



The Assembly and Association Briefing

Newsletter of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Vol. 3, No. 1 (Issue 18) - Published February 1, 2016

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The Peace Monument statue in Seoul, which represents Korean women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese army during World War II. The monument stands in front of the Japanese Embassy and was erected in 2011, to mark the 1,000th protest on the site

The Special Rapporteur pauses during a press conference held at the conclusion of his official mission to the Republic of Korea on Jan. 29, 2016



Kiai: South Korea's democracy project threatened by regression on fundamental rights

SEOUL — United Nations Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai concluded his official visit to the Republic of Korea today by commending the country on its “impressive achievements,” but underlined that its journey to democracy is not yet over.

“The project of building democracy and human rights in South Korea is not over; indeed it never truly is, in any nation,” the Special Rapporteur said. “What we have is a structure, and our solemn task as governments and citizens is to continually build upon that structure, strengthening the foundation and cultivating its resilience.”

While Kiai applauded the Government's many human rights achievements, he also highlighted “a trend of gradual regression on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association — not a dramatic shutdown of these rights, but a slow, creeping inclination to degrade them.”

Kiai said that undue restrictions are seeping into every stage of the peaceful assembly process in South Korea, despite what he called a “rich history of protest.” These limitations range from formal legal constraints to more practical obstacles and are gradually reducing the right to peaceful assembly to a privilege, he said. Government officials frequently use national security and people's “convenience” as rationales for restricting protests, but often go too far in doing so.

He cited as a “fundamental problem” the fact that assemblies are deemed to be “unlawful” unless organizers notify the authorities in advance, and the authorities' practice of banning many demonstrations even after notification.

“Organizers' failure to notify does not make an assembly illegal,” the independent expert said.

“Nor should the notification process be used to preemptively ban assemblies, except in very limited circumstances.”

English

Read Kiai's full statement

한국어

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Photos

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Audio

Listen to the press conference

The Special Rapporteur also highlighted aggressive police tactics during assemblies, such as the use of bus barricades, water cannons and massive deployments of personnel.

He urged authorities to emphasize a philosophy of de-escalation and communication in evaluating its approach to managing protests, calling these “the more pragmatic options — in terms of proper assembly management, in terms of protecting protesters' human rights and for ensuring public order.”

The expert found fewer issues surrounding the right to freedom of association for non-governmental organizations, calling the level of civil society participation “impressive.” He did, however, call attention to problems experienced by some civil society groups, including the LGBTI association Beyond the Rainbow Foundation, in attempting to obtain legal personality.

He also highlighted concerns about workers' right to organize, including “irregular” workers, those in “disguised working relationships,” teachers and public officials as examples. Other areas of concern included the recent outlawing of the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU) and employers' efforts to snuff out independent unions.

The Special Rapporteur will present a final report on his visit to the Human Rights Council during its 32nd session in June 2016. The full version of this story is [available on our website](#).

“The project of building democracy and human rights in South Korea is not over; indeed it never truly is, in any nation.”

Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai, at a press conference following the completion of his official visit to the Republic of Korea on Jan. 29, 2016



Call for submissions for the UNSR's next report: Exploring fundamentalism's impact on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

For his next report to the Human Rights Council in June 2016, Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai will explore the subject of fundamentalism and the intolerance that it can spur, leading to violations of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. The contours of this subject, however, are not necessarily what they might seem at first glance.

The term “fundamentalism” lacks a formal academic or legal definition, but for many people it can be a loaded term, implying religious extremism or terrorism. These connotations only capture a small part of the story.

For this report, the Special Rapporteur will be approaching the subject of fundamentalism from a different, and much broader, perspective. He believes that fundamentalism encompasses strict adherence to the principles of any given subject, discipline or ideology — not just religion. It also frequently implies intolerance of other views. The purpose of the report is not to make a judgment on whether fundamentalism is good or bad, but to look at its often detrimental impact on the realization of freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Thus, the report will also explore other variations of fundamentalism, some of which may not traditionally be viewed as fundamentalism at all: market fundamentalism, nationalist fundamentalism, political fundamentalism and cultural fundamentalism — essentially any belief system that posits itself as superior to others and makes itself impenetrable to criticism.

Of course, fundamentalism concerns beliefs, and the mere adherence to a fundamentalist belief system is not a human rights violation. It is, in fact, protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Human rights violations and abuses only arise when fundamentalism is put into action in a way that infringes upon the assembly and association rights of others. Such actions can include everything from imposing views on others to taking advantage of a power imbalance to restrict others' rights. Thus, the report focuses on fundamentalism only as a starting point. Its ultimate contribution will be exploring the nexus between fundamentalist belief systems and how these can spur intolerance — in law and in practice — towards groups who do not share the same beliefs.

What's your opinion and experience?

The Special Rapporteur convened an expert consultation to discuss this subject in late 2015, but he would also like to hear your views. He is particularly interested in unconventional examples that might be classified as fundamentalism-driven restrictions on assembly and association rights. Due to the open-ended nature of the subject, the mandate has not produced a questionnaire for respondents to fill in; submissions will be accepted in any format.

We invite States, civil society, multilateral organizations, businesses and members of the general public to submit examples, thoughts, questions and opinions via e-mail in the format of their choice. Submissions can be sent to info@freeassembly.net and freeassembly@ohchr.org. If you're still not sure what we're looking for, [click here](#) to read more.

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Photo: A 2009 protest in Portland, Oregon, USA (Portland Independent Media Center)

More
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Photos
Click here to see photos of the UNSR's Dec. consultation

UNSR releases annual report recapping 2015

NAIROBI — Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai released his mandate's **second-ever annual report**, “2015: The Year in Assembly & Association Rights” on Jan. 14, 2016. The report tells the story of 2015 from the perspective of assembly and association rights and recaps the Special Rapporteur mandate's work during the year.

“There are any number of words that could be used to describe the events of 2015 — inspiring, uplifting, informative, moving, even maddening,” Kiai writes in the report. “But there is one word that cannot be used: satisfying.”

“That is unfortunate, because the year was filled with stirring tales of courage, dedication and passion from activists all over the world: Burundi, the Maldives, Malaysia, Brazil, Bahrain, Venezuela, Russia and more. ... The problem is that far too many of these stories had the wrong ending in 2015.”

The report describes the events of 2015 as “another epic, global tug-of-war over the role that assembly and association rights play in our world today,” citing the emphatic continuation of the global trend of massive protest movements despite many governments' attempts to shrink space for civic engagement.

Kiai says that civil society faces a tough battle to reclaim civic space in 2016 and beyond, but that he is optimistic.

“People may die and movements may be crushed, but humanity's urge to come together and improve our lot in life is immortal — an unstoppable force, innate in each one of us,” he writes. “I am looking forward to what this force inspires in 2016, and to seeing each of us do our part in the struggle to reclaim civil society's rightful space.”

The report is available at the following link: <http://freeassembly.net/reports/2015-year-in-review/>



UN experts urge review of UK surveillance bill threatening freedom of expression

GENEVA — The United Kingdom's draft Investigatory Powers bill could, if adopted in its present form, threaten the rights to freedoms of expression and association both inside and outside the country, a group of United Nations human rights experts [warned in early January](#).

The draft legislation, which is currently being examined by the Joint Parliamentary Committee, aims to unify the various regulations governing how the UK surveillance agencies, police and other authorities can monitor suspects.

Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association Maina Kiai, and Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders Michel Forst made an official joint submission to the Committee in January, expressing serious concerns about several provisions of the draft Bill.

The submission highlighted the Bill's excessively broad definitions and disproportionate procedures to authorise surveillance, including mass surveillance, and data retention without adequate independent oversight and transparency.

"The lack of transparency could prevent individuals from ever knowing they are subject to such surveillance," the experts noted in a six-page submission* to the Joint Parliamentary Committee. "This will ultimately stifle fundamental freedoms and exert a deterrent effect on the legitimate exercise of these rights and the work of civil society and human rights defenders."

Stressing the potential for human rights violations, the Special Rapporteurs called for a comprehensive review of the draft Investigatory Powers Bill "to ensure its compliance with international human rights law and standards." [The joint submission can be read here](#).

(Photo: [ep_jhu/Flickr](#))



Stop harassment of human rights defenders in occupied Palestinian Territory — UN experts

GENEVA — United Nations independent experts [expressed grave concerns](#) on Dec. 18, 2015, at continued reports that human rights defenders are being subjected to physical attacks, harassment, arrest and detention, and death threats, particularly in Hebron in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), in an apparent bid by Israeli authorities and settler elements to stop their peaceful and important work.

"Amidst a charged and violent atmosphere over past months in the OPT, Palestinian and international defenders are providing a 'protective presence' for Palestinians at risk of violence, and documenting human rights violations," said the UN Special Rapporteur the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst.

"The continued harassment of human rights defenders in the OPT, who are exercising their rights to freedoms of expression and association, is simply unacceptable. It should cease immediately," Forst stressed.

Earlier this month, a group of UN human rights experts urged the Israeli Government to ensure a protective environment where human rights defenders in the Occupied Palestinian Territory can work without unlawful restriction and without fear of retaliatory acts.

"We recently addressed concerns to the Israeli Government regarding retaliatory acts by Israeli authorities against members of one organisation based in Hebron, Youth Against Settlements, after its Centre was subjected to raids and settlers allegedly called for it to be closed," said the Special Rapporteur the situation of human rights in the OPT, Makarim Wibisono.

"The Centre has now effectively been shut down as a result of the Israeli military declaring the surrounding area a military zone," she said. "We urge Israeli authorities to lift this military order."

The experts' statement has been endorsed by the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Méndez, and by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai.

The full statement is [available on our website](#).

A scene from the 2015 edition of the annual "Open Shuhada Street" demonstration in Hebron, Palestinian Territories (photo: [Juliane Kravik/Flickr](#))



Freedom of association & assembly:

By the numbers

Number of strikes Chinese labor strikes in 2014, [as reported](#) by the Hong-Kong based group China Labor Bulletin

1,379

Number of Chinese strikes in 2015

2,741

Minimum number of labor activists [detained](#) in Guangdong, the province with the largest number of strikes, in late 2015

12

Number of people [killed in Burundi](#) since a crackdown on the opposition that followed President Pierre Nkurunziza's April 2015 announcement that he would run for a disputed third term (as of Jan. 14, 2016)

439

Percentage of those deaths that came in December 2015 alone

30

Number of years that [Paul Kagame](#) will have served as Rwanda's president when his current (and second) term expires in 2017

17

Additional years that Kagame is permitted to serve as president, following changes to the constitution approved in January 2016

17

Number of people [summoned](#) by authorities for investigation in South Korea, following the November 2015 "Peoples Rally" protest

1,500

Number of [members claimed](#) by the Korean Teachers' and Education Workers' Union (KTU), which was de-registered by the government in 2013 because its ranks included dismissed teachers

60,000

Number of dismissed teachers with KTU membership [who were at issue](#)

9

Percentage of KTU's total membership that these nine dismissed teachers represent

0.015

Number of civil society organizations in Myanmar who signed a petition [expressing concerns](#) over their country's Investment Protection Agreement with the EU

571

Years since the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring (read Amnesty International's [assessment](#) on how it has worked out thus far)

5



A scene from an animal rights protest in Germany on Jan. 16, 2016 (photo: Jakob Huber/Compact)

الإسلام لله أكبر

Alarms over Saudi Arabia's growing clampdown on freedom of expression

GENEVA — United Nations human rights expert David Kaye expressed grave concern on Dec. 15, 2015, at the growing repression of freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia. He noted a string of severe punishments against individuals for the holding and expressing of opinions, including human rights defenders and bloggers, Raif Badawi and Mikhlif al Shammari, and the poet Ashraf Fayadh.

His call was endorsed by Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai, among other UN experts.

"As the world struggles to fight terrible forms of violence, national authorities everywhere should avoid the targeting freedom of expression, especially against those who advocate tolerance, respect and human rights," the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression said.

Several prominent writers and artists have been punished severely for expressing their beliefs in Saudi Arabia. Badawi, recently awarded the Sakharov Human Rights Prize, is a well-recognized human rights defender sentenced in 2014 and flogged in January, when he received 50 public lashes. His health has since deteriorated and authorities have reportedly transferred him to an isolated detention facility and are considering a new round of flogging.

Al Shammari was convicted this month for 'stirring up public opinion' for his work advocating for reconciliation between Shia and Sunni communities via Twitter. And Fayadh, the Saudi-born Palestinian poet, was reportedly sentenced to death for 'apostasy', based on a collection of poems and on allegedly blasphemous comments.

"Such attacks on freedom expression deter critical thinking, public participation, and civic engagement, the very things that are crucial to human development and democratic culture," Kaye stressed. "They also promote fear and intolerance which can resonate beyond the Saudi Arabian society."

"Promoting public flogging and capital punishment in response to the expression of ideas is not only inconsistent with international human rights law but also manifestly disproportionate," Kaye stated. "I urge the Saudi Government to free all three individuals and any others held for the content or form of their expression."

The full statement is [available at our website](#).

"As the world struggles to fight terrible forms of violence, national authorities everywhere should avoid the targeting freedom of expression, especially against those who advocate tolerance, respect and human rights."

Special Rapporteur David Kaye in a Dec. 15, 2015, statement expressing concern over growing repression in Saudi Arabia



Fundamental freedoms key to ensuring peaceful and fair elections in Venezuela

GENEVA — On Dec. 4, 2015, two United Nations human rights experts called upon the Venezuelan Government to guarantee the security of all individuals ahead of Sunday's parliamentary elections, and to urgently remove all obstacles to peaceful public participation.

The elections went forward on Dec. 6 and resulted in a [landslide victory for the opposition](#).

"Reinstituting full space for the freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and ensuring accountability in all reports on violence is key to dissipating political tensions in Venezuela and to ensuring democratic governance," said the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of expression, David Kaye, and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, prior to the election.

"Authorities must ensure the safety of those trying to exchange ideas in the last days of the electoral process," the experts said, recalling the recent killing of opposition politician Luis Manuel Díaz following a campaign rally in Guárico state. There have also been reports of attacks against other peaceful political events just days before the 6 December vote.

"The killing of Luis Manuel Díaz is a very worrying sign of how the environment for political participation in Venezuela has deteriorated," they warned. "A peaceful electoral process requires, at a bare minimum, that the Government guarantee the security of all — particularly

at political events — regardless of political views."

The UN human rights experts also noted that the attacks were only "the tip of the iceberg," and that they were "emblematic of deeper, more systematic challenges for public participation in Venezuela."

"A vast array of cumulative restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association has been building up over the past few years in Venezuela," Mr. Kaye stated. "These have narrowed space for the open and free debate required during any electoral process".

The independent expert stressed that "without ensuring freedom of expression to all, it is impossible to have open, free and fair political processes."

Special Rapporteur Kiai stressed the need to secure the right of people to peacefully assemble and publicly demonstrate their opinions prior and after elections: "Democracy requires a year-round commitment to creating an environment where people can express political opinions, organize for political purposes and peacefully assemble — all without fear of retribution."

The full statement is available on our website in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

UN rights experts urge France to protect fundamental rights while countering terrorism

GENEVA — The current state of emergency in France and the law on surveillance of electronic communications impose excessive and disproportionate restrictions on fundamental freedoms, a group of United Nations human rights experts, including Maina Kiai, [warned on Jan. 19](#).

In a list of concerns shared with the French Government, the independent experts stressed the lack of clarity and precision of several provisions of the state of emergency and surveillance laws, related to the nature and scope of restrictions to the legitimate exercise of right to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the right to privacy.

“As France debates the strengthening of measures in the fight against terrorism, and considers a reform of the criminal procedure, we call on the authorities to revise the provisions and possible reforms adopted to that end, to ensure they comply with international human rights law,” they noted.

In order to guarantee the rule of law and prevent arbitrary procedures, the experts recommend the adoption of prior judicial controls over anti-terrorism measures. The state of emergency law in force since the recent terrorist attacks in France, which temporarily expands the powers of the executive in the fight against terrorism, only allows judicial review a posteriori.

The UN experts also noted that the law on surveillance of international electronic communications, adopted in November 2015, expands the power of the executive over the collection, analysis and storage of communications content or metadata, without requiring prior authorization or judicial review.

“Ensuring adequate protection against abuse in the use of exceptional measures and surveillance measures in the context of the fight against terrorism is an international obligation of the French State,” they stated.

In their communication with the French authorities, the UN experts expressed alarm that environmental activists have been under house arrest in connection with the state of emergency invoked following the November attacks. “These measures do not seem to adjust to the fundamental principles of necessity and proportionality,” they said highlighting the risks faced by fundamental freedoms in the fight against terrorism.

“While exceptional measures may be required under exceptional circumstances, this does not relieve the authorities from demonstrating that these are applied solely for the purposes for which they were prescribed, and are directly related to the specific objective that inspired them,” they said calling on the French Government not to extend the state of emergency beyond Feb. 26, 2016.

The full statement, including the list of experts, is available on our website in [English](#) and [French](#).

UN experts urge Ethiopia to halt crackdown on protesters, ensure accountability

GENEVA — A group of United Nations human rights experts including Maina Kiai [called on the Ethiopian authorities](#) to end the ongoing crackdown on peaceful protests by the country’s security forces, who have reportedly killed more than 140 demonstrators and arrested scores more in the nine weeks leading up to the experts’ Jan. 21 statement.

“The sheer number of people killed and arrested suggests that the Government of Ethiopia views the citizens as a hindrance, rather than a partner,” the independent experts said, while also expressing deep concern about allegations of enforced disappearances of several protesters.

The current wave of protests began in mid-November, in opposition to the Government’s “Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan” to expand the capital’s municipal boundary. The “Master Plan” could reportedly lead to mass evictions and the seizure of agricultural land in the Oromia region, as well as extensive deforestation.

The UN experts welcomed the Government’s announcement on Jan. 12, 2016, suspending the implementation of the “Master Plan”, but were concerned about continuous reports of killings, mass arrests, excessive use of force and other abuses by security forces.

“The Government’s decision is a positive development, but it cannot be seen as a sincere

commitment until the security forces stop their crackdown on peaceful protests,” they said. “The role of security forces should be to protect demonstrators and to facilitate peaceful assemblies, not suppress them.”

“We call on the Government to immediately release protesters who seem to have been arrested for exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, to reveal the whereabouts of those reportedly disappeared and to carry out an independent, transparent investigation into the security forces’ response to the protests,” the experts said.

“Accountability does not erase past abuses, but it is an important step towards rebuilding trust between people and their government,” they stressed. ”

The UN independent experts also expressed grave concern over the Ethiopian Government’s use of anti-terrorism laws to arrest and prosecute protesters: “The wanton labelling of peaceful activists as terrorists is not only a violation of international human rights law, it also contributes to an erosion of confidence in Ethiopia’s ability to fight real terrorism. This ultimately makes our world a more dangerous place.”

The full statement is [available on our website](#).



Police watch demonstrators in and around Place de la République in Paris on Nov. 29, 2015, the day before the COP21 climate talks opened (photo: [Chris Bentley/Flickr](#))

Special Rapporteur news in brief:

December 2015 - January 2016

Special Rapporteur profiled in the Guardian

Maina Kiai was the subject of an extensive [profile in the Guardian](#) on Dec. 23, 2015, in which the Special Rapporteur recapped the developments of 2015. The article noted that the world had seen an almost unprecedented clampdown on civil society groups in 2015, from the banning of western bodies in Russia, to the lengthy battle faced by Greenpeace in India. At the same time, we have seen extraordinary numbers of people attempting to exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, whether by voicing their opinions on the street or joining with their fellow citizens to effect change.

"There is a crisis of governance across the world. A disconnect between politicians and the people," Kiai was quoted as saying. "You can see that in the number of people who vote in developed countries. The link is that people are increasingly finding they don't have any other option."

The full article is available on [the development professionals section](#) of the Guardian's site.

Special Rapporteurs mark 50th anniversary of key UN human rights treaties

Speaking ahead of Human Rights Day 2015, the largest body of independent experts of the United Nations Human Rights system on Dec. 9 renewed its commitment with the implementation of the Covenants, the two key human rights treaties which, together with the Universal Declaration on Human rights, form the International Bill of Human Rights.

The 55 independent mechanisms of the Human Rights Council —'Special Procedures'— announced that they were joining a year-long campaign to promote full ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 16 December 1966.

"The Covenants have spurred considerable normative developments and institutional building at international level, which have been matched by developments at national and local levels," the experts said.

But despite these positive developments, human

Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai and other UN experts join former US President Jimmy Carter for a conference on elections and human rights at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, on Jan. 14, 2016 (photo: The Carter Center/Michael Schwartz)

rights remain under severe threat.

"We urge all States to live-up to their duty to respect human rights and to fully cooperate with all of us as mandate holders appointed according to the rules of procedure of the Human Rights Council," the experts continued. "States should honour their standing invitations and accept requests for country visits and provide timely and substantive responses to alleged human rights violations that we bring to their attention."

The full statement is [available on our website](#).

FOIA factsheets in Spanish

The Special Rapporteur has released Spanish language translations of two of his most popular factsheets, which condense UN reports into a two-page, plain-language format. The first summarizes best practices related to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and [is available here](#); the second summarizes the [right to freedom of association](#). The Special Rapporteur is grateful to [Feliciano Reyna](#) and [CIVILIS DDHH](#) for the translations.

Upcoming & other news

- **31st Session of the Human Rights Council:** The Special Rapporteur will join fellow mandate holder Christof Heyns in Geneva the week of March 7, 2016, to present a joint report to the 31st session of the Human Rights Council on practical recommendations for the proper management of assemblies. The report was drafted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 25/38, and has been in development for a year. You can learn more about the project on our [peaceful protests hub page](#).

- **Consultation with Asia-Pacific governments on civic space:** Prior to the start of the Special Rapporteur's official visit to Korea, he joined the [Community of Democracies](#) on Jan. 20, 2016, to convene a half-day consultation with Asia-Pacific governments on civil society space and the right to access resources. The civil society portion of the consultation was held in Seoul in [November 2015](#). You can learn more about [the project here](#).

- **Carter Center event in the United States:** The Special Rapporteur was in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, on Jan. 14-15 to take part in a two-day conference on election standards and human rights at [the Carter Center](#). Kiai was on a panel that discussed how electoral observers and Special Rapporteurs can work together to improve the quality of elections.





World briefing:

Freedom of assembly and association in the news

People run for cover after police use tear gas and stun grenades against protesters in São Paulo, Brazil, on Jan. 12, 2016. Protesters had gathered to demonstrate against a rise in public transportation fares (photo: [dfactory/Flickr](#))

Israel

Israel's parliament was [considering](#) a law to require members of NGOs that receive more than half their funding from abroad to wear a special tag at parliamentary committee meetings. Some activists said it was a way to target left-wing NGOs, with one arguing that the law was "pointless, unnecessary and causes international damage to Israel." The proposed bill has drawn criticism from both the [European Union](#) and the [United States](#). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in January that [he backs the law](#), but opposes forcing NGO representatives to wear special tags in the Knesset.

Haiti

Protests [erupted across Haiti](#) on Jan. 18, ahead of a controversial second-round presidential vote. The country's opposition has called October's first-round vote an "electoral coup" by President Michel Martelly, who cannot run for a second consecutive term, but favors candidate Jovenel Moïse. [Media reported](#) that demonstrators burned electoral offices in northern towns and destroyed vehicles the capital Port-au-Prince. The elections were [ultimately postponed](#).

Brazil

Brazilians took to the streets [en masse](#) on Dec. 13, in the latest of a series of protests calling for the ouster of President Dilma Rousseff. An estimated 40,000 people turned out in São Paulo, with smaller crowds elsewhere. In a separate development, protests against rising public transportation fares [erupted in Sao Paulo](#) on Jan. 8, 2016. Riot police used tear gas and stun grenades to disperse the protest, which they characterized as violent. Similar clashes between police and protesters took place on [Jan. 12](#) and [Jan. 14](#).

China

China instituted a widespread [crackdown](#) on labor union leaders in Guangdong Province, arresting [over a dozen activists](#) and claiming that they improperly intervened with labor disputes, disrupted public order and trampled the rights of workers. The move came as labor disputes have been [on the rise](#) in China, fueled by a slowing economy and increased layoffs. One piece in the [Washington Post](#) noted the 'cruel irony' of a workers' state stamping out labor activism.

Malaysia

Malaysia's parliament hastily passed a controversial new [national security council law](#) in early December, which the government claims is necessary to improve security. The law would give the government broad powers to declare "security areas" and arrest, detain and seize property without warrant. The law was passed only two days after it was tabled, leading to criticism that there was not sufficient time to debate it. Critics also claim the law [concentrates too much power](#) in the hands of the prime minister. The senate [signed off](#) on the bill on Dec. 24.

Burundi

As Burundi [lurched](#) towards possible civil war, the Human Rights Council held a special session on Dec. 17, which resulted in a unanimous resolution calling for a team of independent experts to investigate [human rights abuses](#) and to report back in March. Burundian opposition refugees, meanwhile, [were pleading](#) for protection from pro-regime 'hit squads' allegedly operating in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda.

Elsewhere

- [South Africa](#) saw a day of nationwide protest on Dec. 16, with thousands of demonstrators calling for President Jacob Zuma to be sacked
- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [agreed](#) to end to investigations into Norwegian-funded NGOs in Hungary, ending a long-running dispute between the two countries
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Association [condemned](#) the arrest and detention of teachers who were peacefully demonstrating over their outstanding bonuses and poor working conditions
- Adapt or perish is the new normal for civil society, [writes Shannon N. Green](#)
- On Jan. 16, demonstrators took to the streets in Hong Kong to protest missing [publishers and booksellers](#)
- Dauria, a Russian environment group that has operated for 20 years, became the latest NGO to be labeled a "foreign agent" in Russia because it received funding from abroad; it joins nearly 100 other civil society organizations
- In Australia, two people protesting against the clearfelling of native forest in Tasmania became the first people charged under the state's [controversial anti-protest laws](#)
- Thousands [protested in Morocco](#) on Jan. 24 over planned education cuts, despite a government ban
- Protests over youth unemployment [took place across Tunisia](#), five years after the start of the Arab Spring (though one commentator argued the demonstrations are [different this time](#))
- [Moldova](#), [Poland](#) and [Italy](#) also saw large protests in January