication, which has been denied access to since 11 May.

The case of **Hoda Abdel Moneim** continues to be on my radar, as her family informed me of her deteriorating health, including the need for urgent surgical intervention. Her mental health has also severely deteriorated. As she has been placed under numerous court cases, her next hearings are

expected on 9 June (case no. 730) and 26 July (case no. 800). I call upon the Egyptian authorities to urgently release her.

I was also made aware of the case of **Mariam Mohamed El-Sayed Abdelbasette**, an Egyptian activist currently detained without any publicly disclosed legal basis in **Oman** under alarming circumstances, shortly after giving birth. She is facing a credible risk of forced return to **Egypt**. The situation is particularly urgent, considering Ms. El-Sayed Abdelbasette is a mother of two minor children, including her newborn, significantly increasing the risks related to her continued detention and possible deportation.

Her husband **Abdel Moussa** was already deported without any written justification to Egypt on 9 April 2026, after which he has been forcibly disappeared, with no information on his whereabouts or legal status. I urge the Omani authorities to ensure access to legal counsel, the suspension of any removal procedures for Ms. El-Sayed Abdelbasette, and taking into consideration her specific vulnerability as a mother of young children. She should further be granted the freedom of movement to any destination of her choice, while the Egyptian authorities should disclose information about her husband. Human rights organizations have been referring to these cases as possible transnational repression.

I deeply regret the sentencing of Tunisian lawyer and columnist **Sonia Dahmani** to two years in prison, the main reason for her sentencing being criticism of detention conditions in a 2023 radio interview. Dahmani has been on trial for five separate cases based on claims of spreading false information under Decree 54. She had already been arrested in May 2024, and was finally released on parole after more than 18 months in detention.

The case of **Saadia Mosbah**, too, is extremely alarming, and I regret that there has been no change in the positioning of the judiciary on her case. I was further made aware of the suspension of the activities of **Avocats Sans Frontières** in Tunisia, which was thankfully withdrawn on 20 May. However, Amnesty International [reported](#) on the risk of dissolution of tens of organizations in the country. All these developments raise serious concerns about civic space and the overall human rights situation in the country.

I was pleased to hear that **Bahrain** announced 300 releases on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha. Nevertheless, I remain concerned that prominent human rights defenders, among them EU citizens **Abdelhadi Al-Khawaja** and **Sheikh Mohammed Habib Al-Muqdad**, and I continue to coordinate closely with both Denmark and Sweden to advance their release.

## **DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW (INCLUDING DEATH PENALTY)**

In its May report on the death penalty, [Amnesty International](#) reported the highest number of global executions since 1981, which is an alarming regression. According to Amnesty, Iran was the main driver behind the spike, as the country doubled its number of executions from 2024 in its attempt to instil fear and punish dissent. An alarming trend worldwide is the resurgence of executions for **non-lethal drug related offences**, which is not in line with the definition of most serious crimes in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Yet, there are also positive trends. The 17 executing countries – **Afghanistan, China, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Kuwait, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Somalia, South Sudan, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, United States, Viet Nam** and **Yemen** – remain an isolated minority, as abolition remains a global trend. For example, in Lebanon and Nigeria, bills have been introduced to abolish the death penalty, while the Constitutional Court in Kyrgyzstan deemed attempts to reintroduce the capital punishment as unconstitutional.

I was disappointed to hear that on 24 May, the Emir of Kuwait issued a decree amending the **Kuwait Municipality Law** No. 33, transforming the formation of the Municipal Council from a mixed system (combining election and appointment) to one nominated by appointment only. The law further included stricter conditions for those eligible for candidacy. This decree comes in a context of the dissolution of the National Assembly in May 2024, and the revocation of citizenship of tens of thousands of citizens, most of whom are women and children.

The issue of citizenship is also a key concern in the context of **Qatar**, where over 40 per cent of Qatar's Baha'i community faces **imminent expulsion**. I am concerned about the possibility of this being a targeted attempt to expel a community that has been present in the region for over 100 years. Those serving in leadership roles within the community have been particularly targeted. I call upon the Qatari authorities to halt these deportations and stop using immigration law as a tool to target the Baha'i community.

## **INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

I welcome the **EU's new approach to humanitarian action** "*Defending Principles, Driving Reform, Delivering Impact: the EU's Humanitarian Action in a Shifting Global Order.*" The plan presents a strong and principled vision for EU humanitarian action, placing renewed emphasis on humanitarian diplomacy, defending humanitarian principles and ensuring access to those most in need. At a time when international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action face increasing pressure, determined action and stronger political engagement are more important than ever.

I was particularly [pleased](#) that the new approach recognizes the role of my office in promoting compliance with IHL. It further speaks of the EUSR's constructive role in unblocking challenging situations and balanced internal and external communication on IHL, and I look forward to carrying this role forward.

In the context of **Sudan**, I am particularly alarmed by the situation in **Tawila**, which has become a refuge for nearly 379,000 people fleeing violence and displacement from **Zamzam Camp** and **El Fasher**, the majority of them women, children and persons with disabilities. Any further escalation of fighting between the **Rapid Support Forces (RSF)** and **Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)** in this already highly vulnerable context risks catastrophic consequences for civilians and may lead to further large-scale atrocities. All parties must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law. Those responsible should be aware that **violations are being documented** and closely monitored by the international community and that grave violations of international law must lead to accountability. I continue engaging with humanitarian partners and international organisations to ensure that the situation in Sudan remains high on the international agenda.

Findings [published](#) this month point to serious allegations of grave violations of international humanitarian law and possible war crimes in **Myanmar**, including large numbers of civilian casualties among women and children. The broader situation continues to raise profound concerns. Restrictions on independent journalism and access also render gathering evidence and documenting violations significantly more difficult. I continue to support the work of international accountability mechanisms, including the **International Criminal Court**, **International Court of Justice** and the **Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar**. A decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Gambia v. Myanmar case is also expected later this year.

In the alarming context in the OPT, I was pleased that the EU moved forward on **new sanctions** against both [extremist settlers](#) and other actors undermining the two-state solution as well as  [Hamas](#) and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Meanwhile, I am extremely alarmed that Israel launched the "Land Registry

and Settlements of Rights” online system for the OPT with the apparent aim of annexation of occupied territory through wholesale registration of land, which would seriously undermine any prospects for the two-state solution.

This month, I met with **Dorothee Klaus, Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon**, whom I had already met in the context of my mission to Lebanon in November 2025. We discussed the evolving humanitarian and security situation in Palestinian refugee camps, including increasing concerns of deteriorating living conditions, rising insecurity and the broader governance challenges affecting camp populations. I was particularly struck by the complex environment in which UNRWA continues to operate, including growing humanitarian needs, increasing social pressures and concerns regarding long-term sustainability. The overall situation in Lebanon also has a major impact on Palestinian refugees.

Like in November, we also discussed the importance of strengthening governance structures, ensuring access to essential services and creating future opportunities for young people through education and livelihood perspectives. The discussion reinforced for me that sustainable stability requires more than humanitarian assistance alone. Long-term solutions will also depend on inclusive governance, education, and addressing the underlying drivers of vulnerability and instability. Throughout the region, I continue to champion the work of UNRWA, including in the context of my upcoming missions to Jordan and Syria.

In addition to ongoing violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** told my office that 96% of displaced respondents to their survey reported an impact on livelihoods, including loss of access to the workplace, reduced income and the loss of assets. This is a strong illustration of how conflict is having a pervasive effect on the economy and affecting more people than only the ones who suffering from displacement. Indeed, some non-displaced respondents have also lost their job, either because the business closed, or construction has stopped or because they can no longer access the fields. NRC estimates that the Lebanese economy will require at least 10 to 15 years to recover from the last few months. This comes after a time where there was finally some hope for Lebanon to get back on its feet.

According to NRC, daily **demolitions of civilian infrastructure** located in the zones subject to displacement orders, including schools, health centres, religious sites and residential buildings, are undermining the practical possibility of return. Some of these demolitions are controlled and targeted, conducted with bulldozers and tanks, rather than being the result of collateral damage of air campaigns. This questions whether Israel may have other means than demolitions to control military threats in these areas. In areas such as **Khiam** or **Bent Jbeil**, NRC observed that every single piece of infrastructure was destroyed in the towns without any discrimination, making the area unlivable even if access is made possible. Even in areas where return may be feasible, the scale of destruction implies that tens of thousands of people will be unable to return until extensive reconstruction takes place.

## **TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

I met with [ICC Judge Nicolas Guillou](#) who bore witness to his tireless work on international accountability. We discussed the impact of the individual sanctions imposed on him precisely for this work. I am encouraged by the dedication and determination of legal professionals like judge Guillou who continue their important work undistracted. At the same time, I remain concerned by the continued impact of sanctions affecting 11 judges and prosecutors at the International Criminal Court have been sanctioned by the US government. ICC prosecutors and judges are carrying out independent accountability mandates.

This month we received the positive news that the US has lifted the individual sanctions against UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, **Francesca Albanese**, but these were unfortunately reinstated shortly afterwards. Meanwhile, NGOs sanctioned for their cooperation with the ICC remain without effective protection.

During the **EU Day Against Impunity for Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes**, I [stressed](#) once again that individuals responsible for investigating and prosecuting the gravest crimes should be supported in carrying out their work independently and without undue pressure. Justice and accountability depend on the ability of international institutions and investigators to perform their mandates freely and impartially. While the ICC has been able to take measures to protect its staff, NGOs impacted by such sanctions are left without any safety nets. I also discussed the importance of **preventing atrocity crimes** – be it in Sudan, Venezuela, Ukraine or Syria – with [the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#).

I welcome an important development in accountability efforts related to the serious crimes committed in **Libya**. The confirmation of charges hearing of **Khaled Mohamed Ali El Hishri** before the International Criminal Court marks a significant step towards justice for victims of serious international crimes and an important milestone in efforts to address impunity in Libya. The case concerns allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed at Mitiga Prison, including torture, sexual violence, murder and persecution. This is the first ICC case linked to Libya to reach this stage since investigations began in 2011, and the first globally addressing serious international crimes committed against **migrants** in Libyan detention centres. It also highlights the importance of state cooperation with the ICC in ensuring that accountability mechanisms can function effectively.

As I prepare my mission to **Syria**, I met with a [group of NGOs](#) convened by EuroMed Rights. They agreed that the priorities I have identified for my upcoming visit in June – transitional justice and accountability, gender equality and women’s rights as well as civic space and media freedom – are key issues that must be tackled in the context of the transition. Like many Syrians, I was shocked to read the news about the confirmation of the death of six children of **Rania Al-Abassi**, who has been searching for answers since the 2013 **Tadamon massacre**. Yet, it is essential that more and more Syrians will know the fate of their loved ones.

## **PRESS AND MEDIA FREEDOM, DIGITAL RIGHTS**

On the occasion of **World Press Freedom Day** on 3 May, I reflected on current global trends that do little to support press and media freedom. In my [social media post](#), I focused on killing of journalists. Annual reports from relevant organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RWB) paint an alarming picture, identifying 2025 as the worst year in the past 20 years in terms of the number of journalists killed. Yet the deliberate targeting and killing of journalists while they are performing their professional duties is recognized as a grave violation of international humanitarian law. Unfortunately, statistics also show that in approximately 80–85% of these cases, no one is held accountable.

Earlier in the month, I marked **World Press Freedom Day** by giving an interview to [TV Rain](#), and independent **Russian** media outlet in exile. Since Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, almost all independent media have been banned, blocked and/or declared “foreign agents” or “undesirable organisations”. With Russia’s ranking 172 out of 180 by Reporters Without Borders in 2026, it is critically important to use available channels to speak to the Russian people.

I was also made aware of **UN Women’s** [landmark report](#) on online violence against women journalists, which concluded that online violence against women in public life in the age of artificial intelligence

(AI) is become more technologically sophisticated, invasive and more damaging. This online violence enabled by AI is intensifying existing patterns of harassment, constraining women's participation in public life and also leads to severe mental health impacts and self-censorship. Only few such cases are reported to the police. The report demonstrates that online violence is not a marginal issue, but a growing threat to women's safety, rights and participation.

I was troubled by the **International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)** report on escalating digital repression targeting media platforms in Central Asia, which highlights concerns about online harassment campaigns, cyberattacks, website blocking, internet shutdowns and AI-enabled surveillance.

### **GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, LGBTIQ+**

The UN Secretary-General's 2025 report on **conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)** was published at the end of the month. For the first time, it includes a Security Council member (**Russia**) in the annex of countries committing CRSV, including the **Federal Penitentiary Service**, the **Russian Armed Forces** and the **Federal Security Service (FSB)** in the context of Russia's war on **Ukraine**. The cases primarily occurred against prisoners of war and civilian detainees.

The annex also includes the **Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)**, **Israel Prison Service** (including Keter special forces) and the **Police Counter-Terrorism Unit (Yamam)** among the parties listed for patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence, primarily during detention and interrogation of Palestinians. This did not come without warning, as last year, the Secretary-General had already put both parties "on notice". I have been speaking about reports of such violations on a regular basis. **Hamas** was also listed in the annex.

Other parties listed include those from the contexts of **Sudan, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Syria, Libya, Mali, Myanmar**, and **Haiti**, as well as actors affiliated with the **Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**, while the report recognizes that these violations are not isolated or confined to a handful of context, but concern conflicts worldwide, as over 9,700 cases were verified around the world.

On the occasion of **IDAHOT**, I expressed my solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ community, and mentioned that 65 countries still criminalize same-sex love, and many continue to enact discriminatory legislation. Such countries include **Senegal, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Kazakhstan** and **Belarus**. I also mentioned the risks faced by LGBTIQ+ communities in the context of armed conflict, including discrimination when seeking access to essential services. I will continue to fight for LGBTIQ+ rights as I engage with actors all over the world.

I was informed that the Egyptian government tabled revised **Muslim and Christian family laws**, referring them to Parliament. During my mission in November, I engaged on these laws, which have been long-delayed. Unfortunately, the fast-tracking of the laws by the President was triggered by a public tragedy: the suicide – during a social media livestream – of a divorced blogger struggling with the failure of a family court to settle alimony and housing issues. In addition to the two family laws, a **Family Support Fund bill** was also tabled. I also hope the parliament will engage with diverse civil society to ensure the laws correspond with the needs of the population.

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

In mid-May, I had the privilege of [giving a speech](#) at in the **Annual Coordination Meeting on combatting anti-Muslim hatred and racism** in Brussels. In the margins of this event, I sat down [with inspiring young artists and activists](#) **Yousra Mahdi** (@crazynouss) and **Esma Bošnjaković** (@strudelworte) who are leading the charge for human rights and anti-discrimination on the ground. As I emphasized during my address to the conference, public and political debates too often frame minority youth through a narrow lens of risk or vulnerability.

These young leaders prove every day that they are not mere objects of policy, but empowered agents of change. Through their creative advocacy and activism, they are doing the heavy lifting to dismantle harmful, monolithic stereotypes and build a more resilient and inclusive society for all of us. We cannot effectively protect the international human rights system without ensuring that youth have a prominent seat at the table today, and it is the duty of our institutions to listen to them, amplify their voices, and remove the deep-seated structural barriers they face.

This month, I also held a constructive meeting with **Katharina von Schnurbein**, the **European Commission's Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism**, with whom we also discussed my concerns regarding the situation in **Israel, OPT and Lebanon**. She invited me to participate next month in the upcoming 16th EU-Israel High-Level Seminar on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life. As I have consistently highlighted in my previous newsletters and public speeches, the EU must project absolute impartiality when addressing faith-based hatred. I strongly advocate for a balanced, side-by-side treatment of all forms of discrimination, racism, and religion-based intolerance, because ensuring an impeccable and consistent human rights track record at home is a fundamental prerequisite for advancing a credible human rights agenda externally.

I was informed that nearly all **Protestant churches in Algeria** have been shut down by the authorities, with a systematic escalation this spring. This has led to thousands of Christians having to practice their religion in private homes and informal gatherings, as authorities tighten control over non-Muslim worship. I hope to discuss this and other matters as I meet with the Algerian Ambassador in early June.

## LOOKING AHEAD

I will kick-start the month of June by speaking about digital authoritarianism at the **Digital Future Dialogue** in Brussels. Shortly after that, I will travel to Jordan to reinforce the dialogue in the framework of our Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership. Later in the month, I will also visit Syria, and I will host a discussion on human rights and IHL in the context of Lebanon.

Later in the month, I plan to participate at the **Global Human Rights Defender Protection Summit** in Dublin. I will also travel to Visby, Sweden, to participate in the annual **Almedalen Week**, which is a major political festival and democracy forum established already in 1968.

I also look forward to bringing the **new approach to humanitarian diplomacy** into practice, as on 9 June I will host a meeting with **EU Special Representatives and Special Envoys** to discuss international humanitarian law, peace negotiations and humanitarian diplomacy together with experts from the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** and the **World Food Programme (WFP)**. I hope these exchanges will further strengthen Europe's role in promoting IHL in peace dialogues, humanitarian access and durable solutions in conflict settings.

*Kajsa Ollongren*

*EU Special Representative for Human Rights*

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