



EUSR for Human Rights – Newsletter – June 2026

On 24 June, we witnessed the apocalyptic **double earthquake** in **Venezuela**, the impact of which is exacerbated by poverty and restricted access to information for the Venezuelan people, who have experienced compounded crises. I am pleased that the EU [reacted early](#) with humanitarian assistance, but for it to effectively reach those in need, the authorities must release reliable information to guide the response, and lift all restrictions to information and independent media.

In June, **Russia's** aerial attacks on civilian objects in **Ukraine** continued with daily civilian casualties, including in Kherson, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and elsewhere. On 6 June, Ukraine marked the Journalist' Day of Ukraine by highlighting the fate of journalists reporting from the frontlines and the occupied territories on Russia's aggression. According to data of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, at least 28 Ukrainian journalists are currently held in Russian captivity or remain missing, while more than 135 journalists have been killed since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion.

I remain deeply concerned by the situation in **Sudan**. In recent weeks, my team has met with humanitarian organisations that shared alarming accounts of the deteriorating situation in Darfur, particularly around Tawila, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people remain at grave risk. Reports of mass killings, conflict-related sexual violence, forced displacement and other serious violations of international humanitarian law underline the urgent need to prevent further atrocities and ensure unhindered humanitarian access.

I am also deeply concerned by credible reports of continued arms flows into the region, which risk further fuelling the conflict and should cease immediately. A [“red alert”](#) was issued by **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk**, demanding action at the highest level to prevent atrocity crimes in **El Obeid** and other areas in Kordofan, where civilians have been trapped in “siege-like conditions for 18 months”. OHCHR documented drone strikes in El Obeid and surrounding areas, with immense civilian casualties. I was pleased to see that on 6 July, the Human Rights Council ordered an investigation into violations in El Obeid.

The situation in the **Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)** remains dire. In June, ongoing restrictions and closures of border crossings into **Gaza** continue, which has led to an [overall decline](#) in the volume of supplies since May. The expansion of the area under Israeli control limits access to aid workers and civilians. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), pests and rodents continue to pose health risks in Gaza, while UNICEF warned that water shortages imply daily trade-offs between drinking, hygiene and disease prevention. Funding shortfalls, too, are forcing humanitarian organizations to scale down and suspend critical services. The **2024 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion** outlines the obligation of Israel as an occupying power to facilitate the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

According to the UN, in the **West Bank**, over 950 settler attack incidents have been documented in over 230 communities in 2026, and widespread demolitions continue. More than 33,000 Palestine refugees continue to be displaced in the West Bank, including due to the continued closure of the Tulkarm and Nur Shams camps. These developments and continued movement restrictions have a major impact on the enjoyment of rights by the Palestinian people, including access to basic services.

All the while, the issue of **de-registration of international NGOs** (INGO) is rendering the situation even more precarious.

On 26 June, the United States announced a **framework agreement between Israel and Lebanon**. The agreement includes a ceasefire, requiring Hezbollah to end hostilities and withdraw from southern Lebanon, with the Lebanese Armed Forces gradually restoring control over all of Lebanon and the Israeli Defence Forces progressively redeploying out of Lebanese territory. The EU [welcomed](#) the agreement, although civil society have raised concerns with me, also outlined in a [joint statement](#), highlighting the importance of the agreement complying with the international legal obligation to investigate and prosecute serious crimes under international law. They further express concerns that the agreement makes the return of the displaced populations from the south contingent on conditions subject to “confirmation”.

Despite the agreement, the UN reports ongoing military activity, which continues to pose risk to civilians and hinder safe return. The death toll is over 4,300 according to the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, and OCHA reports that over 500,000 remain displaced. Towns within the “security zone” are subject to home demolitions and destruction of civilian infrastructure, strictly prohibited under IHL. Hezbollah, too, continued to fire projectiles. These issues were also discussed during my event on human rights and IHL Lebanon (*see below*).

HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUES AND BILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS

Highlighting the consequences of the **Russian aggression in Ukraine** is one of my key ongoing priorities. In June, I joined the **EU-Ukraine Human Rights Dialogue** for a shared assessment of the human cost of Russia’s war and a coordination of the EU’s response. The forcible transfer and deportation of children, the widespread and systematic torture of civilians, including through sexual violence, the destruction of cultural heritage, and the erasure of Ukrainian identity in occupied territories are not incidental horrors of war. They are tools of a deliberate strategy in violation of international law.

From 3 to 4 June, I visited **Jordan**. With **Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi** we discussed the human rights aspects of the **EU-Jordan Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership**, the regional context particularly from an international humanitarian law (IHL) perspective, as well as the upcoming **High-Level Conference on International Humanitarian Law**, to be hosted by Jordan. We also discussed the **situation in Jerusalem**, as Jordan holds the custodianship of its Christian and Muslim holy sites. At the **Petra National Trust** awards ceremony, too, I emphasized the importance of protecting religious and cultural heritage under both international human rights and humanitarian law.

I engaged with the **Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)** and think tanks to discuss Jordan’s modernization agenda. I further met with civil society organizations and women’s rights actors, who raised concerns regarding civic space and the freedom of expression, especially challenges related to the 2023 **Cyber Crime Law**. Women’s rights issues, including meaningful participation in public and political life, equality in the labour market, and the need for reforms to inheritance and custody rights were raised. All CSOs were concerned that the regional context has had a negative impact also on the local human rights landscape, and civil society asked to be included in policymaking as genuine governance actors. In all my interactions, I also encouraged Jordan to move towards abolition of the **death penalty**.

I was hosted by **Her Royal Highness (HRH) Princess Rym Ali** at the **Royal Media Institute**, where I engaged with students, alumni and media actors, as well as a woman journalist from Gaza in a

heartbreaking encounter that will mark me for life. I also had an interview with Jordanian journalists, and my visit was extensively covered by national media outlets, including [The Jordan Times](#) (twice), [Jordan News Agency](#), [Jordan Pulse](#), [AmmanNet](#), [Al Ghad](#) (in Arabic), [Ad-Dustour](#) (in Arabic) and the [Palestinian Refugees Portal](#) (in Arabic). My press release can be found [here](#).

From 15 to 16 June, I headed to **Syria**, for my first visit to the country, which had also been postponed multiple times. I met with **Foreign Minister Asaad Hasan al-Shaibani**, with whom I discussed the evolving EU-Syria partnership from a human rights perspective, including the next iteration of the **Day of Dialogue**, for which I hope the EUSR for Human Rights could return to Syria. We also discussed the regional situation and domestic context in Syria, including in Sweida. With both the Foreign Minister and **Interior Minister Anas Hasan Khattab** I expressed my wish for a solution to be found for the 9th and 12th grade students in Sweida, who were due to take their exams.

With Minister Khattab, we also discussed the importance of women's participation in the security sector as well as gender responsive investigations. With **Minister for Justice Dr. Mazhar A-Wais** we emphasized the importance of sharing knowledge and expertise on transitional justice, and I recommended the establishment of a **National Human Rights Institution**, which could also deal with complaints on violations that have occurred after 8 December 2024. With the **National Commission for Transitional Justice** and the **National Commission for Missing Persons**, we discussed their efforts to advance work on truth and justice in Syria in a victim and survivor-centred, gender-responsive and trauma-informed manner. When discussing the draft **Transitional Justice Law**, I reiterated the EU's principled stance on the **death penalty**.

Based on the results of [extensive civil society and UN consultations](#) prior to the visit, I had identified four priority topics for roundtables with civil society: **transitional justice and accountability; gender equality and women's rights; civic space and media freedom**; as well as **international humanitarian law (IHL)**. You can read more about the visit, including the conclusions of these roundtables in my [press release](#). In Damascus, I further met with the EU Heads of Mission, with whom I discussed their observations on the human rights situation in Syria, as well as my initial observations.

In addition, I also engaged with the **Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria**, the **Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, the **UN Refugee Agency**, and **UN Women**, with whom we discussed the "no camps policy" of the new Syrian authorities and returns (including in the context of housing, land and property issues and civil documentation), the fate of the women and children who have left the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps (and the risk for resurgence of ISIL in the absence of requisite support), mass graves and missing persons in the northeast, women's political participation as well as the need for gender responsive investigations of violations.

My visit was also extensively covered in the **Syrian media**, including by [Sana](#), [ASharq News Syria](#), [Alekhbariah](#), [Welat TV](#), [Al Thawra News](#), [Syria TV](#), [Damas Radio FM](#), [Syria News](#), [Syria TV News](#), [Syria Now](#), [Radio Sham FM](#), [Al Wahda Foundation](#). I also [spoke with Celine Kasem](#) (@celinekasem) about young people's perceptions on transitional justice. In Brussels, in preparation of my visit, also [met with Huma Khan](#), Head of the OHCHR Syria Country Office (whom I also met in Damascus) and member of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic **Fionnuala Ni Aolain**.

At the beginning of the month, I met with **Algerian Ambassador H.E. Mohammed El Amine Bencherif**. We agreed on the importance of the EU-Algeria partnership also in the area of human rights, and particularly the close cooperation in multilateral fora. In addition to commenting on some laws whose broad interpretation has allowed for the limitation of the exercise of legitimate rights in Algeria – including the freedom of expression - I also raised the suspension of the operations of **SOS Disparus**

and the expulsion of **Nassera Dutour**, whom I had met last year. I also asked about information on **Rachid Ben Nakhla**, and continued to call upon the release of poet **Mohamed Tadjadit**, union leader **Ali Mammeri** and sports reporter **Christophe Gleizes**.

15 June marked the 11th **EU-Egypt Association Council**. I was pleased to see that [EU position](#) highlighted some of the issues that I had already discussed with my Egyptian counterparts during my November 2025 visit, including Egypt's commitment to reduce the number of crimes punishable by the death penalty, introducing alternatives to pre-trial detention and the release of those who exceed the maximum period, continued encouragement towards inclusive civil society consultations, and concerns related to civic space and the freedoms of expression. This month, NGOs brought to my attention concerns about alleged reprisals against human rights defenders abroad, challenges related to the NGO Law, continued discrimination against the Baha'i, and the need for comprehensive legislation on violence against women and girls.

On 24 June, the 12th **EU-India Human Rights Dialogue** took place in New Delhi, an important engagement that my office helped preparing. Co-chaired by EU Ambassador **Hervé Delphin**, the dialogue provided a vital platform for free and frank discussions following the historic **EU-India Summit** earlier this year. In an era of growing global challenges, it remains essential that the EU and India - as two major democracies - continue to engage constructively on the universality and indivisibility of all human rights.

The comprehensive agenda allowed the EU to address critical challenges and exchange views on the protection of civil society, freedom of religion and expression, rights of the child, gender equality, and LGBTIQ+ rights, as well as the implementation of the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights**. The EU also firmly reiterated its unequivocal opposition to **capital punishment** in all cases without exception, underscoring that our strategic partnerships must remain anchored in the uncompromising defence of human dignity and the rule of law. I look forward to following up on the agreed actions, especially on setting up a joint platform with India to address **child abduction** cases, in accordance with the principles of the 1980 Hague Convention.

MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS

In Paris, I met with part of the new leadership of the **UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** (UNESCO), **Deputy Director Åsa Regnér** and **Assistant Director General Communications Information Mariya Gabriel**. UNESCO's continued presence in countries like Ukraine and Sudan has proven vital to safeguard the space of free media, education and science, as well as the general morale by safeguarding cultural heritage during conflict. UNESCO's research shows that 15 days of military spending by UN Member States could fund independent media and investigative journalism in conflict settings, which is essential in providing lifesaving information.

I also had the opportunity to visit the **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development** (OECD) to meet with **Director for Environment, Jaime de Bourbon**, and the Deputy Director of the **OECD Development Center**. **Director de Bourbon** stressed the importance of a human rights-based approach to limit vulnerabilities of environmental degradation and ensure inclusion in mitigation measures. The OECD Development Center shared with me its important work, which demonstrates through facts and figures why human rights are central for sound economic policies. This is essential from a gender equality and labour rights perspective, but also in relation to aging populations. OECD's work on developing reliable indicators for sustainable development as part of the **UN Global Compact** is vital to guide both development investments and government policies.

CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

From June 23 to 25, I attended the annual **Almedalen Week** – a democracy and political festival held on the Swedish island of Gotland, where I was invited to speak on several panels. Together with the **Embassy of the Netherlands in Sweden** and **Human Rights Watch**, I shared the EU's work to advance accountability and justice for war crimes committed in **Ukraine**. In a panel hosted by the EU Representation in Sweden I discussed the crucial role of EU accession on the path to peace for Ukraine with **State Secretary to the Prime Minister, Christian Danielsson**, and researchers.

The **Ukraine Hub** organised [a streamed discussion](#) (in Swedish) with the child rights organisations **Save the Children**, **SOS Children's Villages** on the impact of the **war on children in Ukraine**. In a [one-on-one interview \(English\)](#) I had the opportunity to dive deeper into the topic. **Civil Rights Defenders** had invited **Meltem Aslan** from Türkiye and **Eduard Marikashvili** from Georgia to Almedalen. They shared their significant challenges and sacrifices in working for human rights in contexts where civic space is shrinking. They expressed to me their views on how the EU can support human rights defenders in such contexts.

Folk och Försvar organised an important discussion about the future of public international law, where I [presented the global picture](#) regarding respect for international humanitarian law (Swedish) that led into a discussion on the impact of European countries withdrawing from the **Ottawa Convention** banning landmines. I also had the opportunity to exchange with civil society organisations convened by the platform **Concord Sweden** and **Member of the European Parliament Alice Bah Kunke** about the impact of language and funding for EU's global human rights imprint.

Almedalen provided a wonderful opportunity for bilateral exchanges between policy makers, private companies and civil society. I was also glad to exchange with both **Ginny Bandanes** from **Microsoft** and **Secretary General of International IDEA, Kevin Casas-Zamora**. During my visit, I was the [guest of the day in the radio programme P4 Extra](#) speaking about my visit and my upcoming hosting of one episode of Sweden's most iconic and longest-running radio programme and podcast, **Sommar i P1**, which will be launched on 23 July.

RULE OF LAW, DEATH PENALTY AND TORTURE

This month I travelled to **Paris** to represent the EU at the **9th World Congress on the Abolition of the Death Penalty**. Against the backdrop of a severe global backlash - marked by a shocking 78% spike in recorded executions over the past year - this gathering of the international abolitionist community was more critical than ever. The EU's stance remains absolute: we oppose the capital punishment in all cases, without exception, and strongly condemn its increasing weaponisation by authoritarian regimes to crush political dissent.

During the Congress, our discussions focused heavily on mobilising the judiciary as an institutional catalyst for legal reform and empowering youth-led advocacy to reshape public opinion. By highlighting our Torture-Free Trade Regulation and our active funding for the Global Consortium for Death Penalty Abolition, we reaffirmed the EU's unwavering commitment to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with civil society until this barbaric practice is eradicated completely.

Only days after I returned from **Jordan**, I was shocked to find out that after having had a *de facto* moratorium since 2027, the country [resumed executions](#): six individuals were executed on 21 June, in a move that is incompatible with the objectives and principles of the EU-Jordan partnership. I truly hope Jordan will resume its moratorium and will not go ahead with plans to execute more persons on death row or to revise its legislation. The EU also regrets the [latest executions](#) of five persons in **Kuwait**, and the increased use of the capital punishment over the last two years.

The global increase in executions is attributable to a handful of countries, while nearly half of the number of executions last year were for drug-related offences, which does not comply with the “most serious crimes” threshold. Those facing the death penalty also often hail from marginalized communities. Overall, however, the direction is abolition, and in Paris, I was also pleased to congratulate **Lebanese Minister of Justice Adel Nassar** for his announcement that Lebanon will continue to pursue abolition. **Sierra Leone’s** Parliament, too, ratified the Second Optional Protocol (OP2) to the ICCPR on the abolition of the death penalty on 9 June. **Cambodia** has announced it will pursue the ratification of OP2, while **Chad** announced it is harmonizing its legislation with a view to adopting OP2.

In the margins of the Conference, I spoke with **Jean-Noël Barrot, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Alain Berset, Council of Europe Secretary General**. I also held dedicated bilateral meetings on the topic with **Lars Castellucci, German Federal Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance**; as well as with representatives of like-minded third countries: **Australia’s Special Envoy for International Human Rights Mark Dreyfus** and the **Director-General for International Institutions and Human Rights at Global Affairs Canada, Emi Furuya**. I look forward to the next World Congress against the Death Penalty, which **Morocco** has committed to host.

On 26 June, we marked the **International Day in Support of Victims of Torture**. I published a [statement](#) on the occasion. Like the worldwide abolition of the death penalty, eliminating torture is one of the most important human rights priorities of the EU, which I continue to raise during all of my travels around the world.

In **Israel**, the Knesset passed a series of legislation, which are alarming from the point of view of the rule of law. In second and third readings, the Knesset passed the “**Nukhba Law**”, establishing a special legal framework for prosecuting those accused of participating in the 7 October 2023 terror attacks. The law creates a dedicated military tribunal, introduces exceptional evidentiary and procedural rules, and permits the death penalty under existing legislation.

The combination of the earlier **Death Penalty Bill** and this new law could normalize the use of the death penalty against Palestinians, ending Israel’s *de facto* moratorium on executions. These initiatives conflict with international legal standards prohibiting cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishment. Allowing the imposition of death sentences by majority rather than unanimous judicial decision, and reducing the size of appeal panels undermines due process protections and fair trial guarantees required under international law. NGOs have also raised concerns regarding the possible use of evidence obtained through torture or coercion.

Following an Israeli Supreme Court ruling rejecting a petition concerning **access by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** to Israeli prisons and detention facilities, another bill, with the aim of restricting access of the ICRC to Israeli detention facilities was also discussed in the National Security Committee, although the bill failed to pass its first reading in the Plenum, the bill is currently on hold.

[Reports](#) on **Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya**, Director of Gaza’s Kamal Adwan Hospital, detained by Israeli authorities without charge since 27 December 2024 under Israel’s Unlawful Combatants Law, are alarming. [Along with others](#), I ask for clarification on Dr. Abu Safiya’s condition, and call for his removal from the Rakefet underground security facility for an urgent assessment of his health, pending his full and unconditional release.

Dr. Abu Safiya reported a sharp increase in assaults against him since judicial proceedings on his release began last month, with violence and beatings having become a daily occurrence. His lawyers

and **Legal Action Worldwide** informed my office about a severe deterioration in his condition, as well as fresh marks of physical assault. I call for an urgent intervention before it is too late. I also call for the release of all the 13 other Gazan doctors held in Israeli detention. In parallel, we have seen the advancement of legislation that would **bar graduates of the medical faculties** of Al-Quds and An-Najah Universities from practicing medicine in Israel. The medical profession cannot be subject to attack.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

In mid-June, I had a highly [productive exchange](#) with **Hadja Lahbib**, European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management. Building on the recent Joint Communication on Humanitarian Action, we focused on the absolute necessity of projecting a robust, unified "Team Europe" approach to humanitarian diplomacy on the world stage. We had a sobering discussion on several conflict zones - including IHL violations in Gaza and Lebanon, as well as the urgent need for unrestricted humanitarian access in the volatile eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Highlighting her successful humanitarian diplomacy mission to Goma, the Commissioner stressed the need to ensure that the various non-state armed groups respect the humanitarian passage. Regarding the **Ebola outbreak**, she confirmed that despite the ongoing conflict, humanitarian corridors remain open and respected. Commissioner Lahbib asked for my support in humanitarian diplomacy in this regard.

On 8 June 2026, I convened a discussion on human rights and IHL in the context of Lebanon. The panellists included independent Lebanese Member of the Parliament **Halime Kaakour**, **Ghida Frangieh** from **Legal Agenda** and **Rodolphe Gabriel** from **ABAAD – Resource Center for Gender Equality**. The meeting was held in the presence of the Lebanese Ambassador, H.E. **Walid Haidar**, and was attended by the majority of EU Member States, EU institutions, UN actors, civil society and university researchers. Several recommendations emerged from the event, both for the Lebanese government and the international community. A [video](#) was also produced of the event, detailing why it is so essential to ensure domestic and international accountability pathways for violations of IHL.

Last month, I welcomed the **EU's new Joint Communication on humanitarian action**, which reinforces the Union's commitment to defending international humanitarian law, principled humanitarian action and humanitarian diplomacy. It also recognizes the role of my office in humanitarian diplomacy. Against this backdrop, on 9 June, I convened the **EU Special Representatives and Special Envoys** for a dialogue with the **ICRC** and the **World Food Programme (WFP)** on the role of international humanitarian law in peacebuilding, mediation and humanitarian access.

The discussion highlighted the value of closer cooperation across EU mandates. As a follow-up, my office is engaging individually with EUSRs and Special Envoys to identify practical opportunities to further integrate humanitarian diplomacy and international humanitarian law into their regional and thematic work. As our meeting ended up being evacuated to Schuman Square due to a fire drill, also [Politico](#) covered it in its Brussels Playbook.

NGOs have also alerted me to the plans by Israeli authorities to advance the **"Shami Neighbourhood"** in al-Jabal, which would risk forcibly displacing approximately 2,500 members of the Jahalin Bedouin communities. The initiative forms part of the broader plan to reshape the area surrounding Jerusalem, including the **E1 corridor** and the recently approved settlement construction plans and transportation schemes, which I also discussed with peace activist **Daniel Seidemann** during my visit to Amman. I continue to call upon the Israeli government to cancel the proposed plan, including all related settlement and road plans, ensuring the protection of the communities from settler violence. Anything else undermines the two-state solution.

During my visit to Jordan, I also met with **Patrick Simonnet, EU Ambassador to Yemen**, and **Jeanette Seppen, Dutch Ambassador to Yemen**. Yemen continues to be one of the foremost humanitarian crises in the world. Yet, there is dwindling international attention and funding to address the emergency. In June, civil society also reached out about the arbitrary arrest by the Houthis of **humanitarian workers**, which has a direct impact on the delivery of lifesaving assistance. Today, **73 UN staff** and dozens of other humanitarian workers remain in Houthi custody. I continue to call for their immediate and unconditional release.

RIGHTS OF PERSONS ON THE MOVE

In order to highlight the critical work of the visited **the United Nations Work and Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)**, I visited Jabal el-Hussein Camp and met with both refugees and UNRWA senior management, **Acting Commissioner-General Christian F. Saunders and Chief of Staff Ben Majekodunmi**, discussing the need to ensure effective service delivery and a rights-based approach to Palestine refugees, whilst also recalibrating UNRWA operations.

While Jordan has been a regional example in granting nationality and rights to most Palestine refugees, a group of **ex-Gazans from 1967** falls outside this category, a problem with immense impact on their children as well, which I also discussed with members of this group. Like the ex-Gazans, also Palestine refugees who fled from Syria to Jordan are a particularly vulnerable category that is facing issues related to access to services, education or employment due to their lack of national identity card.

In Amman, I further met with **Maria Stavropoulou, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Representative in Jordan**, and visited a refugee registration centre, where I also got to speak with both Syrian and Sudanese refugees. While I was pleased to hear about Jordan's commitment to voluntary and sustainable returns to Syria, I remain concerned about the financial situation of UNHCR, and the implications of looming camp closures for the refugees and service delivery. This could also force Syrian refugees to return before they are ready.

I have also been made aware of the severe situation in **Village 5**, a fenced area of Azraq camp in northeastern Jordan, which people can only leave in exceptional circumstances. As Jordan is starting its work on the **Jordan Response Plan**, I hope that both Syrian refugees and NGOs will be fully involved. I also hope that UNHCR can start registering refugees again after it has been unable to do so since 2019.

Based on my discussions with UNCHR, it seems that most returnees to Syria have been able to start their lives in a dignified manner, but those who have returned to Jordan have cited economic as well as housing, land and property (HLP) related issues. **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)**, an organization I also met in Damascus, published is [Legal Needs Assessment on Syria](#), which finds that millions of people in the country remain trapped in a "legal limbo", rendering it impossible for them to prove their identity or access their HLP rights.

62% of Syrian families surveyed have incomplete legal identity documents for at least one member, while 80% of those who have returned to Syria since December 2024 have documentation gaps. I was pleased to find out that the authorities have started registering stateless Kurdish families, annulling the consequences of a 1962 census. 61% of the families owning or renting property said they lack any formal documentation of their housing rights, which has the potential of triggering disputes. The issue is particularly severe for women, with 87% of women whose spouse is missing being unable to access their property or legal rights, inheritance legally frozen without a death certificate. Access to legal

assistance, too, remains uneven. The NRC report outlines recommendations to the Syrian authorities and the international community to address the issue.

In the context of **Egypt**, the bylaws (executive regulations) of the **Asylum Law** (Law No. 164 of 2024) were published during the month of June. Several NGOs presented me with their analyses on the bylaws, outlining their concerns in a context of increased criminalization and deportations. NGOs noted that despite the executive regulations, many issues remain unclear.

The most serious concerns relate to contraventions of human rights and refugee law, including the prohibition of **non-refoulement**. The bylaws do not resolve some of the vague definitions in the Asylum Law, providing grounds for the revocation, rejection and cessation of asylum. There are also concerns related to the appeals process. Moreover, there are no provisions on a transition period between UNCHR and the new system. The bylaws do not include provisions to uphold the continuity of the protected status of UNHCR-recognized refugees, including the recognition of their previously issued cards.

The **positive aspects** of the executive regulations include the introduction of some clarity on the role and operations of the Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs, the requirement to develop standardized guidelines to receiving asylum applications, the requirement to conduct individualized hearings, establishing special procedures for unaccompanied minors, the possibility of submitting family-based asylum applications, granting temporary residence permits, and the obligation of the Standing Committee to provide reasonings behind its decisions.

To mark **World Refugee Day**, I issued a [statement](#) where I acknowledged the impact of displacement on access to rights, and also highlighted the importance of ensuring the right to seek asylum, defend the rights and protection of refugees around the world, issues I also discussed with Commissioner Brunner some time ago, including commitment to **non-refoulement**.

June saw two major developments in the external aspects of **EU migration policy** that warrant strong monitoring from a human rights perspective. On 12 June, the [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) entered into force. Alongside, the European Parliament and the Council agreed on the new [Return Regulation](#), approved by the European Parliament on 17 June. Civil society and [UN experts](#) have expressed concerns that the Regulation significantly broadens the categories of countries to which people may be returned, although return is only possible to countries that respect international human rights standards and principles of international law, including non-refoulement.

The Regulation also enables EU members to create so-called “return hubs” in third countries, whilst also introducing provisions on the respect for fundamental rights. On 20 June, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [called upon](#) the EU and its Member States to exercise due diligence and to ensure consistency with international human rights and refugee law in the implementation of the Return Regulation.

As implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Return Regulation progresses and cooperation with third countries expands, I call for robust monitoring of country situations and accountability mechanisms to ensure full consistency with EU and international human rights and refugee law. The Pact will only be sustainable if faster procedures are matched with robust fundamental rights safeguards, and here, our Member States and their border procedures play a key role.

Finally, NGOs have reported on a new level of surveillance of **migrant workers in Gulf countries**, which has led to the creation of self-censorship of private communication. Migrant workers were particularly concerned about their ability to speak with human rights organizations and media. In May, Amnesty

International documented that more than 1,000 persons have been arrested in Gulf states in relation to the ongoing regional conflict, including spreading rumours or sharing conflict-related content.

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

On the occasion of the **International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict**, I issued a [joint statement](#) with **UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten**. I also published a [video statement](#) from Damascus. Sexual violence can never be justified by military necessity nor is merely a byproduct of the conflict. Often, it is used systematically as a weapon of war, including in **Sudan** and **eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**. The scale of suffering to which the civilian population in both of these countries is exposed is immense and demands increased attention from the international community, as it bears the hallmarks of crimes against humanity.

I continue to call for accountability to be enforced against all perpetrators of these horrific acts. At the same time, more must be done to end the support that parties to these conflicts receive from **third states**, which I have extensively discussed with civil society during the month of June. In order to shed a further light on sexual violence as a weapon of war around the world, I have decided to launch a **video series** on CRSV, which will be rolled out over the summer.

In **Afghanistan**, the **Taliban** intensified its systematic repression of women and girls. [Civil society](#) and [UN experts](#) have warned that a new decree issued to govern the conditions for separation of spouses will enable child marriage and prevent women and girls from leaving abusive relationships. I was also alarmed by reports of the arbitrary detention of dozens of women in **Herat** for allegedly violating restrictive dress codes. These arrests sparked peaceful protests, to which Taliban security forces responded with [excessive force](#), killing at least two people, including a child, and injuring several others.

I want to reiterate that all women have the right to equality and peaceful assembly, to the freedom of movement and the freedom to choose what to wear. I call on the *de facto* authorities to reverse the decree, and to end arbitrary arrests and detention, ensure accountability for the excessive use of force, and uphold the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. I also call upon the international community to refocus its attention on the situation of Afghan women and girls. Normalization is not an option.

On 17 June, the [report](#) of the UN Secretary-General on **Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC)** found that for the first time since the establishment of the mandate of the **Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict** 30 years ago that government forces became the main perpetrators of grave violations of against children. Another alarming finding was that a record number of children endured grave violations by parties to armed conflicts in 2025, described by **Special Representative Vanessa Frazier** as “one of the darkest chapters for child protection”.

Also the **Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the OPT (CoI)** published a report titled [“The essence of childhood has been destroyed”: Israel’s deliberate targeting of Palestinian children in the OPT since 7 October 2023](#) (18 June 2026). According to the CoI, the deliberate targeting of children is one of the **key elements establishing genocidal intent** of the Israeli authorities and security forces to destroy the Palestinian group, in whole or in part, in Gaza. The CoI further reports on a sharp increase in violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinian children in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In its [statement](#) at the Human Rights Council, the EU reiterated the need for Israel and all other countries to cooperate with relevant Human Rights Council mechanisms and mandate holders, and to fully respect their mandate and independence. The unacceptable killing of 7-month-old **Sam Haikal** on 5 June is only the latest example.

PEACE AND SECURITY

On 12 June, I participated at the **16th annual Meeting of Human Rights and Gender Advisers in CSDP Missions and Operations** in Brussels. I appreciated the insightful discussion with them on the implementation of human rights in the current challenging geopolitical environment. Members of the CSDP missions asked the EU and its Member States to continue ensuring that missions and operations have dedicated resources to address human rights and gender priorities.

From 22 to 26 June, the first-ever **UN Peacebuilding Week** provided an important opportunity to reaffirm that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without human rights, justice and accountability. Together with fellow EU Special Representatives working across diverse regions, I initiated in a joint **social media campaign** highlighting how the EU's engagement contributes to peacebuilding. To mark the occasion, I also published an [opinion article](#) reflecting on the importance of transitional justice in Syria, among other contexts, and the challenges of protecting civilians in a context of limited international enforcement capacity, as well as the role of principled diplomacy in building lasting peace.

The situation in the **Middle East**, where multiple framework agreements have been agreed over the past few months, demonstrates that agreements alone are not enough, but sustainability lies in implementation and long-term peacebuilding which addresses the root causes of conflict. Addressing key grievances through human rights, justice and accountability as well as guarantees for the protection of civilians are essential elements to guarantee sustainability. It is therefore essential that human rights and international humanitarian law remain at the heart of the EU's external action.

I was pleased to see that after six months of intense deliberations, the **Structured Dialogue** of the **UN Support Mission in Libya** (UNSMIL) – one of the core components of the political roadmap of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya – concluded within the announced six-month timeframe, producing 600 recommendations across four tracks, including human rights. I hope the recommendations will find buy-in from the communities, including those on victim- and survivor-centred transitional justice.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, POLITICAL PRISONERS, CIVIC SPACE, MEDIA FREEDOM

Last month, I participated in the **Global Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Protection Summit** organized by **Frontline Defenders**, which focused on challenges currently faced by HRDs across the world aiming to collect ideas to strengthen global HRDs protection infrastructure. I engaged in a [panel discussion](#) with the new **UN Special Representative on HRDs Andrea Bolaños Vargas** and **Member of the European Parliament Barry Andrews**. In the margins of the summit, I also met with the **Irish EU Presidency**, particularly on its human rights priorities.

A HRD from **Tanzania** informed me about his efforts to secure investigations killings, disappearances and injuries caused during the violence that accompanied the autumn general elections. In this context, he requested assistance from the EU, particularly with regard to strengthening the capacity Tanzanian CSOs to gather evidence. He encouraged a more proactive approach by the UN Human Rights Council and High Commissioner for Human Rights. I used the opportunity to meet with a [selected group of HRDs](#) from Sudan, Ecuador, Cameroon, OPT and Western Sahara participating in the Summit.

In June, **Front Line Defenders** published its **Global Analysis 2025/26: [Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2025/26](#)**, which gives a detailed overview of the violations against HRDs at risk in countries around the world. According to the analysis, at least 358 defenders killed in 28 countries for their peaceful work in 2025. The countries with the highest number of killings documented were Colombia

(165), Mexico (43), OPT (43), Brazil (22) and Honduras (13). I am deeply concerned by the information contained in this analysis. Human rights defenders contribute to the protection of all our human rights, and that is why we must work hard to ensure that they can do so safely.

At the **European Parliament**, I met with the 2026 cohort of **Sakharov Fellows**. The European Parliament's Sakharov Fellowship offers human rights defenders from non-EU countries the opportunity to follow a two-week intensive training in Brussels and at another location in an EU Member State. It aims at developing capacities of human rights defenders to advocate for and effect positive change. The programme has been organized annually since 2016 further to an initiative taken by the Sakharov Prize Community at the 25th Anniversary Conference of the Sakharov Prize. This year's 14 fellows were from **Azerbaijan, Colombia, DRC, Egypt, Nigeria, Malawi, Morocco, Pakistan, Salvador/US, Serbia, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam** and **Uganda**. My office works closely with former Sakharov Fellows, which is an impressive network that my office greatly benefits from.

This month I celebrated news of the release from a **Cuban** prison of **Jonathan David Muir Burgos**, whose release I have been calling for. It is an enormous relief that Muir Burgos, who turned 17 during his more than three months in a high-security prison, is now reunited with his family. I continue to urge the Cuban authorities to lift all charges against him, including the restrictions to speak publicly about his own situation.

In June, I was alerted about the sentencing of human rights defenders **Mahrang Baloch** and **Sibghat Ullah Shah Jee** to life imprisonment by an Anti-Terrorism Court in **Pakistan**. Both activists are members of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, a peaceful civil rights movement advocating against human rights violations in Pakistan's south-western province of Balochistan. They were sentenced for the alleged killing of a law enforcement officer during a sit-in in July 2024, with no direct evidence presented linking them to the violence. According to [Amnesty International](#), the proceedings raise serious concerns regarding the right to a fair trial and due process. Peaceful civic engagement is a foundational element of a democratic society, and I encourage the Pakistani authorities to ensure full respect for fair trial standards and due process, to protect civic space, and to release all political prisoners.

I was encouraged to see the [UN Special Procedures](#) call attention to the situation of political prisoners in particularly vulnerable position in **Belarus**; something that I also highlighted in a social media campaign in May. The prisoners mentioned were **Aliaksandra Pulinovich, Volha Mayorava, Yavor Volkau, Stsiapan Latypau** and **Viachaslau Areshka**, three of whom I had highlighted in during my campaign. They should be released as a matter of priority.

I was troubled to read the Human Rights Watch [update](#) on activists in **Turkmenistan**, including the situation of the imprisoned **Mansur Mingelov** and **Murat Dushemov**, and that of **Nurgeldy Khalykov** and **Soltan Achilova**. On 29 June, a high-profile court case against journalists and other individuals associated with leading independent news outlet **Toplum TV** started in **Azerbaijan**. Toplum TV is one of Azerbaijan's few independent media platforms. The trial will continue in July.

The EU [expressed its concern](#) regarding the heavy 25-year prison sentence imposed on the 75-year-old former President of the Truth and Dignity Commission, **Sihem Bensedrine**, in relation to her human rights work. I was further heartbroken to find out that three days earlier, a Tunis appeals court upheld the eight-year prison sentence of **Saadia Mosbah**, President of the antiracism association **Mnemty**, in a trial that was attended by the EU and Member States. I continue to call upon Ms. Mosbah's release. This is another blow to human rights in Tunisia, which I will continue to raise in internal discussions with both the EEAS and the Commission.

Tunisia should immediately lift the sentences and release those convicted for their human rights work. Charges for financial crimes have been increasingly used against human rights defenders and their organizations. Tunisia is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and human rights and democratic principles are an essential element of the **EU-Tunisia Association Agreement**.

I remain concerned about the case of **Ahmed Douma**, whose appeal hearing took place at the New Cairo Misdemeanor Appeal Court on 25 June. EU observers could not observe the trial. The appeal concerned Douma's one-year prison sentence in Case No. 2449/2026 on charges related to the spreading of false news. I urge the Egyptian authorities to drop the charges against the exercise of his legitimate rights, and to release Douma without delay.

Last month, I raised the case of Egyptian national **Mariam Abdelbasette**. I was pleased to hear that the Omani authorities allowed her to leave the hospital on 7 June and return to her residence in Muscat, accompanied by her newborn child. However, on 10 June, when Ms. Abdelbasette attempted to obtain a birth certificate for her child from the Omani Civil Status Authority, the authorities required the presence of the child's father. He had been deported to Egypt in April, rendering it impossible for Ms. Abdelbasette to acquire the requisite documentation to leave the country.

In **Saudi Arabia**, I remain concerned about the case of **Manahel Al-Otaibi**, whose case I have raised during the November 2025 Human Rights Dialogue with Saudi Arabia, held in Brussels. Ms. Al-Otaibi is concerned about the medication administered in prison for her multiple sclerosis, which has exacerbated during her detention. Pending her full and unconditional release, I call upon the Saudi authorities to ensure her detention conditions are in line with international standards, with access to family and medical care.

The day I left **Syria**, filmmaker and activist **Hassan Akkad** was detained over allegations related to online defamation and cybercrime. On 21 June, I was pleased to find out that media figure Mousa Al-Omar announced he had formally withdrawn the lawsuit and granted him a pardon. After his release, Akkad published a detailed account of his arrest and detention, noting that additional legal cases on him remain active. He further linked the case to a wider public debate concerning his anti-corruption activities and accountability campaigns, and welcomed the announcement by the Ministry of Justice review the Assad era **Cybercrime Law**.

I was pleased to hear about the release of human rights defender **Sepideh Gholian** in **Iran**, after the suspension of the remainder of her sentence. Gholian is a woman human rights defender and an anti-death penalty campaigner. She was arrested on 12 December 2025 together with five other human rights defenders, including **Narges Mohammadi**. I call upon the release of all other human rights defenders by the Iranian authorities.

It was a real pleasure to sit down with the Executive Director of **the European Endowment for Democracy** (EED), Jerzy Pomianowski. EED is an independent grant-making organisation, set up in 2013 by the EU and the EU Member States. From grassroots activists to independent journalists, EED backs those in the European neighbourhood and beyond who cannot always be reached by other donors — and their flexible needs-driven approach makes them a truly unique player in the democracy support landscape.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Combating all forms of hatred and intolerance remains a fundamental priority for the European Union. On 8 June 2026, I participated in the [16th EU–Israel High Level Seminar on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life at the European Commission](#). Following the horrific attacks of 7 October

2023 and ongoing regional conflict, we are witnessing a terrifying global surge in antisemitic hate crimes, physical assaults, and online harassment that directly targets the democratic fabric of our societies. Yet, as I made clear during the discussions, a true partnership demands courage and honesty in matters related to the respect for international law.

In our external action, the EU will continue to tackle antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred side-by-side, entirely rejecting any selective application of outrage or hierarchy of human rights violations. We will actively push third-country partners to protect minority communities and introduce Holocaust education into school curricula, while ensuring we continue to pass the difficult, necessary messages when the universal rules-based order is at stake.

NGOs have informed me about the arrest by security officers of several individuals belonging to **Egypt's Shia Muslim minority** on 22 June, transferring them to undisclosed locations. The arrests took place in the period immediately preceding the celebration of Ashura, an occasion of profound significance for Shia Muslims. I urge the Egyptian authorities to provide more information about these cases, including disclosing the whereabouts and legal status of those arrested, as well as to immediately release them unless promptly brought before an independent judicial authority and charged with a recognized criminal offence supported by credible evidence.

RIGHTS OF LGBTIQ+ PERSONS

June marks **International Pride month** to commemorate the “Stonewall uprising” in 1969. However, as NGOs have informed my office, for most LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities around the world, Pride is not a party. Rather, it is a reminder that their safety, protection and rights are at risk. As a matter of fact, there is even a deterioration of the situation. In June, the **African Regional Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Family Values and Sovereignty** convened in **Ghana**. Simultaneously, the anti-rights Africa Charter is advancing, new anti-LGBTIQ+ laws were enacted in Niger and Ghana, and there have been multiple violent attacks against LGBTIQ+ persons from Cameroon to Uganda.

DIGITAL RIGHTS

From the war in Iran to Russia's internal repression, it is clear that **digital authoritarianism** is on the rise. Authoritarian regimes are getting inspired by each other and reaping the fruits of rapid technological development. Those stand up for human rights and democratic freedoms need to be at least as agile and tech savvy. This is also a significant reason why the EU needs to advance its **digital sovereignty** - to be able to offer secure technological solutions for persons both inside and outside the Union to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association as well as access to independent and reliable information.

LOOKING AHEAD

You will have seen that I have accepted to take on a new role as Secretary General of the European External Action Service (EEAS). I will reflect more on the conclusions of my mandate as EUSR in the July-August newsletter. I will continue to serve as EUSR until the end of August 2026.

Kajsa Ollongren

EU Special Representative for Human Rights

All newsletters can also be read on the EUSR's [webpage](#).

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