

In memory of Ben Whitaker,  
an early and inspired advocate  
for the cause of minority rights.

State of  
the World's  
Minorities  
and Indigenous  
Peoples 2015

Events of 2014

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**Front cover:** A Yi minority woman from Yunnan province stands among a crowd of fellow attendees of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, March 2015. *EPA/Wu Hong*

**Inside front cover:** A Bedouin girl in southern Israel's Negev desert. *REUTERS/Finbarr O'Reilly*

**Inside back cover:** A Garifuna boy stands on a beach in Honduras. *Steve Pavey*

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Focus on cities

State of  
the World's  
Minorities  
and Indigenous  
Peoples 2015

Events of 2014

Edited by Peter Grant

Minority Rights Group International

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# Foreword

Rita Izsák, UN Special Rapporteur on  
minority issues

**M**inorities and indigenous peoples have played a central role in cities around the world for centuries, whether as established communities with a presence spanning generations, or as new arrivals in search of security, livelihoods and greater freedoms. From New York's Chinatown to the rich historical fabric of Mosul, until recently one of the most diverse areas in Iraq, under the right conditions minority and indigenous communities have not only been able to prosper but also contributed in numerous ways to the growth, development and diversity of their cities. For this to happen, however, adequate protection and policies must be in place to ensure that minority and indigenous residents can freely and equally enjoy the opportunities that urban areas offer.

Sadly, all too often this is not the case. Since being appointed UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues in 2011, I regularly receive complaints and letters from minority groups from all regions reporting allegations of discrimination in urban contexts. Even in countries with high levels of economic development, well-functioning public services and a stated commitment to equality, many minority and indigenous populations still live in slum-like conditions on the urban margins. Other challenges facing minority and indigenous city dwellers include lack of access to appropriate services, inadequate housing, including threats of evictions, and other manifestations of social exclusion. In addition, many face the daily threat of violence and intimidation from local gangs, right-wing groups and even police. Minorities and indigenous peoples in cities also must contend with how well cities welcome their contributions to the cultural urban landscape and facilitate their participation in the development of vibrant, multicultural urban identities.

Yet I note that while some cities have taken steps to adapt to certain urban issues, such as developing inclusively designed public spaces or gender-sensitive transportation to respond to challenges that women face in urban areas, the concerns of minorities and indigenous peoples, on the other hand, have yet to be mainstreamed into urban policy to the same degree. As a result, their predicament is often invisible in official censuses or city planning, disguised by an absence

of disaggregated data or overlooked altogether by local authorities.

The complex issues and challenges of urban indigenous and minority groups, which are often rooted in social and institutional prejudice, cannot be addressed solely through conventional approaches to urban poverty reduction. Cities must also proactively acknowledge and tackle specific dimensions of discrimination. As with gender, disability, age and other potential areas of vulnerability, planners and policy makers need to develop specific strategies that tackle minority and indigenous concerns. While the experiences of minority and indigenous communities vary widely and cannot be easily generalized, common priorities include increased security in local neighbourhoods, heritage conservation, protection from evictions, equitable service delivery and an end to segregation, both social and physical.

This impressive volume put together by Minority Rights Group International (MRG) highlights the continued failure of many municipal officials, city planners and other urban decision makers to recognize and support their minority and indigenous populations. Furthermore, it draws attention to the limited understanding among rights activists of the specific implications that urbanization has for minority and indigenous communities. In Canada, where the majority of the country's First Nations population now live in urban areas, entrenched exclusion and discrimination have pushed young community members into criminal gangs. In Bangladesh, Dhaka's Dalit population are mostly concentrated in isolated and unsanitary 'colonies' where basic services such as water access are largely absent. In Uganda, poverty and crop failure have driven many Karamajong to migrate to Kampala, where community members can end up engaged in begging, prostitution or being exploited in other ways. Though each example is unique, the common thread between them is the particular challenges that urban areas present for these groups.

This volume is an important contribution to better understanding some of the challenges facing indigenous and minority urban communities, whose struggles often remain

invisible. Moreover, while this report provides a global overview with extensive and well-researched examples, it also asks the important questions often forgotten when thinking about this field: how can we better understand the challenges and causes of discrimination against and marginalization of minorities and indigenous peoples in urban environments, as well as propose solutions and strategies of prevention that can truly work in practice?

In my view, it is essential that minority and indigenous advocates reach out with a view to developing a greater dialogue with development practitioners and policy makers in the urban

**Below:** A Dalit community in the Pongue Sweeper Colony in central Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Minority Rights Group/Livia Saccardi*

sector, to strengthen understanding of how these challenges can be addressed and actively improve the situation of marginalized urban communities. In many countries, in fact, minority and indigenous rights activism is alive and well in cities, where the necessary networks and resources do exist and could be readily mobilized. Though this volume often presents a disturbing picture of the predicament facing minorities and indigenous peoples in urban areas, it also includes some inspiring examples of urban communities taking steps to secure their rights. It remains my hope that it will inspire all readers to support indigenous and minority communities in the struggle to retain their unique cultures, while benefiting from the opportunities that urban life can offer. ■







Minority and  
indigenous peoples'  
rights in urban areas

Corinne Lennox

## Introduction

**A**s our cities grow, they are becoming more diverse in terms of ethnic identity, cultural life, languages spoken and religions practised. Minorities and indigenous peoples are pushed to cities because of poverty, violence, forced evictions from land or poor social services in rural areas; others are pulled by the prospect of better opportunities. Many have lived in cities for generations and some are newly arrived from countries in turmoil. While some can find support from other community members to integrate into city life, most remain on the margins.

The current proposals for the Sustainable Development Goals include Goal 11, 'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. Without attention to the situation of minorities and indigenous peoples in cities, this goal will be much harder to reach. Factors such as the barriers created by discrimination, disproportionate levels of poverty, inter-communal tensions and unequal access to political participation will undermine strategies that are blind to the specific issues faced by many minority and indigenous communities in cities. The best way forward for urban policy and planning is to make minorities and indigenous peoples visible and active participants in tackling the many challenges that lie ahead for global urbanization.

There are many unanswered questions for urban policy and planning about the place of minority and indigenous communities in cities. Do cities offer more opportunities for inclusion or new dimensions of exclusion? Can cultural identities flourish in urban spaces or do cities homogenize groups? Is discrimination on the basis of an ethnic or religious identity less common in the city, or does discrimination persist and even take on new forms? Is governance in cities more representative of diversity than federal governance? What can be learned from the resilience strategies used by minorities and indigenous peoples in cities? These are just some of the issues that ought to feature in what seems to be an under-researched dimension of urban studies.<sup>1</sup> Yet as the current volume shows, attention to the situation of minorities and indigenous peoples is needed to

make cities safer, sustainable, democratic and equitable.

General policy approaches to the urban poor will not be sufficient to fulfil specific minority and indigenous peoples' rights nor to assess the impact of urban policy on these groups. These rights are important for establishing a framework for policy and planning that is consistent with the international human rights law commitments of states. Attention to these rights is also important for operational purposes. A human rights-based approach can mitigate potentially negative impacts of policy and also help to make policy more effective in tackling key challenges faced by cities, such as social cohesion, rule of law, security, livelihoods support, public participation and environmental sustainability.

This chapter will examine urbanization, keeping in mind the four key pillars of the minority rights framework: the right to exist, the right to non-discrimination, the right to identity and the right to participation. Each rights pillar will highlight some important issues for urban policy to consider and some suggestions for future action. Many of these issues will then be explored in further depth through the thematic chapters that follow.

## Recognizing diversity in cities

The increasing population of minorities and indigenous peoples in cities around the world is largely invisible in public policy and statistics. This is partly because dominant groups in cities fail to acknowledge diversity and also because many minorities and indigenous peoples occupy highly marginal spaces in terms of settlement, employment and/or legal status. Take Santiago, for example, where almost half of Chile's Mapuche indigenous people live, yet, according to Andrea Aravena Reyes, Santiago office chief for the National Corporation of Indigenous Development (CONADI), for most Chileans 'the Mapuche is still thought of as a person with an indigenous surname, living in the southern region of Araucanía, belonging to an old-fashioned community and fighting for rights to land. All the rest are ignored and segregated.' Or China, where an estimated 100,000 Africans live in Guangzhou city alone, constituting the largest community of African descent in Asia, where

**Right:** Syrian refugee boy in the underground shelter where he lives with his family, El Akbiya, Lebanon. *UNHCR/S. Baldwin*

many are left in legal limbo due to strict visa measures enforced by municipal authorities.

A vital part of protecting minorities and indigenous peoples is recognizing that they *exist* in cities. States have an obligation to protect the existence of minorities and indigenous peoples. This means ensuring that minorities and indigenous peoples are physically safe but also that their identities are protected. Urban life can pose a threat to these groups on both of these counts.

Melting-pot approaches to managing cities can offer some benefits but risk making minority identities invisible. Whereas national constitutions and policy might acknowledge different identities across the state, the municipal-level governance may be blind to the need for recognition in urban policy and planning as well. Conversely, in some countries, it is municipalities that are dealing with high diversity that have taken more proactive steps than the national government to accommodate the daily challenges of multiculturalism.

The diversity of minority and indigenous communities themselves is one such challenge. Groups may have different needs, different rights claims, varying socio-economic statuses and a range of legal statuses. One city will typically comprise a range of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities and possibly indigenous peoples; they might be nationals of the state who are either historically resident in urban centres or have migrated from rural areas. Alongside these communities will often be migrants, asylum seekers and refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) whose legal status will be far more tenuous and thus their marginalization usually greater. This presents a complex landscape for urban policy to respond to and different rights to accommodate.

Minorities and indigenous peoples can also often be invisible in cities because governments may make no provision for recognition of their rights in these spaces. Minority and indigenous peoples' rights protection is often tied to a particular space where a minority or indigenous



group constitutes the local majority; frequently provisions are made for forms of territorial autonomy in such cases and resources allocated accordingly. In most cities, however, minorities and indigenous peoples do not have the same opportunities for recognition of territorial autonomy and consequentially their right to participate in decision making that affects them can be overlooked. The state may consider that its obligations to minorities and indigenous peoples do not extend to those who have migrated away from their home regions to urban areas. For example, extra budgetary support might be offered for teaching in minority and indigenous languages for schools in minority and indigenous regions, but not to schools in cities that nevertheless service a minority or indigenous population alongside other groups. Conversely,



governments may divert budgetary support from rural areas to support minorities or indigenous peoples in urban centres, thus undermining self-government capacities elsewhere.

Cities can be harsh and violent places for minority and indigenous communities. Their common position of marginalization also means they will typically have weaker access to justice or remedies for human rights violations committed against them. Inter-communal tensions can result in discrimination between groups; in the worst cases, this can escalate into violent conflict. Many cities are historically known to be flashpoints of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict, from Belfast to Jerusalem and Sarajevo to New Delhi. There is also a fast-growing number of urban refugees: according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

nearly half of the world's refugees now settle in cities and towns instead of camps. For most, this resettlement will last for many years and can create tensions or exploitation by local populations.

Inter-communal conflict can erupt over competition for space and resources and is often stirred by political leaders seeking to profit from factionalism. In Durban and Johannesburg, immigrants are being housed in temporary camps as xenophobia and high unemployment have triggered violent attacks, resulting in the deaths of six immigrants in Durban in 2015.

Addressing the invisibility of minorities and indigenous peoples in urban spaces is one important step towards dealing with these problems. Cities can reform their data collection practices to ensure that minority and indigenous

identities are counted through disaggregating data along ethnic, religious and linguistic lines, along with important intersecting identities of age and gender. The participation of the communities themselves in the data collection process is also vital. Minority and indigenous community members can be trained in data collection techniques and are frequently better equipped to build trust between researchers and the local community. They can also enhance data collection, for example, by identifying the types of research methods that will best involve target groups and key issues of relevance to the community.

The proposed Sustainable Development Goal 11 also calls for states to 'enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries'. This will be facilitated by formal recognition of urban diversity and the creation of structures for participation in decision making. There is often a wide range of civil society organizations in urban centres that seek to support minority, indigenous and immigrant communities. In Santiago, some 70 Mapuche organizations are active in advocating for their rights, helping to reduce their urban invisibility and the exclusion that stems from this. Governments can work with these civil society organizations (CSOs) to improve urban policy. In Canada, for example, the federal government has adopted in 2014 a renewed national Urban Aboriginal Strategy, which provides funding to urban indigenous organizations to promote economic inclusion of urban First Nations individuals and communities.

### **The right to non-discrimination**

Discrimination in access to employment, housing, health and education are among the push factors that prompt many people from minority or indigenous communities to migrate to cities. Discrimination can decline in urban spaces because identity differences are less visible or structures of discrimination, such as local traditional hierarchies, less pronounced.

However, the hopes of overcoming the barriers of discrimination in urban spaces are not always realized. Among immigrant groups,

many who belonged to dominant communities in their country of origin often find they are now a marginalized minority. The Urban Audit's 2012 Perception Survey of European cities, for example, found that on average, only 73 per cent of people agreed that the presence of foreigners was good for their city. Others might find that they were discriminated against for their religion in their home region while in cities instead they face ethnic discrimination. Nationals of the country will likely find that discrimination against their group is not limited to rural areas and structures of discrimination are remade in urban spaces. In Mexico City, one survey conducted by the Secretariat of Social Development revealed that 40 per cent of 'non-Native' residents 'would organize protests to impede indigenous settlements near their homes'.

Discrimination in cities can take many forms. Direct discrimination can occur, for example, when public servants from dominant groups delivering services perpetuate discriminatory attitudes towards minorities and indigenous peoples in cities, thus denying them equal access to many services.

Minority and indigenous victims of crime can find that the police do not respond equally to their complaints and impunity may be widespread. Practices of ethnic profiling and disproportionately high incarceration rates are also common. In Tel Aviv, 30 per cent of inmates at Ofek prison for minors are Ethiopian Jews, but the community constitutes only 3 per cent of the national population. In Los Angeles, the Police Department (LAPD) has undergone numerous federally mandated reforms to respond to decades of ethnic discrimination practices. A 2009 Harvard study on policing in Los Angeles found that the LAPD has dramatically increased the number of non-white police officers to 55 per cent of the force, reflecting the city's ethnic diversity more accurately. Community policing approaches have also been adopted, such as community forums, increasing the proportion of ethnic minorities who report a positive relationship between their community and the LAPD.

Access to adequate housing may be denied to minorities and indigenous peoples who apply for government support or who seek private market

accommodation. In many cities, this will leave them with no option but to live in the worst slum areas with little security of tenure, and inadequate water and sanitation. This can also produce residential segregation along ethnic or religious lines, intersected with class. The end result is disparity in access to adequate housing; a 2010 UN-Habitat study found that in Mexico City, for example, while 16.4 per cent of all houses have only one room, 34.3 per cent of indigenous people's homes fall into this category. In Vancouver, indigenous people constitute 3 per cent of the population but 30 per cent of the homeless. In the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, more than half the population are of African descent, despite comprising just 7 per cent of the population in the city's richer neighbourhoods.

Minorities and indigenous peoples are also more likely to be pushed into employment in the informal economy, where wages are lower and legal protection against discrimination is much weaker. One study by UN-Habitat in 2010 found that Maasai indigenous women selling artefacts in urban centres in Kajiado district in southern Kenya earned less than non-Maasai traders, who were better organized and more able to secure trading licences. Discrimination also leads to minorities and indigenous peoples often being concentrated in the most hazardous and polluting jobs. The majority of sweepers in Lahore, Pakistan are Christians, occupying the lowest ranks of employment in the sanitation services. In Pune, India's ninth largest city, nearly 90 per cent of waste-pickers are women, most of whom are Dalits. Minority and indigenous women in many of the world's cities make up a large proportion of domestic servants with little labour rights protection. In the Philippines, a 2005 UN-Habitat report estimated that 50,000 indigenous women unable to find employment in urban areas have migrated abroad to work, often as domestic servants.

In schools, children can face discrimination from pupils or teachers, often with little assistance for those who do not speak the dominant language of the city. This leads to higher drop-out rates for minority and indigenous children and, in turn, lower levels of employment. This also leaves some children vulnerable to recruitment into ethnically based

urban gangs, harming wider social cohesion. The absence of traditional occupations in cities also leaves many minorities and indigenous peoples with limited use for their skills.

Indirect discrimination can also be a major problem: policies and legislation may not be attuned to the realities of minorities and indigenous peoples, resulting in unintentional harm to these groups. For example, the requirement of a formal legal address to register for health and education facilities might disproportionately affect minority and indigenous communities, which often have a higher degree of housing insecurity.

Minorities and indigenous peoples have a right to not be discriminated against on the basis of, *inter alia*, race, national, ethnic or indigenous origin, religion or language. There are several options for legislative and policy reform to help reduce discrimination.

Regularization of legal status can enable minorities and indigenous peoples to access livelihoods in the formal economy where protection against discrimination is stronger. Labour rights associations for the informal sector can be supported to better include minorities and indigenous peoples. In Pune, Dalit women are part of a workers' cooperative, SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling), that negotiated an agreement with the municipal authority to have exclusive rights to manage the waste recycling, a move that has improved wages, safety and security for the workers. Targeted micro-credit programmes can help minorities and indigenous peoples to overcome discrimination in accessing financial services. For example, the government of India has launched in 2015 a Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes to support Dalits to finance innovative enterprise and green businesses. Support to small businesses run by minorities and indigenous peoples can also help diversify their employment opportunities; the Norwegian Centre for Multicultural Value Creation is assisting immigrants to start their businesses by providing advisory services, coaching and training in business establishment.

Land titling and more accessible tenure policies in informal settlements can give minorities and indigenous peoples more security and a legal



address to access other services. Such policies can be particularly important for minority and indigenous women who may lack equal access to land rights under traditional or national law or who have migrated to urban areas to escape gender-based violence.

Schools can offer integration programmes for minority and indigenous children through special language training, parental outreach and fee waivers. In Athens, a Filipino migrant workers' union, Kasapi Hellas, runs their own primary school, attended by a majority of Filipino children but also other ethnic minorities and Greeks. Intercultural schools (with more than 45 per cent of students with a migrant background) have also been created in Greece to offer specialized teaching in cross-cultural education and Greek as a foreign language.

UNESCO has been supporting anti-racism initiatives by launching in 2004 the International Coalition of Cities against Racism. The coalition brings together more than 500 member cities to share experiences of tackling forms of racism and promoting inclusion. Regional coalitions have adopted Ten Point Action Plans, which help to focus plans and strengthen accountability. One of the first steps taken in one participating city, Quilmes, Argentina, was to administer a survey asking residents to provide information on discrimination, which has served as a baseline for data collection and a guide for planning appropriate policy responses.

Legislation and complaints mechanisms on non-discrimination can be tightened to ensure access to basic rights in cities. In the US, the Department of Housing and Urban Development oversees the Fair Housing Act (1968), which prohibits housing discrimination based on race, colour, religion, national origin, sex, disability or familial status. The act is accompanied by an enforcement mechanism, which will investigate cases of alleged discrimination. The Fair Housing Initiatives Program supports public and private organizations to combat discrimination in access to housing, including investing in public education campaigns to ensure compliance with the Fair Housing Act among private landlords.

City governments can also adopt 'special measures' under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial

Discrimination (ICERD). Special measures are targeted programmes to help individuals overcome discrimination in accessing specific human rights. These can be appropriate especially where disparities are evident or heightened in urban contexts. In the urban area of South East Queensland, Australia, for example, the Urban Institute for Indigenous Health runs several programmes on urban Aboriginal health designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, including dedicated health clinics and targeted public health campaigns for Aboriginal people to address community-specific health disparities.

Minorities and indigenous peoples often live alongside other urban poor people who may experience other forms of discrimination and inequality. There is a need to be sensitive to inter-communal tension that might arise from any policies targeted at minorities and indigenous peoples, or from the exclusion of these groups from mainstream pro-poor policies. Transparency is important to demonstrate the aims of targeted policies as one component of broader urban poverty reduction strategies. Data collection is one tool to show the need for targeted measures. In Canada, for example, the Ontario provincial government has an 'Our Health Counts' Urban Aboriginal Health Database Project to gather data on health indicators and related social determinants of health, such as access to adequate housing.

## **Protecting cultural and religious identity**

Cities are the most diverse multicultural spaces on the planet. The global metropolises, in particular, bring together cultural and religious life from around the world. This is a great opportunity for urbanites to sample the music, food, art, dance, languages and traditions of many identities and to forge new identities from cultural fusion. The proximity of so many differing communities, however, can also create tensions over competition for scarce resources, political power and physical space to express one's identity.

States should protect the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples to practise their cultural and religious identity freely. However,



assimilation pressures can be a major problem for minority and indigenous communities, especially those that have migrated to cities. Discrimination can prompt individuals to try to blend into their new society in the hopes that their identity will be less of an obstacle in accessing employment or housing, for example. Such enforced invisibility requires shedding visible signs of religious identity, changing names, abandoning traditional languages and other strategies to hide one's ethnic or religious affiliation. In more extreme cases, there may also be open hostility against certain groups and masking one's identity becomes a matter of safety and even survival.

There can be differing levels of integration sought by different groups within minority and indigenous communities. This can be particularly pronounced in cities that contain multi-generational immigrant groups. Older generations might cling more closely to their distinct ethnic, religious or linguistic identities, while younger generations are seeking greater opportunities for multicultural inclusion in highly diverse cities. The urban space can present greater choice for degrees of integration sought by communities. On the other hand, lack of service provision that is responsive to the needs of different groups can make some minorities and indigenous peoples highly isolated from mainstream life in the city. Urban policy needs to take account of these multi-generational needs, including along gender lines.

Practising one's cultural or religious identity might also be more difficult in new urban environments. For example, there may be fewer places of worship for one's religion or fewer opportunities to use one's mother tongue, including in schools. States can adopt positive measures to enable minorities and indigenous peoples to express their identity in community with other members of their group. This may include eliminating restrictive planning laws for religious buildings or providing teaching materials on minority cultural life. In Moscow, the mayor has refused to permit the building of any new mosques, arguing that most of the Muslims in the city are not permanent residents and therefore have no entitlement to such provision for worship. Muslims, Jews, Hare Krishna and various Protestant communities

have all been denied permission to build or restore places of worship, while Russian Orthodox churches are growing in number in the city.

For communities whose cultural life is tied to land and natural resources, the city will offer little support to sustain such practices. In some urban regions, the spread of cities is encroaching illegally on ancestral lands, usually without consent or compensation. Processes of so-called 'gentrification' (in the global North) or 'modernization' (in the global South) are pushing minority and indigenous communities out of their neighbourhoods in the name of development and diminishing cultural diversity. In China, the Old Town of Kashgar, Xinjiang, has been home to Uyghurs for centuries and is organized into distinct neighbourhoods that support Uyghur community relations. However, Kashgar is being demolished to make way for new high rise construction, without the effective participation of Uyghurs in the redevelopment of the city. Similarly in Istanbul, the historic Roma settlement of Sulukule was demolished in the name of urban regeneration, displacing some 3,500 Roma to new housing in a remote neighbourhood, with higher rent, few jobs and inadequate compensation.

Traditional livelihoods may also be difficult to pursue in the city in the absence of relevant resources and markets. Loss of cultural and religious traditions can also impact on minorities and indigenous people seeking to return to their place of origin, prompting feelings of dislocation or even practices of alienation in home communities.

Formal and informal spaces can be supported for protecting and promoting the expression of minority and indigenous cultural life in cities. In Montevideo, for example, the Afro-Uruguayan House of Culture promotes a wider understanding of the values, customs, culture and history of Afro-descendants in Uruguay. Such spaces can also support wider economic and social inclusion aims. For example, in Liverpool, the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre was originally founded by the CSO Liverpool Black Sisters. It now serves as a resource centre and meeting and training space for the local community, particularly for members of black

**Right:** An Aymara indigenous woman casts her vote at a polling station in Patamanta, Bolivia, 12 October 2014. *EPA/Martin Alipaz*

and ethnic minority groups. In Canada, there is a nation-wide network of nearly 120 Friendship Centres that provide culturally relevant support programmes and services to First Nations people transitioning into or living in urban areas.

### **Participation in public and political life**

Wider studies on urban poverty have found that two major factors for poverty reduction are 'the extent to which the urban poor are organized and the nature of their relationship with local government'.<sup>2</sup> On both counts, minorities and indigenous peoples can be at a disadvantage. They may have less social capital and other capacities to organize in public life and they often lack representation in political life and/or patronage ties to local government actors. Across both issues, exclusion due to discrimination is a root cause.

Participation in public life can be one means of accessing political decision making. Minorities have the right to form associations, including across borders, and in many cities there will be a diverse range of such organizations. Individuals may also seek to join other forms of associational life such as trade unions, housing associations or other political organizations. The 2012 Immigrant Citizens Survey in Europe, however, shows great variation across cities on the participation of immigrants in such groups. In general, immigrants in the studied cities were slightly more likely to join immigrant or ethnic associations than to join general trade unions or political parties, suggesting possibly a lack of trust or practices of exclusion in these latter institutions. In other regions, so-called slum dweller associations have played a major role in improving basic conditions and security of tenure for those living in urban slums. More research is needed on whether minorities and indigenous peoples have an equal rate of participation in such associations or face similar practices of discrimination. It cannot be assumed that urban poor organizations and participatory processes are inclusive of minorities and indigenous peoples.

The governance of cities represents an important opportunity for fulfilling the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples to participate in decision making that affects them or the regions where they live. In most cities, the proportion of minorities and indigenous peoples in the population is not matched by the proportion of representatives from minority or indigenous groups in government: in London, for example, the population of 'black and minority ethnic' people is around 40 per cent but the number of London councillors of this identity is only about 15 per cent, with about 30 per cent of those being minority women.

One advantage of municipal governance is that local elections are often open to voter participation by resident non-citizens, which can increase the participation of some categories of minorities, such as refugees or migrant workers. However, not all countries will extend voting rights to non-citizens. In other cases, the lack of secure housing – and thus a legal address – can impinge on voter registration. These problems are not unique to minorities and indigenous peoples, but they are often disproportionately affected by such barriers due to discrimination in access to adequate housing or highly restrictive citizenship criteria. In the US, the mayors of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles have launched a new Cities for Citizenship programme to naturalize the 8.8 million US legal permanent residents who are eligible for citizenship: besides being excluded from voting, an estimated 52 per cent of them have low incomes.

Minorities and indigenous peoples can have success in seeking political office at the municipal level. In some countries there are minority and indigenous-focused associations of such representatives, such as the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials in the US. Social capital for standing in elections can be easier to harness in cities where ethnic or religious groups are concentrated and national structural barriers to political inclusion are less pronounced. Conversely, politicians can use ethnic or religious affiliation as vote-seeking patronage, which can have the effect of excluding the most marginalized minorities from political representation. Without this vertical patronage individuals often cannot broker access to essential



institutions like schools, public services or micro-credit.

In many rural spaces or regions where minority or indigenous communities constitute a majority or have ancestral ties to the land they may have achieved recognition of self-governance and territorial autonomy. These structures will often not be appropriate in cities. In such cases, forms of cultural autonomy can be used instead to empower groups to exercise governance over key religious or cultural affairs. In Mexico City, which was founded on ancestral lands of indigenous peoples, a Council for Indigenous Consultation and Participation for Mexico City has been established. The council reviews policies that will impact on indigenous peoples but also cultural diversity initiatives in general.

Many cities have created similar consultative

structures for representatives of CSOs that have been formed by minority groups. In Denmark, for example, the Integration Act (2005) recognizes that Integration Councils can be established at the municipal level to give advice on integration and nationally there is a Council for Ethnic Minorities, founded in 1999. However, there are mixed views on the success of these institutions, which have no legal authority, may not be fully representative and exist against a backdrop of integration policy that has been criticized as too assimilationist. For the right to participate in decision making to be fulfilled, participation of minorities and indigenous peoples must be full and effective, with genuine involvement in democratic processes and the opportunity to influence outcomes. Such consultative institutions must also be transparent

and representative, offering equal opportunities for the participation of minority and indigenous women and different age groups.

### **Building the benefits of diversity into cities**

As urbanization increases and our cities become even more diverse, policy makers need to think through the implications of cultural and religious plurality for the future of urban space. Diversity has many benefits for cities if managed effectively, including with respect for the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples.

In response to the need for more analysis of the benefits of diversity in cities, the Council of Europe launched in 2008 a project on 'Intercultural cities: governance and policies for diverse communities'. This is a major programme of research and policy exchange that 'supports cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realize the diversity advantage'. The programme has created an 'intercultural cities index' and other tools to measure how cities are supporting diversity in several sectors from governance to public space, business support and cultural life. More than 60 cities in Europe, North America and Asia have completed the index with support from the project.

More interventions are needed to facilitate multicultural space and interaction in cities. Research by scholars such as Ashutosh Varshney on inter-communal relations, for example, suggests that ethnic and religious diversity in associational forms of civic engagement – for example in professional associations, trade unions or activity clubs – can help to counter attempts by political leaders to polarize communities along ethnic or religious lines. Shared cultural space can be very significant for bridging ethnic and religious divides and building the day-to-day foundations of integrated social life. For example, building a sports centre or organizing multicultural festivals can give people opportunities to interact in a neutral space. In Mexico City, the *'Feria de los Colores, Sonidos y Sabores – Interculturalidad a través de tus sentidos'* includes a forum for public debate, a 'Living

Museum' where communities share their cultures and an exposition of local products.

These efforts can start with stated commitments by city governments on supporting diversity, non-discrimination and outreach to CSOs engaged on these issues. One way to operationalize these commitments is through funding: for example, the intercultural cities index shows that many cities have used the criterion of 'interculturalism' to allocate grants for public events. In Geneva, for example, up to 60 per cent of grants are allocated on this basis.

Further research is needed on intercultural relations in cities. In general, data collection can be more reflective of ethnic and religious diversity. This will help uncover inequalities and can identify major barriers to inclusion. Research can also pinpoint some of the unique resilience strategies used by minorities and indigenous peoples to cope in urban settings; for example, how do individuals deal with the barriers of discrimination in accessing services and what can be learned from this to tackle other social barriers to integration? In Europe, for example, the Immigrant Citizenship Survey focuses on large cities in Europe and provides researchers and policy makers with data on key dimensions of integration.

Innovative data collection tools can also be applied: for example, social distance surveys or isolation indexes can measure how people living side by side in cities view other ethnic and religious groups. This data can show where inter-communal relations are tense and can be used to devise policy responses to reduce the potential for conflict. The use of the 'transect walk' method, where researchers and community members walk together through community spaces to discuss and document various issues, can also be helpful to map spatial inequalities, communal segregation and shared space in urban settlements. Another important data collection tool is the impact assessment. Impact assessments can reduce the likelihood of urban policy and planning exacerbating discrimination or inter-communal tensions by measuring how proposed activities or legislation might affect ethnic or religious communities differently. Affected communities participate in the assessment process at different stages, from design to implementation and

evaluation, to provide vital data on potentially positive or negative impacts of proposed activities. Impact can be measured against several variables, including existing state obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights standards.

## Conclusion

The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Agenda concluded in its report: 'Cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost.' Giving attention to the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples in cities will be essential to winning this battle. This will also offer general collective benefits, such as conflict reduction, better environmental sustainability, greater revenue and less inequality.

Cultural, religious and ethnic diversity in cities is a fact and will continue to grow as urban spaces expand. We cannot ignore this. This diversity has the potential to make or break our cities. With the right measures in place, minorities and indigenous peoples can be equal partners in making urban life flourish for all.

## Recommendations

- Policies for reducing the exclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples in cities should be devised with the full participation of the affected communities, with due consideration for representation also along gender and age lines.
- Respect should be given for self-identification and for enabling individuals and communities to define the transformation of their own cultural and religious identity through urban life.
- Urban policy should measure the impact on discrimination of urban development plans. Participatory impact assessments to analyse the potential effects of activities on inter-communal relations and inequality should be used for policy planning.
- Legislative reform and monitoring tools for reducing discrimination in cities should be adopted.
- The legal regularization of minorities and indigenous peoples living in cities should be prioritized, including offering secure legal status, housing tenure, employment protection, access to health care, permits for places of worship and registration in schools.
- Research and data collection on urban areas

should include disaggregated data on the situation of minorities and indigenous peoples, including along gender and age lines. ■

## Endnotes

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# Minorities and indigenous peoples in cities – conflict and conciliation

Chris Chapman



**R**arely do cities simply mirror the dynamics of the country they are situated in. At the very least, large cities, particularly capitals, magnify and concentrate the trends and developments that mark a country's history. And often they serve as testing grounds for new phenomena, or even form their own micro-societies, with demographics, economies and politics that are markedly different from the countries they are located in. As foci of economic activity, they attract populations on the move, and these in some cases significantly change the ethnic or religious make-up of the city. It might be a religious minority fleeing persecution in another country, or an indigenous people evicted from their rural territory. In some cases the demographic change is more subtle and gradual. Cities may also become less diverse as a result of conflict, if a specific community is targeted and forced to flee. For instance, since 2003 Baghdad has been transformed: what was once a mixed Sunni/Shi'a city with significant Christian and Kurdish minorities is now overwhelmingly Shi'a, with Sunnis comprising as little as 10–15 per cent of the population.

Cities can generate inter-communal tension, most commonly if one or more groups are deprived of having a say in decision making,

**Below:** A Syrian Kurdish refugee waits for transportation at the Turkish border after fleeing northern Aleppo, an area dominated by ISIS insurgents. *REUTERS/Murad Sezer*

denied equal access to resources such as public services or their identity and culture is not respected. Cities can also be highly symbolic in their own right, being seen as a focus for the aspirations of a people – as is the case with Jerusalem, regarded by both Jewish Israelis and Palestinians as a religious centre and as their respective national capital. Kirkuk, a few hundred miles to the east, is seen by the Kurds of Iraq as their Jerusalem, due to long-standing grievances over Saddam Hussein's attempts to engineer the city's demographics by expelling Kurds and providing Arabs with financial incentives to settle there. It is also the centre of much of the country's oil wealth.

On the other hand, cities offer many opportunities for promoting conciliation. The fact that populations live in close proximity offers opportunities for tension, but also for positive interaction. The state will often be ready to invest more resources in conciliation efforts in large cities, seeing the potential for greater rewards, and also – particularly in the case of capital



cities – the possibility to create a highly visible example that can serve as inspiration for the rest of the country. Belfast is a good example of such an approach. Large-scale infrastructure projects, if well-managed, can help to provide jobs, hence reducing the competition for resources, and bring people together – although they can also result in forced evictions and the pricing of poorer sections of the population out of the immediate area. New generations may learn to live side by side with ‘the other’ without feeling the same resentments as their mothers and fathers. Cities can also offer a refuge to minorities and indigenous peoples fleeing conflicts: a large population of Kurds now live in Istanbul, many having moved there from Turkish Kurdistan in the east of the country either fleeing the conflict or seeking economic opportunities. The conflict has a way of catching up with them, however: unknown numbers of those who grow up in Istanbul have returned in later years to fight with the armed wing of the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (PKK), the main Kurdish nationalist organization in Turkey. More recently, protests in a number of towns and cities, and at the Syrian border, over the failure of the Turkish state to support Kurds besieged by ISIS in the Syrian city of Kobane turned violent when they were tear-gassed by police.

### **Top-down intervention in leadership structures**

A comparative study by Ukoha Ukiwo of two cities, Warri and Calabar, in the Delta state of Nigeria, suggests that the potential for conflict significantly increases when the state is perceived as intervening in a partisan manner to favour one group over others. Both cities are populated mainly by three ethnic groups – the Efik, Efut and Qua in Calabar, and the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo in Warri – but, unusually for Nigeria, the dynamics between the groups are not structured in terms of indigenes and migrants: rather, all groups are considered indigenes in the state in question. (In Nigeria’s federal system, indigenes are groups which are officially recognized as being native to a particular state – one of the federal units of Nigeria – a status that carries with it a number of privileges.) In Warri, violent inter-group

conflict has recurred regularly since the 1950s, a situation which has by and large been avoided in Calabar.

As in many countries, many ethnic groups in Nigeria have customary leadership structures which may be recognized to a greater or lesser extent by the state. This can have the advantage of giving legitimacy to local-level conflict resolution mechanisms and allowing for decentralized decision making. In both cities that were studied, one ethnic group was larger than the other two, but in Warri, authorities took a series of decisions that strengthened the status of the traditional leadership of the Itsekiri, the largest ethnic group, vested control over land in an Itsekiri institution, excluded non-Itsekiri from contesting elections and moved a key governance institution to an Itsekiri area. These moves triggered outbreaks of violence beginning in the 1950s and continuing until 2003. The failure to prosecute people responsible for inciting ethno-political violence, murder or illegal seizing of resources has also been pinpointed as a major cause of continuing conflict. In Calabar, by contrast, decision makers took into account the need to reassure each group that they would not be excluded when deciding on the respective statuses of traditional leaders. In one case, they even went against the recommendation of a judicial panel of enquiry that had recommended a far-ranging expansion of the Efik king’s powers in 2000 (the Efik are the largest group in the city numerically).

The dynamics that either fuelled or checked violence in Warri and Calabar are arguably the same as those that play a role in conflicts in any environment, whether urban or rural. The fact that the city of Warri served as a flashpoint for violence, however, points to a heightened risk of conflict when populations are concentrated in a small space and access to resources is poorly managed. In addition, the official recognition of traditional leadership structures turned out to present challenges in the two Nigerian cities, where ethnic diversity is higher and the settlement areas of different ethnic groups overlap more than in rural areas.

In divided cities, it is common for public services to become segregated along identity lines. At its most extreme, this can result in cities –



and countries – running an entire set of parallel public services, at considerable extra expense and requiring an increased bureaucracy to run them. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period following the Balkan wars of the 1990s are examples. A 2006–7 report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) noted that lack of cooperation between the governments of Serbia, Kosovo and the minority Serb community in Kosovo was blocking moves to integrate public services there. The report does recognize that in some cases, parallel services were necessary to cover gaps in coverage, and also ‘for the provision of services to some minority communities who avoid seeking aid from the Kosovo-run health care facilities due to lack of trust’. Croat and Bosniak parallel institutions in the city of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) are another example.

Parallel service provision in education can in some cases contribute to the availability of mother-tongue schooling for minority and indigenous children, and ensure that the culture of the community is portrayed in a positive light. However, in the absence of state support and a national-level policy, larger minority and indigenous communities are more likely to muster the resources to provide services; particularly those minorities that can call on the support of a kin-state. Service provision gaps can arise for smaller groups, as was the case for the Bosniaks and Gorani in Kosovo.

### **Minority and indigenous peoples’ rights – what can they bring to peace-making in cities?**

A feature of most of the academic literature on divided cities is that it tends to fall within the discipline of conflict resolution/management/transformation, rather than human rights or, more specifically, minority and indigenous peoples’ rights. A conflict transformation approach tends to emphasize the needs and interests of belligerent parties. An added value of a minority and indigenous peoples’ rights approach, however, is that it could contribute to strengthening a policy focus on the situation of smaller minority or indigenous groups who are not active parties to the conflict. For example, since the 2003 Iraq crisis, it is estimated that 90

per cent of Sabean Mandaeans, a pre-Christian religious minority who speak a dialect of Aramaic, have fled the country. Those who still lived in rural areas have moved to cities: now the 5,000 remaining Mandaeans are to be found overwhelmingly in the cities of Baghdad, Kirkuk and Maysan. While minorities in Iraq tend to have little faith in the official security forces, these bodies offer at least the hope of a more neutral security umbrella than that provided by the militias and tribes that typically dominate the landscape outside Iraq’s cities.

Even for Iraq’s larger minorities, however, life in cities offers a precarious sense of security. Cities such as Erbil and Baghdad have social clubs run by Christians where alcohol is served, exempted from the prohibition laws usually applied to businesses of this kind. But while in Erbil, which is under the aegis of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the status of these clubs is not questioned, in Baghdad there are periodic raids and closures by the authorities. When the Chaldean Catholic Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad was attacked by militants in October 2010, resulting in the deaths of 58 worshippers, police and bystanders, witnesses stated that police vehicles posted to protect the church were removed shortly before the attack. If these small populations are to remain in Iraq – and many in the Mandaean community fear that theirs will not – it is essential that municipal decision making in these cities takes the particular security needs of their communities into account.

Hence it might be thought that monitoring of minority and indigenous peoples’ rights implementation by international bodies would be welcomed by countries facing ethnic or sectarian tensions. In Belgium, however, the oversight of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) has been resisted. Though Belgium signed the Convention in 2001, it has yet to ratify it. This has much to do with the particular situation of the capital city, Brussels. Within the complex constitutional arrangement of Belgium, which includes two geographical regions (Wallonia and Flanders) and three linguistic communities (French, Flemish and German), the Brussels Capital Region has a special status.

Historically a Flemish-speaking city, located geographically within Flanders, it now has a French-speaking majority, and has protections for both languages. (The considerable numbers of English-speakers, due in large part to the presence of European institutions and NATO, should also not be forgotten, and a number of other languages are spoken by migrants and refugees from Africa and the Middle East).

Much of the current tension between the two main linguistic communities – which has risen to the point at which a definitive partition of the country has been seriously considered – centres around areas of demographic flux such as the municipalities surrounding Brussels, in a region known as the *Vlaamse Rand*. These are officially Flemish-speaking but, because of the pressure on housing in the city, increasing numbers of French speakers are taking up residence there. As part of the compromise which serves to allay the fears of the Flemish that they will be pushed out of the greater Brussels region, these boroughs maintain their Flemish character, for example by having signs in Flemish only.

The rejection of FCNM monitoring is not about an antipathy to minority rights per se, but is based on a fear that external monitors unfamiliar with the context and history would challenge such hard fought-for and delicately balanced arrangements – among other things by requiring bilingual signage. The fear is not necessarily well founded. The Council of Europe, as a rule, takes local specificities into account when making human rights interventions in member states. Conflict situations are by definition never stable but in a state of constant flux, and as such the arrangements that are in place to contain them must be constantly reassessed and, where necessary, renegotiated. The resolution of tensions tends to be largely influenced by the demands of the most powerful party or parties, and the role of minority and indigenous peoples' rights within such situations is to remind all actors that there are interests of smaller communities at play which there is a moral and legal imperative not to ignore.

A minority and indigenous peoples' rights framework is also relevant in assessing the success of the power-sharing arrangements that often result from peace negotiations. On the face of it,

consociationalist power-sharing appears to tick a number of minority and indigenous peoples' rights boxes. It reserves key government positions for representatives of a range of ethnic groups; provides for representation of those groups according to share of population in civil service jobs; and allows minorities and indigenous peoples a veto on policies and legislation that will significantly affect them. Contested cities offer opportunities to bring in an additional layer of power-sharing at the municipal level. This can serve to relocate some of the ethnic in-fighting away from the national stage. It also allows for new configurations of power-sharing – a different way of dividing up the cake – based on different local-level demographics, thus helping to allay the fears that smaller groups have of being excluded. However, in practice, smaller minority and indigenous groups are often excluded, particularly those who were not represented by one of the warring parties (and therefore, more often than not, did not get a seat at the negotiating table). In addition it discourages effective governance by basing appointments on identity rather than competence.

Johannesburg presents an exceptional example, in that – as at the national level – power-sharing modalities were established only as an interim measure, to pave the way towards eventual majoritarian democracy. In the city, the arrangement that was concluded involved the re-drawing of ward boundaries to bring together previously white and black areas. This allowed for the creation of wards that had a sustainable tax base, and were therefore able to provide adequate services – this was not possible for majority black areas using apartheid-era boundaries, because those areas were 'fiscally depleted owing to restrictions on nonresidential uses and the illegality of homeownership'.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, South Africa, with its emphasis on non-discrimination, majoritarian democracy and avoidance of affirmative action in legislative and executive positions, remains the exception: in general, power-sharing arrangements are almost ubiquitous in peace agreements that follow on from identity-based conflicts. Minority and indigenous peoples' rights frameworks offer a check on the more discriminatory outcomes of these arrangements; in a 2009 decision against

Bosnia and Herzegovina by the European Court of Human Rights, *Sejdić (a Roma) and Finci (a Jew)* used minority rights standards when they successfully convinced the court to order the government to amend the country's power-sharing set-up (resulting from the Dayton peace agreement), which explicitly excludes them from significant political positions. Unfortunately, due to a failure to reach political consensus on the issue, no progress has been made in implementing this ruling.

### **Cities, conflict and memory**

In post-conflict scenarios, cities are often the locus for conflict memorials. Such memorials themselves often become the focus of tensions, or are used by one community to create a one-sided historical narrative. Memorialization has been difficult even in the Bosnian town of Brčko, often cited as one of the few examples of successful post-conflict reconciliation after the wars that tore apart the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. A largely Bosniak town when the war broke out in 1992, but separating two chunks of Serb-held territory, Brčko was fought over bitterly and presented a particular challenge during the Dayton peace negotiations. It was eventually given a unique autonomous status, outside the Serb and Bosniak/Croat federal structures, and is now diverse, relatively integrated and prosperous. But discussions over a common war memorial collapsed, and there are now separate Serb, Croat and Bosniak monuments in the city centre, serving as symbols of division rather than peace. The Croatian city of Vukovar, which has a mixed Croat and Serbian population and was the scene of a three-month siege by Serbian forces, as a result of which it was incorporated into the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina, has the highest concentration of war memorials in Croatia.<sup>2</sup> These memorials, far from helping the population to come to terms with the past and move towards reconciliation, 'express the Croat discourse of victory through victimhood'<sup>3</sup> and consolidate fear of the other. In the memorials, 'the city's division is mirrored and reified'.<sup>4</sup>

In other cities, the state has stood back from the process of memorialization. In Belfast, Protestants and Catholics produce their own memorials and these are tolerated by the state.

In Beirut, in the absence of state-sanctioned memorials, there are many shrines and statues erected by one community or the other.

There is a kind of anarchic democracy to this arrangement: in theory, any community, no matter how small, is free to express their visualization of the war; in practice, however, this is likely to be dependent on power dynamics at the local level.<sup>5</sup>

### **What can be done to promote conciliation?**

Bollens identifies four approaches to the management of contested cities – neutral, partisan, equity and resolver, with the latter being the most likely to succeed in positive transformation of conflict dynamics.<sup>6</sup> In practice, as is usually the case with conflict management approaches, there will be a tendency to apply these to communities that are associated directly with the conflict – that is, communities out of which an active armed group has emerged. What is less clear is how minorities and indigenous peoples not associated with armed groups – usually smaller communities – will fare. The table overleaf attempts to sketch out the possible outcomes for such communities.

Minorities and indigenous peoples in cities not associated with armed groups may be immigrant communities, or those who have migrated from other parts of the country, seeing the city as a safe haven. As such, they are less likely to be integrated into decision making structures. Belfast, for example, has a growing immigrant population from Asia and Eastern Europe, who experience hate crime in a city that is struggling to overcome a legacy of violence and has no shortage of weapons. Decision makers at the national level and international organizations that intervene in conflict management will need to make efforts to ensure that such communities are included in processes at city level.

Because of the particular challenges presented by cities, an approach often proposed is a special status for cities – usually capitals – managed by a neutral third party such as the UN. Such an approach may involve elements of the neutral or equity approaches – or both. This has been considered for Jerusalem (UN General Assembly Resolution 181 [II]) and

## Approach

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*Neutral:* aims to be blind to identity-based concerns in all government action.

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*Partisan:* the state intervenes explicitly to favour the interests of one party in the conflict – usually the community that holds power in the state – and to attempt to cement its power.

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*Equity:* essentially maintains the status quo while attempting to undertake steps through affirmative action measures to address imbalances (mainly in access to resources).

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*Resolver:* rather than ‘incremental reform’, it seeks ‘basic structural change’. Led not by national government but local-level sectoral experts/civil servants, technical know-how is used in order to challenge the political assumptions that justify and buttress the status quo. Aims to identify and address the needs of each party in terms of delineation of territory, freedom of movement, management of public spaces and access to resources and employment.

## Impact on communities not associated with armed groups

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This approach could actually result in discrimination, in that it would treat all sectors of the population the same, ignoring the specific human rights needs and cultural differences of minority and indigenous communities. It is hard, for example, to see how decisions around language use in primary and secondary education could be neutral – in practice, the majority language is likely to be favoured.

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This approach does not pretend to achieve a just outcome in a conflict and as such will have negative outcomes for all communities other than the dominant one. It is possible that resentment built up within minority and indigenous communities linked to active conflict parties will be taken out on those who have arrived from other parts of the country or from abroad.

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This approach is unlikely to make fundamental changes to underlying dynamics and structural injustices that may be a root cause of the conflict. If resources are scarce, affirmative action measures may focus on communities linked to armed groups in the hope of reducing tensions by providing a peace dividend.

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As Bollens argues, this model has the best chance of achieving a just outcome and eliminating the structural injustices that underlie the conflict. However, efforts will need to be made to ensure that the needs and fears of all communities – not just those linked to armed groups – are considered.

Sarajevo (Owen-Stoltenberg proposal of 1993). The thinking behind these proposals in both cases was to provide for a neutral adjudication of issues surrounding access to shared areas and territorial demarcation, including sensitive issues surrounding holy sites. Neither proposal succeeded in gaining the support of all concerned parties. However, the Belfast experience may shed some light on how such externally managed arrangements might work in practice.

In 1972, the British government imposed direct rule on Northern Ireland, which had had its own parliament since 1921, in response to growing sectarian violence, in the hope that government by politicians not directly linked to the province would be more successful at managing the contentious issues that drove Protestant–Catholic clashes. Even after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which established a Northern Ireland Assembly, direct rule was reinstated on several occasions due to disagreements over issues such as decommissioning of weapons and policing.

However, the approach from London proved to be overly cautious, focusing on conflict containment but making no progress towards addressing the root causes behind sectarian grievances. The failings of this approach are particularly apparent in Belfast. Urban planners, seeking not to antagonize either party, served only to reinforce sectarian conditions by shying away from real change. For example, the current spatial structure of the city imposes tight constraints on the growing Catholic population while protecting the under-used land of the declining Protestant majority. Interviews with urban planners in Belfast found that they ‘follow the wishes of the people’ and ‘practic[e] the art of the possible’. They avoid ‘social engineering decisions’, and do not wish to determine ‘how the society or economy should change’.<sup>7</sup>

In some cases, local-level administrators took action within their limited mandates to attempt to further integration and reconciliation. Urban development in Nicosia, Cyprus, was held back for many years while negotiations between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders failed to progress. The respective mayors of the Turkish and Greek sides of the city, however, agreed a ‘Nicosia Master Plan’, based on the assumption

that the city would eventually be reunited and that the foundations for a prosperous and integrated city should be laid as early as possible. The plan has succeeded in promoting commercial activity in inner-city areas and creating pedestrian-friendly public space.

Governments may need to introduce specific measures to help members of minority communities overcome their suspicion of state-run facilities. In Kosovo, the town of Rahovec/Orahova is home to a Serbian minority who generally travelled to majority Serb areas in the north some 50 miles away to access public services. In 2006, the local authorities took proactive steps to encourage the Serbs to use the town’s public facilities by making vehicles available with drivers from the minority community. This resulted in an increase in the take-up of government-run services.

Cities are built environments, and the very structure of the city may be defined by the dynamics of a conflict. What should town planners do when cities are ghettoized? When antagonistic communities do not mix? Efforts to transform ghettos after they have been torn apart by violence can yield positive results – for example, the regeneration of Electric Avenue after the 1981 Brixton riots in London – but for local communities the outcomes are not always positive: processes of gentrification often occur whereby local communities are forced out by soaring property prices.

Town planners may be tempted to break down barriers between communities, integrating residential areas by force if necessary. However, much depends on how those town planners are viewed – whether residents see them as well-intentioned, neutral interveners working towards a goal of reconciliation. A new tram line in Jerusalem that links the east and west of the city appears on the face of it to be an attempt at integration: travelling between communities that normally have little interaction, it features signs and announcements in Hebrew and Arabic. Highly symbolic, a stretch of the line follows the 1949 Armistice Line, and runs past many of the city’s most important monuments. However the tram has been the focus of attacks by both Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, meaning that many residents of both communities are now too afraid



**Above:** A Palestinian woman (L) and an Israeli woman ride a light rail tram in Jerusalem, November 2014. *REUTERS/Ronen Zvulun*

to use it. One Palestinian resident interviewed by the *Telegraph* newspaper described the tram as ‘a mobile Jewish settlement in the heart of East Jerusalem’. It should not be forgotten that the tram’s integrationist bent contrasts sharply with another major infrastructure project with a diametrically opposed objective – the West Bank barrier.

One strand of expert opinion recommends instead a focus on creating public spaces where communities can interact, usually on the border where divided communities meet.<sup>8</sup> The temptation for planners to make a visible statement by creating architecturally sophisticated public spaces – often with grandiose, peace-promoting symbology – should be avoided, however. These are particularly problematic if they come at the expense of public services

and amenities. Instead, the preferred spaces of intercultural interaction are the day-to-day ones: ‘libraries, schools, colleges, youth centres, sports clubs, specific cinemas, the hair salon, the hospital, markets and community centres’.<sup>9</sup>

The key factor for success, when attempting to incorporate a conflict transformation perspective into urban design, is involving local communities, particularly at the planning stage. Many of the factors that contribute to peace or exacerbate tensions relate to structures – roads, paths, bridges, walls, parks. When a footbridge between Catholic and Protestant areas in Belfast was modified in order to improve access for the disabled, the surrounding community was not consulted. High platforms were built on each side of the bridge, and crucially, the bridge was moved so that it directly overlooked a row of houses with cars parked outside. The result was that the platform served as a vantage point for youths to throw stones at their neighbours. As a consequence, the design facilitated violence rather



than serving as a link.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, physical design can only go so far in the absence of steps to address the root causes of conflict:

*'Design means little when vast swathes of Belfast are divided along sectarian lines and only real improvement will come through social integration, mixed-education and political progress. Designing a bridge to prevent stone throwing will prevent stone throwing but the hatred will remain.'*<sup>11</sup>

Urban design can also be consciously used to reinforce structures of power and domination: Jerusalem's road network includes modern, high-speed highways linking the centre of the city to the settlements, while roads in Palestinian enclaves are older, narrower and slower. While the city appears to favour Israelis' freedom of movement, Palestinians find themselves 'dominated and fragmented by conflict infrastructures' – most notably in the form of the separation barrier.<sup>12</sup> Belfast's 'peace walls' are another example of architecture that aims to keep communities separate. While potentially necessary in the short term, in the long run such measures can entrench the dynamics of a conflict by decreasing everyday interaction.

It is clear that contested cities offer both challenges and opportunities for peace-making. The elements needed for success in the urban environment will be the same as those required for national-level peace-building – encompassing, in most cases, inclusive dialogue, a long-term commitment to and investment of resources in addressing the root causes of the conflict, and some sort of truth telling and transitional justice process. However, the urban context also throws up its own requirements. Urban communities – including those of minorities and indigenous peoples – must be closely involved in the design and implementation of urban infrastructure projects, particularly those with an overt peace-building objective. If progress towards peace is stalled at the national level, but municipal leaders have the will to promote reconciliation at the urban level, no matter how symbolic, they should be empowered to do so. While measures to keep communities apart – both physically, and by providing separate services – may be necessary

where grievances are still live, efforts need to be made incrementally to build confidence and provide spaces for interaction, even if initially it is on a limited level. And, finally, all arrangements should be assessed on their compliance with human rights standards, particularly minority and indigenous peoples' rights. ■

## Endnotes

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Minority and  
indigenous women  
and urbanization

Nicole Girard



*'My community looks up to me. Some male members of course, often try to discredit us or patronize us but overall, I feel I have been appreciated as a person who lives and works in the city who has been of some help to the community. I feel very confident after coming to Delhi.'*

Sarah, Chin Woman from Burma living in New Delhi

**S**arah is a 27-year-old woman from a small town in Chin State, Burma. As a minority ethno-Christian community, Chin face discrimination, assimilation and persecution from the majority Buddhist state. Livelihood opportunities are extremely limited and further study is usually only a dream for women. 'For many of us, being able to get married to a good earning husband or someone who had worked or is working in a foreign country, is the most important thing in life.' Eight years ago she decided to chance her luck in India, first in the north-eastern states, then in Delhi with the hope of finding some higher education opportunities. Here, she was able to find work and study further.

'I am lucky enough not to work in factories like many other women in the community,' she explains. 'In factories, women are subjected to all forms of exploitation and are discriminated in their wages and working hours, and are looked down upon.' Discrimination against people from north-eastern Indian states is rampant in Delhi, because of their East Asian looks that make them stand out from continental Indians. With similar looks to north-easterners, Chin women face this same discrimination.

*'I have faced harassment in New Delhi for sure; women are felt, touched, molested and harassed in every place. Being Christians and having a different culture – males and females mingle freely in public unlike the locals – also makes people view us as westernized and immoral, and women are seen as easy targets.'*

Delhi, like metropolises all over the world, has been a beacon for millions of migrant women who seek opportunity for themselves and their families. Some are driven by extreme poverty, some by conflict and warfare, and some, like Sarah, by a desire to continue their studies.

But for women from minority and indigenous communities, the city poses key specific challenges to their lives, and in some cases their very existence. Cities, while mirroring the broader national patterns of discrimination, also create new forms of exclusion. At the same time, cities can provide key opportunities for minority and indigenous women to improve their life chances. Even in the most challenging circumstances, indigenous and minority women may on some level 'choose' urban life – even if that choice is often largely informed by a lack of alternatives.

### The lure of the city

In many countries throughout the world, indigenous and minority women in rural areas are increasingly moving to the city. While the migration flows in many countries were primarily male, with women often following in later waves, this imbalance has now levelled out as women take up an increasing proportion of migration flows. Movement to the city, or between cities and rural areas, is directly and indirectly related to gender differentiated roles and gendered experiences. Trends also vary depending on specific countries' level and type of economic development; the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reports for instance that rural–urban migration is dominated by women in countries with quickly expanding export-oriented manufacturing sectors.

Displacement from ancestral lands is one of the key drivers of indigenous migration to the city. Land dispossession poses a distinct challenge for indigenous women as many of their traditional livelihoods, such as handicrafts, traditional medicinal knowledge or food production, are based on maintaining access to land and its natural resources. Their role in the community centres around these and other tasks: without them, roles and responsibilities can change and this in turn can have a negative impact on women's status. In Southeast Asia and parts of northern India and Bangladesh, for example, many indigenous peoples practise shifting cultivation. Women's role in this form of agriculture is well established, with some estimates suggesting that they perform up to 70 per cent of the related work.<sup>1</sup> State-sponsored conservation policies that seek to eradicate this practice in the name of environmental preservation directly affect

the status of women, as their contribution to food production, resource management and health care is seriously undermined and their traditional knowledge is lost. In northern Thailand, for example, forest conservation and bans on shifting cultivation have been directly tied to increasing food insecurity and women's migration to cities, Chiang Mai in particular, in search of work. The creation of national parks on indigenous territory has also prevented women from gathering the materials necessary to make traditional handicrafts or medicines that could otherwise generate income, further dispossessing them and driving urban migration.

All over the world, development projects have taken place without the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, leading to mass displacements and women's migration to the city. In the Philippines, massive open-pit mining across the country in the ancestral territories of indigenous peoples, particularly in the Cordilleras, has contributed to a loss of access to clean resources. Many indigenous women struggle to secure employment with the mining companies and leave to find work in urban areas, suffering extreme poverty in cities like Baguio or Manila. Similarly, it is estimated that in India approximately 26 million indigenous people have been displaced under the auspices of development projects since independence in 1947, many of which are hydroelectric projects. Without sufficient resettlement programmes in place, many end up in urban centres.

Armed conflict and separatist movements in areas populated by minorities as well as indigenous traditional territories have long been a driver of minority and indigenous women's migration to the city, as they are forcibly relocated on a massive scale alongside their communities or fear for their safety in militarized zones. In the Mindanao region of the Philippines, decades of fighting between the government and Moro-Muslim separatist groups have resulted in mass displacements affecting mostly Muslim communities. After being displaced into IDP camps, there are very few livelihood options. Besides being vulnerable to trafficking, Muslim women migrate to Cotabato City or General Santos City, often becoming underpaid domestic workers.

Likewise, in Northern Uganda, the increased

availability of guns and ammunition in the region has had a direct impact on indigenous Karamajong pastoral herders. Cattle raids between them and neighbouring groups have become more violent, which in turn has led to military efforts to disarm the population. This has led to an even more insecure situation rife with human rights abuses. As a result, indigenous Karamajong, especially women and children, have been displaced to struggle in the urban slums of Kampala or Jinja.

Gendered property and inheritance rights discrimination is also a key driver of women's migration to the city, due to customary laws and practices that privilege male rights, as well as discriminatory state policies. In Kenya, for example, Maasai customary inheritance is patrilineal, whereby women's property is contingent on the men in their lives, either their father or husband. If a woman's parents die, their property will go to her brothers. If a marriage dissolves or the husband dies, women are considered to no longer have rights to their shared property. In this case, property such as livestock or even the family home is likely to go to the husband's family.

The Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working with urban Maasai women. Director Ole Kaunga Johnson notes that Maasai women mainly 'migrate due to challenges they face at home' stemming from property rights issues. 'Gender-based violence, marriage breakage or early death of spouse, due to violence related to natural resource based conflict between indigenous nomadic groups, are some of the leading reasons for women to migrate,' he explains.

In Canada, the Indian Act of 1876 had dramatic consequences that resulted in indigenous women's migration to the city. Women have comprised the majority of First Nations urban migrants since the 1950s. There are several reasons for this. First, in an amendment of 1951, women lost their native status if they married non-status men, meaning they could not pass status on to their children nor remain on reservations. This provision did not, however, apply to men. This clause was brought to the attention of the UN

Human Rights Committee in the case known as *Sandra Lovelace v. Canada* (1979–81), whereby the committee concluded that Canada was in breach of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In 1985, the Canadian parliament revoked this section of the Act.

Second, in regard to real and matrimonial property, reservations are governed by the Indian Act. But the Indian Act does not cover division of property on reserves upon separation or divorce. The then UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari, in his report on his 2007 visit to Canada, notes how this 'legislative void [has had] dramatic results'. He continues:

*'In some cases, women – and their children – are forced to choose between staying in a bad and/or violent situation or leaving the matrimonial home. Often, the choice to leave results in the woman and her children being forced to leave their community and/or become homeless.'*

Trafficking too has a key role to play in how minority and indigenous women move to urban areas, with many lured on a false pretence of work or sold outright by their families. Those who lack citizenship or identification are particularly vulnerable to brokers who will take advantage of them, especially when they lack skills in the majority language, as is the case in Thailand and Burma. Those who are in situations of displacement are vulnerable to traffickers as well, with little access to decent livelihoods but, equally, nowhere to turn. Rural indigenous women in Chiapas, for example, are targeted by traffickers for sex work in the city. 'It is very easy to trap an indigenous woman compared to a *mestizo*', notes one trafficker cited in a local study, 'first of all they do not speak Spanish and, second, as they are suffering from poverty due to loss of their land and house in the conflict, they need some employment urgently'.<sup>2</sup>

For a great many minority and indigenous women, though, urban migration is driven by the search for education for themselves or for their children. Women from minority and indigenous peoples routinely have lower education and literacy rates than their male counterparts, but for those who are able to challenge practices that

privilege male education, the city is usually the only place to pursue secondary or post-secondary education. Indeed, despite a lack of data on this issue, it is clear that the choice to pursue education has influenced many women to make the journey to the city.

### **Life in the city**

*'The memory of our mountains and jungles and their sound kills us. We face new problems in raising our children and relating with our partners, because the city is not our customary environment. We are pursued by the images of the anguish when we had to leave, running with what little we had or could carry in order to outrun death and desolation. Amidst this anguish, we are in charge of our families, accepting activities that are not traditional in our cultures, such as getting jobs as domestic servants or, in the worst of cases, even selling our bodies.'*

Indigenous woman from Colombia<sup>3</sup>

The city harbours much potential, but for minority and indigenous women a great number of obstacles must first be surmounted. Discrimination faced in the city often compounds and builds on the discrimination that drove them to the city in the first place. The need for opportunities that they cannot access in a rural or displaced setting becomes a need for opportunities that are difficult to access in an urban setting as a result of entrenched discrimination. In some cases, 'the interplay between exclusion, employment and poverty is clearer in the cities'.<sup>4</sup>

### **Employment**

The hope of obtaining adequate and safe employment is a clear draw to urban areas. Indigenous and minority women, however, both those who are migrants and those who have lived their entire lives in the city, can find that their hopes remain unrealized. Women largely remain responsible for unremunerated care work in their own families, as well as working towards a formal income. This results in what has been called 'time poverty', whereby women are burdened by both responsibilities, a huge contributing factor to urban poverty for women.

Women, including those from minority and

**Right:** A Bangladeshi Santhal woman carries raw bricks in the brickfield in Habigonj, Bangladesh. Poor labourers migrate to brickfields to meet the growing demand of construction works as urbanization rises rapidly in the country.

*EPA/Abir Abdullah*

indigenous communities, overwhelmingly work in the informal industries, from handicraft sellers, street vendors and domestic workers to seamstresses, rag pickers and garbage collectors. Women are more frequently employed in the informal sector than men because a stable schedule is often not required, work can be completed at home, and skills or qualifications are not demanded. While there is a degree of freedom and flexibility in the informal sector, it offers little security in times of crisis and little mobility to better positions.

Paid domestic work can be considered part of the informal industry as it is often unregulated and piece-work by nature. In many countries around the world, minority and indigenous women are the backbone of this workforce, mainly in urban areas. One study focusing on indigenous women migrating to towns and cities in four states in India, for example, found that 60 per cent were employed in domestic labour.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 40 per cent of Afro-descendant women work as domestic labourers.<sup>6</sup>

Domestic work is not only underpaid and undervalued, it can be dangerous and in some cases essentially bonded slave labour. A problem too is that exploitative patterns that exist in rural areas may well carry over to urban centres. In Nepal, many indigenous Tharu in the Terai region – including women and girls – have been enslaved under the debt bondage system called *kamaiya* or *kamalari* (the latter referring specifically to young female domestic servants). Based on bonded labour practices that have been in existence for centuries, *kamaiya* is now officially prohibited, but girls and women encounter many obstacles upon rehabilitation, and often end up back in domestic work. There is also a profound legacy effect, despite the abolition of *kamaiya* by law in 2002, in that the children of (ex-) *kamaiya* Tharu families risk becoming child labourers. According to a study by the International Labour



Organization around the time of abolition, more than 30 per cent of (ex-) *kamaiya* children were working away from their homes. And many ended up in the urban centres of Nepal – 14 per cent of domestic child labourers in Kathmandu, and 24 per cent of domestic child labourers in Pokhara, were of Tharu origin.

Other than domestic work, it is common for minority and indigenous women to become locked into certain urban employment sectors. For example, Dalit women in Bangladesh are largely a rural population, but for Dalits living in the capital city Dhaka the majority were born



in the city and live in vast informal settlements. To be Dalit is to be untouchable, outcast from the social and religious hierarchy. Employment is hereditary, passing down jobs that are considered dirty and demeaning through the generations. According to Zakir Hossain, the Director of Najorik Uddyog, an NGO working with Dalit communities in Dhaka, a large proportion of Dalit women are public cleaners.

*'The main employment of Dalit women is cleaning and sweeping jobs in the municipality, the City Corporation and other government and non-*

*government offices. Other than cleaning jobs, some Dalit women are involved in sewing clothes at home. But guardians and male members of the family do not like their sewing and other activities other than sweeping jobs.'*

Similarly in India too, Dalits – many of them women – are employed by municipal governments to work in waste removal. In the city of Pune, however, waste-pickers, 90 per cent of whom are Dalit women, were able to organize themselves into a union in 1993. Thereafter, Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH) was



created, a worker-owned cooperative of waste-pickers who were given in 2008 exclusive rights by the city to work as garbage collectors. The city has provided uniforms, protective gear and some motorized carts; women report working fewer hours for the same amount of money and increased respect in the community.

Indigenous women of Bangladesh, the Garo group in particular, are almost exclusively employed by the urban beautician industry. The industry is largely unregulated and their working hours and holiday time are at the whim of the owners. They regularly work 10–12-hour days, seven days a week, for extremely low pay. Despite this, they have been able to support themselves and their families through the economic independence the industry has provided. According to one study, 67 per cent have been able to save money for purchasing property or for their children's education. Clientele reportedly prefer and expect to have an indigenous woman to perform this sort of work, due to stereotypes that describe them as loyal and disciplined.

## Housing

Female-headed households are increasing in urban areas throughout the world, and are more common in urban than rural areas. Such households are typically income-poor and tend to be tenants rather than home-owners. Nevertheless, there are also benefits for women in female-headed households as they are able to decide how funds are used and are less likely to suffer from 'secondary poverty', where men withhold funds for themselves, to the detriment of women and children. Discrimination based on ethnicity further compounds these difficulties: in Brazil, Afro-Brazilians make up 60 per cent of income-poor female-headed households. Afro-Brazilian women have difficulty securing access to credit as they are not considered eligible for loans or mortgage schemes, limiting their ability to purchase their own property.

Minorities and indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable to evictions in urban areas, as many reside in informal settlements, lacking security of tenure, and are often the first targeted for evictions by municipalities. Evictions, however, have a disproportionate effect on women. Discrimination in property rights

again exposes women's vulnerability to eviction. Domestic violence often increases during and after the stress of evictions, meaning the burden of re-establishing one's home falls in multiple ways on the woman's shoulders. Since many women use their homes to generate income, through piece-work for example, evictions can destroy or stall women's income earning opportunities.

Even in places where families in low-income housing settlements have proof of tenure, urban beautification drives have resulted in the mass demolition of minority homes, or the prevention of selling goods on the street, as is the case for Tamil and Muslim communities in Colombo, Sri Lanka. While exact figures are not given, author Minna Thaheer claims that many Muslim low-income households in urban slums in central and north Colombo are in fact led by single women, who are divorced, widowed or abandoned.

Despite the community's long-time residency in Colombo and title deeds to their homes, last-minute evictions and house-demolition have not been prevented, severely impacting women-headed households. After evictions, some have been relocated to remote areas outside the city centre, making the commute to their inner-city jobs much more difficult. Many of the women work in the informal sector as domestic workers or informal street sellers. Street beautification initiatives by the government have prevented Muslim women from generating an income, creating additional stress as police clear vendors from the streets. Thaheer further suggests that it is their potential as a minority opposition voting base that has fuelled evictions in central Colombo. Positively, however, the threat of evictions and its disproportionate impact on the lives of Muslim women has spurred their increased engagement in municipal-level politics.

## Gender-based violence in the city

All women have a right to the city, but this right can be undermined through gender-based violence or the fear of such violence that can restrict women's mobility, especially at night. In low-income and informal settlements, a lack of secure infrastructure can accompany violence against women, including dimly lit areas, structurally weak housing that is vulnerable to break-ins, and unsafe public transit, public toilets

and secluded areas.

Evidence suggests that urban women are at the greatest risk of violence, particularly in poor communities, by strangers. But in Canada, indigenous women are almost three times more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-indigenous women. What is more, this is largely an urban phenomenon. According to research conducted by the Native Women's Association of Canada into individual cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, 70 per cent disappeared from an urban area and 60 per cent were murdered in an urban area. According to Dr Heather Howard, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Michigan State University, 'the particular challenges [of violence against urban indigenous women in North America] have to do with the lack of criminal justice, policing, social services, and general attention to indigenous women who are being sexually trafficked or are sex workers.' According to research included in a March 2015 CEDAW report, 'the rate of Aboriginal women engaged in street prostitution is 70 percent in Winnipeg, 40 percent in Vancouver, and nearly 80 percent in Vancouver Downtown Eastside', so exposing these women to disproportionate amounts of violence. Most of the homicide cases against indigenous girls and women remain unsolved, despite normally high clearance rates for homicide in Canada; indigenous women consistently report a distrust in police, due to bias and misconduct, and a reluctance to report violence.

In situations of conflict and displacement, Colombia's urban areas have posed particular dangers for women from Afro-Colombian communities. As a result of ongoing conflict between paramilitary groups, cities like Cali, Bogotá and Medellín have accommodated a high influx of internally displaced Afro-descendant women, many of whom have endured gender-based sexual violence fleeing their homes or in situations of displacement. 'Afro-Colombian women have been disproportionately and negatively impacted by all the manifestations of violence in an urban area, including its sexual, economic and environmental aspects,' explains Charo Mina-Rojas, coordinator of an Afro-Colombian women's human rights defenders project. 'This violence has been the result of

racial and social discrimination, discriminatory economic policies and internal armed conflict.' Such violence permeates Afro-Colombian women's experience in the city:

*'When there is not a strong support system, as she had it in her rural community, it can have a severe impact on her children. Due to a culture of violence and gangs, kids quickly become engaged in easy-money activities and soon death, early pregnancy, and prostitution.'*

The presence of paramilitaries in urban areas is extremely dangerous for Afro-Colombian women, especially in cities like Buenaventura where, according to government figures, 84 per cent of the population is black. Sexual violence is used in Buenaventura by armed groups as a means to control territory and terrorize the community. 'We are all victims in a collective sense,' one woman from Buenaventura recounts. Impunity for perpetrators is commonplace and many of Buenaventura's residents have reportedly lost faith in the government's ability to protect them. Local authorities are also accused of overlooking violence against women, viewing it as primarily a 'social' problem. However, this sort of discrimination in the justice system is starting to be addressed by the Attorney General's office, which is conducting 'sensitivity training' for its officials to deal with such cases.

### **Access to health services**

Health is intricately related to being able to secure other rights, such as adequate housing and a life free from violence. Unfortunately, just because a woman lives in closer proximity to health care services than her rural counterparts, this does not mean that she is able to access them. Indeed, for minority and indigenous women, cultural barriers, including language and a lack of culturally sensitive services, combined with poor socio-economic status and discrimination, present serious barriers to accessing whatever benefits the city may have to offer.

A lack of regular access to clean water and sanitation facilities can pose direct threats to women's health. Diseases that stem from a lack of sanitation, such as schistosomiasis, a parasitic disease that results in lesions to the urogenital

tract, make women three times more vulnerable to HIV infection. Discrimination against Dalits in India manifests itself in unequal access to water and sanitation. On the national level, it is estimated that 60 per cent of non-Dalit women have access to adequate sanitation and water, whereas only 38 per cent of Dalit women have adequate access. The same discrimination is manifested in urban slum dwellings, where Dalits are over-represented. In one study from an urban slum in Chennai, 30.3 per cent of Dalits had no access to adequate water supply and sanitation, compared to 20.8 per cent of non-Dalits. A lack of hygienic options in informal settlements, particularly around menstruation, causes unnecessary shame and threats to self-respect for women. As many urban informal settlements do not have access to clean water, due to gendered responsibilities, women must travel and queue for long hours to collect water.

Besides a healthy environment, access to healthy food is critical for minority and indigenous people in the city. For many indigenous people who have migrated to urban areas, including in the developed world, urban diets are a severe health threat, resulting in malnutrition, diabetes and obesity. According to Dr. Heather Howard, the principal researcher for the Transforming Diabetes in Urban Aboriginal Toronto project, one of the key challenges faced by urban indigenous women is food security. She explains:

*‘While there is little published research on this, I know from my own research in Toronto that this is a significant issue, and includes problems with access to fresh, healthy food that is affordable; and/or reliance on food-banks or community/social service provider communal meals, where the nutritional value is not optimal. It impacts women in particular because they are often the ones responsible for many other people being able to eat healthily – more than men, they are caregivers for older relatives and young children.’*

‘Indigenous women have been taking the lead to address these issues too,’ she adds, by ‘initiating community garden projects and promoting approaches to diet grounded in decolonization.’

## Education and cultural continuity

The pursuit of education consistently encourages young people to move to cities, and is a dream of many urban youth. Once again, however, proximity is no guarantee of access. Unaffordable fees pose significant barriers, as does discrimination from fellow students, teachers and even in course content, leading to higher non-completion rates.

Nevertheless, there is certainly evidence that supports a positive link between urbanization and increasing access to education among minority and indigenous women. In Latin America, for example, two out of three indigenous girls complete primary school in urban areas, compared to half or less in rural areas. Though geographical proximity may play a part, it may also be the case that urban indigenous parents also have a better understanding of the importance of education for girls than their rural counterparts. In some countries, such as Brazil, Costa Rica and Honduras, urban indigenous females have higher primary school completion rates than their male counterparts.

For the situation in Colombia, Mina-Rojas makes a distinction between Afro-Colombians who have been raised in big cities and those who have migrated as a result of displacement, saying that the former have more opportunities for education and advancement. In most cases, she says, for Afro-Colombian female rural–urban migrants the negative impact of the city outweighs the positives. But even for long-time urban residents, discrimination hinders the benefits of educational attainment: ‘For Afro-Colombian women a one year increase in her academic situation can increase her income by about 8 per cent. But still, even when academic levels are similar, Afro-Colombian women’s salary is still lower than her white counterparts.’

Assimilation and loss of cultural knowledge systems can also come from urbanization. Pronounced in situations of displacement and dispossession from traditional lands, passing traditional knowledge on to the next generation can become extremely difficult. This poses particular challenges for women, as they have a key role to play in the transmission of spiritual and cultural knowledge. In Tanzania, for example, Maasai women who practise traditional medicine have found it difficult to continue upon



relocation to cities, where medical boards and city authorities demand a licence and a permanent location for their work, amounting to largely unaffordable expenses.

### **Finding their way in the city**

As indigenous and minority women establish themselves in cities, they are increasingly coming together to resist oppression, discrimination and marginalization. In cities all over the world, indigenous and minority urban women's movements are gaining strength and are organizing for their rights to the city.

Bolivia, with over 60 per cent of its population belonging to an indigenous people, is a prime example. Disenfranchised by centuries of oppression, the latter half of the twentieth century saw an increase in migration among indigenous women to urban areas. Living on the outskirts of the capital La Paz, many are employed as domestic workers or work in the city's streets, selling goods in the market. With their colourful layered *pollera* skirts, woven shawls and bowler hats, known as *chola*, their distinct dress singled indigenous women out for insults and discrimination: they could be denied service in restaurants and shops, prevented from taking taxis and public buses, even barred from entering Plaza Murillo, La Paz's central square.

Since then, however, there has been a dramatic change in the political participation and empowerment of indigenous women in the city. The election of Bolivia's first indigenous president in 2006, Evo Morales, was supported by an array of indigenous women's organizations, the largest of which was the Bartolina Sisa Departmental Federation of Indigenous Rural Women. Indigenous women's voices have been increasingly heard in national media, and many now occupy positions as journalists and television hosts, working in government ministries, banks and law offices. And spectacularly, many are doing so while donning their traditional outfits, reclaiming their *cholita* identities. In fact, with Bolivia's growing economy, as indigenous women have gained more economic and political clout, *chola* fashion is even entering mainstream society, with designer labels and fashion shows. For the earlier generation of rural-urban migrants, few would have imagined such a relatively quick and

successful rise of indigenous Bolivian women, despite the challenges that still lie ahead.

Indigenous and minority women's worker cooperatives have also helped women make the leap out of poverty in the city. In the small tourist city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, in the Mexican state of Chiapas, the indigenous weavers' cooperative, Sna Jolobil, currently comprises 800 weavers from 20 Tzotzil and Tzeltal indigenous communities. The success of the cooperative, which was founded by a local male weaver Pedro Meza and an American partner in the 1970s, has enabled indigenous women to continue their cultural traditions and, depending on their preference, stay in their rural communities or relocate successfully to an urban setting. Micaela Diaz Diaz, an elderly indigenous Tzotzil woman, recounts her experience at Sna Jolobil after she separated from her abusive husband:

*'One day Pedro Meza, the organizer of the co-op, asked me to come work in the store for just a month or two. So I came to San Cristóbal and rented a room ... I also sold my weavings and began to make some money. In 1977 Indians weren't supposed to walk in the streets of San Cristóbal at night. We didn't have permission to live in town. Even though I was one of the first Indians to work and live there, I never had any problems. I liked living in San Cristóbal and working in the store all those years.'*

### **The right to the city**

For better or worse, our futures are urban, and the cities of the world, especially those in the global South, are increasingly female. Many women will be the heads of their households and the primary income earners. Women experience the city differently than men, however, moving through gendered barriers of poverty, discrimination, violence and political exclusion. But all women too do not experience their cities in the same way, and those who face discrimination on account of multiple aspects of their identity have even more obstacles to confront. Indigenous and minority women are among the most marginalized, their stories largely invisible to governments, despite their potential to add to the prosperity of cities overall.

So how can cities be made inclusive for minority or indigenous women? First, we must

**Right:** Aymara women dance in traditional *chola* dress, La Paz, 2014. The fashion of *cholitas* is slowly beginning to enter the mainstream as the status of indigenous women in Bolivia improves. *REUTERS/ABI/Bolivian Presidency/Handout*

be able to understand the exact situation facing minority and indigenous women in urban areas. Governments are obligated to collect data that is disaggregated on the basis of gender and ethnicity so that we can see who is migrating to which cities and what their urban experiences are like. The availability of research on minority and indigenous women in cities is extremely scant, and much of the research for this chapter has been provided by independent researchers and media, non-governmental and civil society organizations or UN agencies.

Second, minority and indigenous women are more successful in cities if there are formal or informal associations and networks of minority and indigenous women working to increase their own well-being and social capital. Governments must acknowledge and support their crucial efforts and include them in the development of relevant policy and legislation.

Third, the participation of minority and indigenous women in municipal-level administration and politics is necessary to reduce discrimination and create more effective policies, such as affirmative action policies, targeted land, property and housing rights programmes and policies, micro-credit lending initiatives, employment assistance and vocational training programmes. In places where existing policies and legislation are ineffective, as in the case of Canada, a national-level review and plan of action must be undertaken to understand where the system is failing. In this way, city officials and law enforcement must be adequately trained to understand the specific plight of minority and indigenous women and the relevant municipal mechanisms that are in place.

Finally, transition and settlement services that can assist with finding employment, housing or counselling services, for both recent arrivals and long-term residents, will go a long way to integrating minority and indigenous women as strong, effective members of the urban community.

In order for minority and indigenous women to access the potential benefits of the city, their right to the city must be realized and the very foundations of discrimination – that is, the way societies and institutions are structured – must be rebuilt. Any policy or legislation that aims to address indigenous and minority women's urban experience must include the participation of affected groups, and consider the wider economic, social, cultural and political factors at play. ■

## Endnotes

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Advocacy,  
participation  
and inclusion  
for minorities  
in urban areas

Sajjad Hassan

## Introduction

**T**hough cities can offer an array of services, entitlements and opportunities, minorities in urban areas are often discriminated against in their ability to access these benefits. Housing, infrastructure, education and employment are all areas where this exclusion may be felt, particularly in a context of hardening prejudice and right-wing mobilization within the majority community. This chapter will explore some of the obstacles that minority communities face in securing recognition and equality, with a focus on the specific challenges and opportunities these groups encounter in urban contexts. Much of the content is action-oriented and focused on practical solutions, drawing on examples of best practice and lessons learned from the work of select minority rights organizations from around the world. Focusing on a range of case studies, including Roma in Europe, Dalits in Bangladesh, African American homeless persons in Chicago, and Dalit and Muslim homeless migrants in Delhi, the chapter will explore some of the key drivers of urban exclusion and identify potential ways forward to achieve safer, more equitable cities for these marginalized communities.

### Overview of major challenges facing minorities in urban settings

Europe's Roma community, which includes between 10 and 15 million people across the region, is a good example of how minorities may still experience acute marginalization even in a general context of economic development and falling poverty rates. Many of the richest urban centres in Europe have Roma encampments on their peripheries, characterized by sub-standard living conditions and high levels of spatial segregation – in many cases as a direct result of deliberate policies by local authorities or national governments, such as forced evictions. In these settlements, basic infrastructure is often largely absent and access to public services, schools and employment opportunities is limited. Housing conditions are also poor. An 11-country survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2012 noted that 'about 45 per cent of the Roma surveyed live in households lacking an indoor kitchen, toilet, shower or bath, or electricity... One in three Roma is

unemployed, 20 per cent are not covered by health insurance, and 90 per cent are living below the poverty line.'

On the other side of the globe, in Bangladesh, Dalits face similar obstacles. Discriminated against due to their 'low caste' status, as in other parts of South Asia, Bangladeshi Dalits are confined to some of the lowest paid jobs, such as cleaning toilets and sweeping streets. A significant proportion are urban, situated in municipally designated slum 'colonies' with no land ownership rights, despite their extended occupation of these areas, with many living in tiny huts often housing three generations of the same family under a single roof. Besides the obvious problem of overcrowding, this also affects the autonomy of younger members of the family, and particularly of women, to pursue their choices. As with a large proportion of Roma settlements, there are few basic amenities such as piped water, adequate sanitation or electricity and there is limited access to schooling. As a result, most Dalits have no formal education and very few are able to enjoy the benefits of higher education. According to a 2006 study, 64 per cent of the country's Dalits have received no education at all.

The homeless are a disadvantaged section, in cities worldwide, that face severe challenges of citizenship and access, especially as affordable housing becomes increasingly unavailable. Significantly, in many cities minority and indigenous communities are disproportionately represented by this extreme form of urban hardship. The case of the city of Chicago is instructive. Across the US, African Americans represent 39 per cent of the national homeless population, despite accounting for just 14.1 per cent of the national population. In Chicago, the situation is even more pronounced: here, African Americans make up 32 per cent of the population and account for an extraordinary 75 per cent of the homeless population. Multiple structural and individual factors play their part in sustaining this imbalance, but institutionalized racism seems to be a significant driver of homelessness. Julie Dworkin of Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), a group that works with Chicago's homeless by organizing, advocating and helping them access rights, particularly to housing, explains:



*'Homelessness is an outcome of a combination of factors – poverty, school drop-out and high crime rates – that together pull children into the revolving door of crime and incarceration. African Americans suffer disproportionately from poverty and the unequal school system that forces children to drop out early. Once sucked in, there is little escape – youth with criminal backgrounds are more unlikely than others to pursue higher education or find jobs. Joining the ranks of the homeless is usually the endpoint of this journey.'*

The problems experienced by African American homeless people in Chicago are manifold, some of them common to all homeless persons but others specific to their situation as a marginalized ethnic group. Housing figures at the top of the list. There is a shortage of affordable accommodation due, among other factors, to poor stock that has been further diminished in some cases by city plans that seek to replace high-rise developments with lower-density mixed income housing. Affordability gaps are especially acute in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of African Americans. Overall, there has been a sharp increase in the number of the city's homeless in recent years, rising to an estimated 138,574 persons in 2013/2014.

In India, the drivers of homelessness are somewhat different and typically intertwined with the dynamics of migration from rural to urban areas, where extreme poverty combines with the pressure on migrant labour to support families back home. Again, minorities – principally Dalits and poor Muslims – are disproportionately represented among the homeless. While data on homelessness, collected as part of the decennial census, does not disaggregate by religion or ethnicity, there is enough evidence that points to this imbalance. In the context of urban poverty nationally, Dalits and Muslims face higher levels of overcrowding and are concentrated disproportionately in the most marginalized urban areas, with an estimated 23 per cent of Dalits and 19 per cent of Muslims based in slums, compared to 11 per cent of the majority community. There is also anecdotal evidence, as well as evidence in the form of qualitative accounts of civil society organizations working on homelessness issues, pointing to the

fact that the homeless are largely made up of these two minorities.

While the situation of the homeless in urban areas generally is acute, the challenges experienced by those belonging to minorities are especially difficult. This is the case in Delhi, for example, the fastest growing metropolis in India and a magnet for labour from rural areas. Migrant labour in Delhi includes a large proportion of Dalits and Muslims, mostly landless labourers from poor northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. Concentrated around settlements with large Muslim populations or in the older parts of the city, again traditionally Muslim, they struggle to access housing and in many cases end up sleeping in the open streets. The absence of a permanent home means they are not even recorded for the purposes of social security schemes such as food rations or pensions. Violence on the streets, especially against homeless children and women, is known to be high.

### **The development and creation of minority community organizations**

Struggles for the advancement of the rights of minorities require (besides an enabling legal environment and capacity in places to support the process), platforms and collectives for minority communities to organize themselves, articulate their concerns and engage with other stakeholders. But community mobilization is not an easy task, especially among very marginalized groups. The Dalit example from Bangladesh is instructive here. Efforts by Dalit rights organizations led to the establishment in 2008 of the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM). This was meant to serve as a platform for the Dalit community, with the aim of educating members on their rights, building public awareness against discrimination, sensitizing policy makers to the poor condition of Dalits and strengthening the capacity of Dalit run organizations to do all this. Mobilizing Dalits to organize themselves on a platform for recognition and rights was at the core of this strategy. The fact that much of the Dalit population in Bangladesh is urban-based meant that the objective of many of these struggles have been specifically urban issues.

These civil society partnerships have, over time, led to many positive achievements, pushing Dalit concerns onto the national political agenda and leading eventually to the government making specific commitments to assist its Dalit population in its budget. BDERM also helped bring the issue to the attention of international agencies and UN bodies, with the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Bangladesh including a specific objective for 'housing for all' on the human rights situation of the Dalit community. But the challenges to mobilizing Dalits continue to be significant. For one, anti-Dalit attitudes in society are deep-seated: changing the mindsets of different stakeholders, such as decision makers, service providers, civil society partners and the public at large, is difficult. And then there is the issue of building Dalit platforms themselves. Afsana Amin of Nagorik Uddyog ('Citizens' Initiative'), a civil society group seeking to promote participation, access to justice and development, which also acts as the secretariat to BDERM, says:

*'Discriminated [against] for centuries, Dalits have internalized their second class status. Educating them to demand reversal of this status is an uphill task. This is compounded by the poor literacy amongst the community, and the acute poverty, along with the concentration in low paid 'dirty' jobs. [This] means that mobilizing for rights and dignity is not a priority for them. And Dalits being sub-divided along sub-castes, makes it a difficult task to organize all on a common platform.'*

BDERM's efforts to counter this take the form of programmes for Dalit youth on skill building, as well as leadership training for national and district committee Dalit members. It also supports projects for the conservation of Dalit language, culture and traditions, while promoting awareness raising and public education initiatives on constitutional rights and entitlements, such as housing and land tenure.

Roma rights activism has taken a different route, with the Open Society Foundation and the European Commission leading the way in opening up policy space for Roma rights organizations to have their voices heard. This took the form, for example, of creating a

network of civil society bodies monitoring the implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015), National Action Plans (NAP) and National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS). In 2012, European Union member states agreed, after an effort by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat and the Open Society Foundation, to sign up to a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of NRISs and NAPs together with Roma and civil rights organizations. These 'shadow reports' are meant to channel local knowledge into national and European policy processes and reflect on the quality and outcomes of government measures, thus serving a watchdog function across the region. György Sümeghy of Habitat for Humanity International (HfHI), an international housing rights agency with a strong presence across Europe, and which is part of an alliance of organizations supporting Roma inclusion, notes that:

*'Monitoring of NRIS and DAPs is best practice at a very high level, to enable civil society to use these standards to monitor how national governments deliver for Roma rights, such as on better housing and access to urban infrastructure. Although not a very strong policy framework – given governments can get away with reporting poor action too – the mechanism does provide civil society with a platform and basis to monitor compliance and act as watchdogs.'*

The Romania report, for example, notes that the housing situation of Roma remains 'dire', with a wide range of issues including 'a lack of basic amenities, eviction from properties rented by local authorities and many cases of families abandoning their homes due to inability to cover utility costs'. That Roma rights groups lead or are active contributors to these reports has meant an expansion of the space available for community organizations to influence policy and practice on Roma integration. Besides HfHI, another important contributor to this process is the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). Its research and data on the human rights situation of Roma has been very helpful in assessing the impact of law and policy on awareness-raising, policy development and strategic litigation.

But the field is never open; there have been





obstructions, too, to inclusion. These have come from the increasing wave of nationalistic mobilization across Europe, supported in large measure by right-wing extremist rallies, protests and petitions. Some municipalities have built walls to separate minority communities, while

others have continued with evictions and the demolition of Roma settlements. There is also the case of Gyöngyöspata, a village in Hungary where a number of years ago a Roma settlement was patrolled and menaced by right-wing militias. Given the weak capacity of national systems in



**Left:** A Roma girl proudly wears her 'Roma' jacket, Bucharest, Romania. *Jake Stimpson*

barrier to greater mobilization for minority rights.

For the CCH, communities in Chicago have been mobilized through outreach programmes, legal advocacy and a law project that litigates for the rights of the homeless. And in organizing its constituents the coalition puts homeless persons right at the centre, to prioritize the issues, provide testimonies, participate in decision making fora, engage the media and act as leaders for campaigns. Julie Dworkin of CCH notes that:

*'It is incredibly important to have the voice of the constituents to have effective advocacy. Someone with the personal experience and deep insight of the issues of homelessness, to sit in front of you to tell the story, can be a very strong message. We frequently bring groups of homeless persons down to lobby state legislators.'*

Although not exclusively, much of this work takes place in the city's African American communities as this is where the large majority of Chicago's homeless come from. Given that in this instance, institutionalized racism acts as a chief contributor to homelessness, education, organization and advocacy – all different aspects of community mobilization – go to the root of the problem, building a constituency not only among the homeless persons belonging to minorities, but also among the wider population and state actors. Meanwhile, attitudes in society remain a big hurdle to community mobilization; Dworkin adds:

*'There continues to be this perception that homelessness is caused by poor decisions and personal problems – such as substance abuse, laziness and unwillingness to find remunerative employment. Influencing this thinking, although not mentioned in so many words, is racism. This is, of course, not true – it is primarily due to poverty why people become homeless. And yet, when people hear homeless – they think single men, African American men, and drugs.'*

There are other hurdles too to community mobilizations among the homeless, mostly to do

some of these countries, the presence of anti-minority right-wing mobilizations has meant that any attempts to enhance the scope of Roma rights carries the risk of a backlash, particularly in urban settings where pressures on services and resources are often most intense. This acts as a

with the urban setting:

*'The transient nature of the population [means that] it is difficult to develop long-term relationships – as well as the fact that most persons are in crisis, and basic needs have to come first, rather than making time for public action.'*

Similar challenges exist for the homeless in Delhi. Lack of awareness and sensitivity to the plight of the homeless, and negative stereotypes, if not outright prejudice among the general public and officials against Dalits and Muslims – as mentioned, the minorities who make up the bulk of the homeless – results in a situation where much of the homeless population of the city is not covered by any social security programme. However, it was activism on the part of a food rights collective – the Right to Food Movement – working with a sympathetic higher court,<sup>1</sup> that led to the crafting of a programme of support for Delhi's homeless, including night shelters, improved facilities in day shelters and soup kitchens, among others. Constituents of the Right to Food Movement and other urban rights collectives in Delhi have worked with national and state governments to implement some of the programmes that the Delhi government formulated in response to the court's verdict. Their focus has been localities where minorities, including Muslims and Dalits, are concentrated, as well as other marginalized minorities – including women, children and elderly persons, among others. This targeting of minority areas has helped the benefits reach the most deserving people.

Whilst it is true that the homeless examples, both from Chicago and Delhi, do not necessarily reflect minority activism as such, they do provide examples where general initiatives still ended up achieving positive outcomes for minorities. In India it was the shared issue of homelessness on the streets of Delhi, rather than a minority specific concern, that created the necessary consensus for traction and led to various improvements for all homeless people, particularly benefitting minorities: this is an example where working with general rights organizations and finding shared issues yielded results. With Chicago, on the other hand, it

was CCH's targeting of its programmes at districts with large African American homeless populations, increasing outreach with the community. In some cases, then, it is universal urban issues, rather than the particular concerns of specific minorities, that might in the long run be able to mobilize other stakeholders in the city to support the process. This, of course, can be a delicate balance as it is important that the particular challenges of minorities are not made invisible in advocacy efforts by collectives and larger civil society organizations.

### **Increasing visibility for minority issues**

In the struggles for minority rights, the biggest barrier is society's attitudes towards minorities and its understanding of the complex exclusion they face. Creating visibility for minority issues, besides collecting data that provides the evidence of the exclusion these groups face, also requires raising awareness to ensure this information has a presence in the public domain. In India, where minority specific data is only now beginning to be collected and published, this information is helping groups to design specific programmes of interventions, as well as helping minority issues to gain greater traction with policy makers and society at large. Yet as the situation in Chicago demonstrates, where homelessness statistics by ethnicity have been publicly available for many years, data is not sufficient on its own to result in positive outcomes.

The Roma situation speaks to another predicament of minorities that has particular relevance to the issue of community specific data: prejudices are so deep-rooted that to talk of minority exclusion publicly could be self-defeating. As György Sümeghy explains:

*'The policy community is divided on whether it is a good thing to collect ethnicity-based data on Roma. Given the risks, perhaps it is in their interest not to be identified as Roma, as that might actually attract further prejudice, and result in Roma being targeted or further disadvantaged.'*

This fear of a backlash against Roma means that pushing for special measures or affirmative action policies could be a risky proposition – as

they could help mobilize the opposition. What activists have found useful though in this context are anti-discrimination policies, to enforce a level playing field and penalize racism. There is also the realization that general pro-poor activism on its own will not necessarily address discrimination against minorities, and that specific platforms and programmes are required to make sure minority concerns are not blurred or overlooked. The challenge, activists believe, is to overturn the prejudices underlying these exclusions – through creating awareness and educating the wider society about Roma.

Countering prejudice is a challenge that Dalits in Bangladesh and organizations speaking for them, such as BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog, also face. The struggle in the country to ensure Dalit rights are recognized as a category worthy of policy attention has been a long, drawn-out one. BDERM and alliance partners are now demanding that the government include disaggregated data on caste in the next national census. This is on the back of demands and campaigns for better housing and upgraded facilities for Dalits in urban settlements, including land allocations and regularization of tenure. However, much of the success of the Dalit struggle in Bangladesh has itself been the impact of efforts, by Nagorik Uddyog and other groups in BDERM, to raise the profile of the issue and bring multiple stakeholders within the fold of the alliance. These efforts bore fruit in 2008, with political parties adopting the term ‘Dalit’ and including Dalit issues in their manifestos, thus committing to include Dalits within the policy framework. In parallel, BDERM also reached out to international stakeholders, such as the International Dalit Solidarity Network and the UN. These have had salutary effects in bringing Dalit issues centre-stage in pro-poor policy debates in Bangladesh and internationally, with a focus on housing and other urban rights.

### **Engaging local authorities: how to participate in local political processes?**

Many of the initiatives for engaging local authorities on Roma rights have been about civil society organizations working alone or in partnership with local authorities to advance

Roma access to services and entitlements. Limited success with this traditional service delivery approach to rights-based work, however, has led to a change of strategy, with some actors now focusing their efforts on the political sphere. Drawing much inspiration from the civil rights movement in the US, an Open Society Foundation engagement programme includes training for leaders to enable them to stand up for their rights. The effort is also to enable Roma to become active voters at the local level and, under an initiative run in Macedonia and Hungary led by HfHI, organize dialogues between local government and representatives of the Roma community, centred on the housing issue, to create awareness and strengthen the voice of Roma while educating city officials on how to act on the concerns of their Roma constituents.

BDERM’s work in Bangladesh, similarly, has focused on the political empowerment of Dalits, developing a grassroots Dalit leadership and organizing them on rights-based platforms to advocate for decent housing, training and livelihood support for Dalit youth. But minority rights platforms have their limitations, due to their small constituency as well as the limited voice they have within the rights movements. Partnerships and alliances with larger rights platforms can help amplify voices. Dworkin of CCH notes:

*‘Much of what we do is in partnership with other groups. These are coalitions of outside groups we lead or join; efforts led by unions, such as the Fight for 15; grassroots pro-poor collaborations, such as Chicago based organizations representing poor people (Sweet Home Chicago); or community organizations and neighbourhood associations concerned about affordable housing.’*

A problem, she adds, is that ‘what is affordable for the poor, might still not be affordable for the homeless’. Where minority groups align with larger platforms, a balance must be struck between the group’s core interests and those of the larger pro-poor platform. These latter groups might be concerned about the poor, but not the most poor specifically, including the homeless. Hence a common ground has to be reached. This

is not to undermine the importance of partnering with pro-poor formations – as Dwarkin makes clear, ‘they have size and bring a lot of scale and reach, all of which is a help to our cause too. Organizations working with the homeless do not have that sort of heft.’

In Delhi, the role of the Supreme Court in asking its commissioners to monitor the implementation of its Right to Food ruling in favour of the urban homeless meant that space was created for the civil society organizations to positively influence outcomes. This also opened up ground for strengthening the principal homeless rights collective in Delhi, the Shabri Adhikar Manch: Begharon ke Saath (SAM-BSK). Numbering over 20 organizations and social movements, SAM-BSK works to promote and protect the rights of the homeless. In recent times, SAM members have pooled their resources to provide emergency night shelter and care for the homeless in the winter months. Other outcomes have been the enrolment of the homeless in electoral registers, giving them the ability to exercise their democratic rights, something that migrants lose when they travel from rural areas to cities. Crucially, the use of an encompassing category ‘homeless’, rather than the specific minority, Dalit or Muslim, has meant that service providers have tended, on the whole, to be supportive of these efforts. The work has not attracted the kind of resistance that, in the literature, seems to visit interventions targeted at minorities, particularly religious communities.

## Lessons and Recommendations

This essay began by exploring some of the obstacles that minority communities face in securing recognition and equality in cities, drawing on examples of best practice and lessons from select minority rights organizations around the world. What is the relevance of each case study for the broader consideration of urban minority rights advocacy? The Delhi example perhaps demonstrates how a focus on shared issues rather than minority-specific concerns can create a common consensus and deliver results for all communities, particularly benefitting minorities. With Chicago, on the other hand, it was the targeting of programmes at neighbourhoods with large African American

populations, designing campaigns in such a way as to increase outreach with the community, that shaped positive outcomes. It helped, of course, that an overwhelming majority of the city’s homeless population happened to be African Americans. The Roma case demonstrates the limitations of taking a ‘general’ poverty reduction approach and the importance of recognizing that discrimination is an issue by putting the emphasis firmly on rights. This has led to a change of thinking towards – and greater focus on – empowerment of Roma people, while still recognizing the constraints facing a disempowered community such as the Roma when voicing their demands in an atmosphere hostile to minorities. It is perhaps Bangladesh that provides the strongest evidence of how a minority rights platform, of and by minorities, can work together with national and international pro-poor networks to deliver real benefits for minorities. It will be instructive to further track the results on that count to understand the factors that enabled this positive outcome.

In this concluding paragraph, some tentative recommendations are presented to overcome barriers and create more effective advocacy for minority rights in urban settings:

- *Better data collection*, disaggregated by community and on a range of issues relating to urban space, disseminated through suitable media to policy makers and other stakeholders. Data is of particular importance for minorities in cities, most of which have relocated from their original settings and often lack clear official recognition. The absence of disaggregated data is behind much of the invisibility of many of the poorest and most marginalized groups, including many minorities.
- *Inclusive pro-poor urban rights platforms* that provide space for minority voices and perspectives, including in neighbourhood committees.
- *Capacity development* for minority rights activists and platforms at both local and national levels to support community members in undertaking their own organization and advocacy.
- *Awareness-raising programs* on the condition of minorities in cities and urban areas, with public

initiatives on minority rights, equality and anti-discrimination.

- *Strong anti-discrimination legislation* against racism, hate speech and other issues, with a designated watchdog to ensure their strong enforcement.
- *Campaigns demanding better provision for minorities* through clear budget allocations and their implementation in a participatory and transparent manner, accompanied by public campaigns educating minority citizens on these issues.
- *Engagement of international fora*, drawing on international standards, to raise minority concerns as well as help create the momentum for global campaigns on minority agendas. ■

## Endnotes

1. The Right to Food Case was brought before the Supreme Court in 2001 by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), to demand better food rights for the country's poor. In response, the court has been issuing a set of interim orders, asking national and state governments to improve the provision of food and nutrition for the poor. The court also appointed commissioners to report on implementation. In 2010, after a severe bout of cold weather in Delhi that caused the deaths of many homeless persons, the commissioners proposed that national and state governments should provide not just food, but also shelter and associated facilities for Delhi's homeless.

The indigenous  
experience  
of urbanization

Carolyn Stephens



The world has long had cities and towns, and there have long been urban populations, but it was only in 2007 that the United Nations (UN) calculated that, for the first time in history, the world's population had become more urban than rural. But while the majority are now acknowledged to live in an urban world, it is still often assumed that indigenous peoples are not included: the common image is of isolated communities cut off from the modern world, largely disengaged from the challenges and advantages of the urban future. Yet this is not the reality for the thousands of indigenous people who migrate to towns and cities every year, nor for the many more who have lived for generations in urban areas. This chapter looks at a real but hidden issue in global policy – the impacts of urbanization on indigenous peoples.

While urbanization can provide major opportunities for indigenous well-being and organization, the city can also be a challenging, alienating and frightening experience, particularly for migrants, threatening their identity in the process. As Michael Dodson, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Social Justice Commissioner for Australia, has put it, '[R]emoved from the land, we are literally removed from ourselves.' Despite these issues, however, indigenous migration to cities has persisted and established urban indigenous communities continue to expand. The UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) calculates that in many countries more than 50 per cent of the indigenous population now live in towns and cities. Indigenous urbanization has been driven by the search for a new life in a context of rural poverty, land grabbing, conflict and challenges, the agency notes:

*'Over the last three decades, they have moved from their traditional lands towards urban areas partly seeking opportunities for education and employment, partly because of human rights abuses and violations in particular to their land rights and partly for cultural survival.'*<sup>1</sup>

Urban indigenous identity is perhaps the most important but also most complex of the challenges of the urban indigenous experience,

as it is linked to the very concept of indigeneity. At an international level and in most national contexts, indigenous peoples are those groups or individuals who self-identify as 'indigenous' – this is how population figures are typically generated within national surveys or censuses. Many elements of self-identification of indigeneity become more complex and fluid in urban areas, however, including aspects such as the occupation of communal lands, links to ancestral territories and the preservation of traditional cultural practices. These aspects can be particularly challenging in cities as indigenous community members may feel unwilling to self-identify in order to 'fit in', particularly among indigenous youth. As a result, urban indigenous populations may become officially invisible if they prefer not to self-identify due to stigma and marginalization within the dominant urban society. This in turn can mean that authorities fail to recognize the existence of the urban indigenous population and that national indigenous development programmes, if they exist, will remain focused on rural communities while the growing challenges of indigenous peoples in cities are overlooked.

Finally, it should be noted that the context also depends on the degree of urbanization in a particular country. In countries with indigenous communities plus a relatively high level of urbanization, particularly where this urbanization has taken place over a longer period, there is usually more experience of urban indigenous issues – in Australia, for example, where urban indigenous policies have existed for decades. Latin America, too, is highly urbanized and home to a number of megacities which concentrate more than 10 million inhabitants – often with a significant presence of indigenous peoples. The urban indigenous experience in these larger urban centres is distinct from that in small towns. The other factor is the proportion of indigenous or minority peoples in an urban area, particularly in smaller urban settings in remote regions such as areas of India and China, where indigenous peoples are the majority in their region. In these areas, when they are often also the majority in the urban setting, their experience is very different from the experience of an indigenous person who belongs to a minority in a large urban setting.

## Increased international attention

Despite a strong focus over the last decades on the process of world urbanization and its impacts on different population groups, the situation of indigenous peoples in urban settings only began to reach international attention recently. It was not until 2007 that the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues first hosted a special meeting on the urban situation of indigenous peoples. According to UN-Habitat, the urbanization of indigenous peoples is the result of two processes: (i) cities growing to engulf indigenous settlements, making their ancestral lands part of the urban space; and (ii) migration by members of indigenous peoples to towns and cities for various reasons. The main difference between these two is based on the relationship that the communities have to the land they occupy. When indigenous land is overtaken by urban space, the indigenous community may continue to live on ancestral lands, although now in an urbanized setting. In the case of forced or voluntary migration, on the other hand, indigenous individuals are in-migrants like other new arrivals to the city. Both groups are frequently exposed to discrimination, however; according to UN-Habitat: 'generally, both indigenous rural-urban migrants and long-time indigenous "urbanites" tend to be marginalized and discriminated against by dominant population groups'.

Common factors that lead to the movement of indigenous peoples from their lands and territories and towards cities include poverty, environmental factors, conflict, the absence of basic services and inadequate legal protection over ancestral lands. In Chile, for instance, 34 per cent of the national indigenous population live in the metropolitan area of the capital Santiago, and have been there for decades since mass exodus from rural areas occurred during the military regime of Augusto Pinochet. More recently, the indigenous Bedouin of the Negev (*Naqab* in Arabic) desert region of Israel are being forcibly urbanized by the Israeli government to allow their ancestral lands to be developed, with the result that their traditional lifestyle of land-based semi-nomadic pastoralism is being replaced with landless, labour-force-led urbanization.

Indigenous migration to urban areas may also

be initiated by indigenous peoples themselves, motivated by opportunities for improved employment, health, housing, education, political participation or other benefits that they may lack in their own territories. The rural-urban internal migration of the Māori, for instance, began after the Second World War, when they started to migrate in greater numbers than ever before. Now, 70 per cent of Māori individuals reside outside their traditional lands.

What is important, however, is to recognize the diversity of urban indigenous experience and the possibilities as well as the risks cities present. 'The impacts of urban areas on indigenous peoples vary greatly,' according to Elsa Stamatopoulou, Chief of the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. 'Some are able to adapt and improve their situations considerably without loss of cultural identity; in other cases, indigenous peoples are subject to discrimination, exclusion and violence.'

So, whether indigenous peoples are moving to urban areas with hopes for a new life, escaping hardship in rural areas or have already lived in urban areas for generations, what is the evidence of the impacts of the urban experience on indigenous peoples in terms of health, progress and social well-being?

## Specific impacts of urbanization on indigenous peoples

Urbanization as a process can affect indigenous peoples either directly or indirectly, in positive and negative ways. Impacts can also vary by group: indigenous women, children and young people may be particularly negatively affected by the new urban environment in terms of, for example, access to safe housing, water and sanitation, personal security and alienation. The most direct impact, or certainly the most readily measurable, is through urban poverty – most of the indigenous peoples who migrate or relocate to urban areas end up in the low-income informal settlements that dominate cities and towns in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In these areas they have limited access to good quality urban housing, healthy food, clean water and health services. Even in Australia, with a long tradition of indigenous urbanization, urban Aboriginal people are often forced to choose between

homelessness or overcrowded, low-income accommodation. Urban areas often lack the benefits of traditional healthy lifestyles, such as indigenous foods and medicines, with unhealthier alternatives such as processed foods and drinks taking their place. Indigenous peoples can also face more exposure in urban settings to infectious diseases and environmental pollution, including exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, particularly for indigenous women.

But on the positive side urban areas can provide access to better schools, improved health services and enhanced living conditions. There may also be better opportunities for indigenous women to study and have careers. Towns and cities can even be spaces for the renovation and maintenance of indigenous identity. In Chile, the Mapuche and Aymara communities initially denied their identities on arrival to the city, but gradually there was a shift from 'negative ethnicity' to 'positive ethnicity', with the urban areas facilitating indigenous organizations, educational groups and political associations.<sup>2</sup>

Indirectly, urban development processes can affect indigenous peoples by encroaching on indigenous territory, in the process displacing them to urban areas. The process of urbanization can also push resource extraction processes into indigenous territories and create widespread environmental destruction, undermining indigenous livelihood sources and creating a range of health issues in these communities. Urbanization can also threaten indigenous livelihoods by reducing access to materials for their art and cultural work. For example, artisanal pottery, which enabled some Batwa to earn some outside income or barter with other communities, is no longer viable because the basic raw material is now being used to produce bricks. People who used to buy their pots now use plastic containers.

Indirectly, urbanization can also have very positive impacts for indigenous peoples. Urban communities can bring resources to indigenous areas through tourism, sales of indigenous goods in urban centres or even international support for indigenous artisans and cultures. For example, the international Fair Trade movement has strong links with indigenous communities throughout the world and supports indigenous cooperatives

to sell their crafts and products to mostly urban citizens in Europe and the USA. Urban areas provide communication facilities that allow indigenous peoples to engage with the rest of the world about their situation. In Brazil, for example, the Mundurucu people began an 'auto-demarcation' campaign of their ancestral land around the Tapajós River in 2014, in response to the government's failure to do so ahead of the construction of two mega-dam projects on the river. The community had consistently protested against the dam projects, which they say will flood ancestral lands and displace their native communities. The government claims the dam projects are necessary to provide energy to the region's growing urban centres. Both Amazon Watch and major news channels covered the story and supported the indigenous campaign.

Most evidence on the urban indigenous experience is from countries with a long history of urbanization, often accompanied by indigenous extermination or active policies of assimilation such as the United States, Canada and Australia. For example, Aboriginal Australians have a long and unhappy experience of urbanization – forcibly taken from their lands at the time of the notorious policies of assimilation, Aboriginal Australians have experienced the worst of all aspects of urbanization: from the mid-nineteenth century they were isolated from their culture and traditions, introduced to alcohol and drugs, and not given access to decent jobs or education. The consequences of this history of forced displacement to urban settlements is still seen today, with high rates of alcoholism and drug dependence among Aboriginal youth and poor health compared to non-Aboriginal Australians across a wide range of health outcomes, including diabetes, maternal nutrition, heart disease and various lifestyle-related health problems.

The urban experience of Australian Aboriginal peoples is mirrored in many other settings. Canadian First Nations peoples suffered a very similar fate to that of Australian Aboriginal peoples. Historically nomadic or in small settlements in remote areas, living sustainably with the land, they were forcibly displaced and 'civilized' in assimilation programmes largely designed to 'westernize' First Nations peoples.



By 2011 the Canadian census recorded that ‘off-reserve Aboriginal people constitute the fastest growing segment of Canadian society’, with 56 per cent based in urban areas.<sup>3</sup>

The impacts of this process in Canada have been profound. Urban First Nations communities in Canada live in much worse conditions than other urban groups. A recent study explored worrying evidence that indigenous women are over-represented among new HIV infections and street-based sex workers.

Comparing indigenous and non-indigenous sex workers, they found that First Nations indigenous women were three times more likely to have HIV than other sex workers and had a high prevalence of inter-generational sex work. This finding illustrates the long-term effects of destructive attitudes and policies towards indigenous peoples – with impacts that continue despite changes in policies.<sup>4</sup>

It is notable that data on the impacts of urbanization is much scarcer in regions such as



**Left:** A Maasai boy watches the construction of a new road outside Arusha, Tanzania. *Panos/Frederic Courbet*

areas they find themselves living in low-income and vulnerable settlements in the urban areas. This brings with it other problems associated with urban life. Video diaries recorded by urban indigenous women in Shillong talk of their fight to gain access to appropriate services and their struggles with issues such as domestic violence and alcohol.

Another important study looked at the urbanization and assimilation of Hmong in Laos into Lao culture and society, and the consequent impacts on indigenous identity and culture. The authors found that Hmong in Laos are undergoing rapid urbanization, aided by the aggressive relocation policies of the Lao government. Forced contact has obliged Hmong to adapt to aspects of Lao culture, resulting in social and cultural upheaval.<sup>5</sup>

Among the most difficult impacts of urbanization on indigenous peoples are the long-term impacts of displacement from traditional lands and cultures. Indigenous peoples, perhaps more than any other group, struggle to feel at home in cities and may experience racism even in poorer urban communities with other recent migrants. There is evidence that this has an impact on recent indigenous immigrants and can affect young indigenous peoples growing up in urban areas to the extent that they do not want to self-identify as indigenous in their new settings. Some evidence suggests that this stigma can also mean that indigenous peoples begin to regard themselves and their physical difference as a problem. For instance, a study of positive body image that looked at inter-ethnic and rural–urban differences among an indigenous sample from Malaysian Borneo found that urban indigenous women had a significantly more negative body image than either rural indigenous women or other urban women.<sup>6</sup>

Urban areas can be home to centres of cultural learning, for both indigenous peoples and other urban residents. This can be supported or destroyed by national governments. One positive example from 2014, linked to Argentina's participation in the International Conference of

Asia, where the majority of urban people live and which has the highest proportion of indigenous peoples globally. However, a study in Shillong in northern India highlights the health problems of the urban indigenous communities particularly for women. Meghalaya state is a rapidly urbanizing state in north-east India, home to indigenous people mostly belonging to the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo tribes. The study highlights that, while rural indigenous health indicators are worse, when indigenous peoples migrate to urban

Indigenous Peoples, was the inauguration by the President of the *Salón de los Pueblos Originarios* (Salon of the Indigenous Peoples) in the National Government House. In neighbouring Brazil in the same year, the closing of a former indigenous museum (*Aldeia Maracanã*) in Rio de Janeiro that had become a centre for indigenous culture and ideas was brought to international attention when planning officials forcibly evicted an indigenous community occupying the site next to Maracanã stadium.

### **Moving towards a culturally inclusive urbanization**

In terms of overall impacts of urbanization on indigenous peoples, the evidence from multiple settings suggests that indigenous peoples, until now, have experienced a complex mix of negative factors while positive impacts have emerged when the urban indigenous communities have become stronger and more organized.

Urban areas can also potentially provide more opportunities for indigenous peoples to improve their lives and rural indigenous peoples often migrate to urban areas in search of these opportunities. Unfortunately, in many settings urban opportunities are not readily available to indigenous peoples, particularly for recent urban migrants, and they may find themselves in informal settlements and working in low-paid, often hazardous occupations.

The positive aspects of urban life can include better access to services such as housing, education and health, but for indigenous peoples these services must be accessible in cultural as well as geographical terms. In most urban settings indigenous peoples find services difficult to access due to stigma and lack of cultural appropriateness.

Entrenched attitudes towards indigenous peoples can have long-term impacts on them and their situation in urban areas and this forms a significant challenge for policy makers wishing to make a better life for urban indigenous communities. A critical challenge in this regard is the support of both urban society and government. Recognizing these challenges, in 2014 the government of Canada announced an improved urban strategy with two streams of work focused on urban partnerships and

capacity building. Similar initiatives elsewhere give important guidance on how governments can approach and support urban indigenous well-being. In Chile, for example, the government has launched a programme of support to end inequality between indigenous and non-indigenous Chileans called 'development with identity'. In Port Augusta in Australia, an evaluation of urban indigenous initiatives concluded with the advice to create long-term, culturally appropriate 'listening services', flexible and without a 'one size fits all' approach. Both programmes highlight the importance of training government staff to be more listening, reflexive and respectful of other cultural views.

Evidence also suggests that a critical way to improve life for urban indigenous peoples is through initiatives to support and sustain their identity. This is most successful when indigenous communities come together and organize themselves. One interesting initiative in Argentina, Chile and Nigeria uses radio to support urban indigenous peoples to 'maintain home languages; gain access to health, education, and employment information; greet friends and relatives; and re-create traditional culture under circumstances of modern pressures, but also to open up opportunities'.<sup>7</sup>

The creation, or recreation, of a 'positive' urban indigenous identity is a critical element, particularly for indigenous young people, who can feel allied to their culture but also alienated by it in the face of the globalized modern city or town. Indigenous organizations become critical in this context: Māori 'edgewalkers' in the Pacific navigate this delicate intersection between indigenous tradition and urban society, and studies show that being comfortable with a pluricultural identity can be key to urban indigenous well-being.

As a final point it is worth noting that urbanization seems to be the future for people everywhere, and it is worth reflecting that towns and cities have always served as homes for disenfranchised groups in search of inclusion and diversity. Different ethnicities coexist in many major cities around the world – with many people of various religions, cultures and languages living together and learning from each other.

London, a global city with an extraordinary



array of ethnic and religious diversity, is one example of a major urban centre that has managed to achieve a relatively cohesive urban society while being enriched by its mix of different cultures. The experience of urbanization for indigenous peoples, too, could be just as positive as they bring their heritage to urban areas. Fundamentally, the challenge is not urbanization itself but the overall structural attitudes of society towards indigenous peoples. While the urban experience of indigenous peoples to date has not been positive, there is no reason why well-governed cities and towns should not be able to integrate indigenous peoples in a way that benefits them and the wider urban society. There are already many cities around the world trying to develop policies to overcome long-standing prejudice and historical attitudes. At the same time, there are many indigenous groups and individuals fighting for their inclusion in urban areas. Our urban future will be richer for the inclusion of indigenous peoples in our towns and cities. ■

## Endnotes

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Urbanization,  
minorities and  
indigenous peoples:  
how can the law  
provide protection?

Lucy Claridge

**A**lmost every country in the world has experienced some form of urbanization. For some, urbanization translates into better health care, quality of education, employment opportunities and a host of other benefits which would rarely be available in rural areas. Conversely, other individuals never fully experience the intended benefits of urbanization, suffering land insecurity, poor living conditions, unemployment and crime. As recognized in other chapters, minorities and indigenous peoples – as some of the most marginalized communities – can suffer disproportionately from the effects of urbanization. This can result in eviction from their ancestral lands for urban development processes, environmental destruction due to resource extraction on indigenous territories, a breakdown of traditional lifestyles, and a deterioration of traditional knowledge and culture.

This chapter will outline the various key international human rights legal standards which may come into play when considering the effect of urbanization on minorities and indigenous peoples, and draw on jurisprudence of international and regional courts, and quasi-judicial mechanisms, illustrating how such situations have been successfully challenged through litigation. While not all of the cases and other sources mentioned specifically touch on urban environments, they provide norms and guidance relevant to the effects of urbanization on minorities and indigenous peoples.

### The right to adequate housing

Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) enshrines ‘the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and the continuous improvement of living conditions’. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which monitors ICESCR’s implementation, has elaborated on this right, declaring in particular that adequate housing consists of more than simply ‘four walls and one roof’, and includes legal security of tenure, access to public goods and services, affordability, habitability, physical accessibility, location and cultural adequacy.<sup>1</sup>

The elements which are of particular relevance to minorities and indigenous peoples include (i) legal **security of tenure**: regardless of the type of tenure, all persons should possess a degree of security of tenure which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats; (ii) **accessibility**: housing is not adequate if the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups are not taken into account, including people facing discrimination; and (iii) **cultural adequacy**: adequate housing should respect and take into account the expression of cultural identity and ways of life.

This right is also enshrined in various other regional instruments and jurisprudence. For example, Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter states:

*‘With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to take measures designed: 1. to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; 2. to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; 3. to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.’*

In its 2001 *SERAC v. Nigeria*<sup>2</sup> decision – which concerned violations of the right to health, the right to dispose of wealth and natural resources, and the right to a clean environment and family rights – against the military government of Nigeria as a result of its condoning and facilitating the operations of oil corporations on the ancestral land of the Ogoni people, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) made the interpretation that various rights under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (the African Charter) implied a right to adequate housing, finding:

*‘Although the right to housing or shelter is not explicitly provided for under the African Charter, the corollary of the combination of the provisions protecting the right to enjoy the best attainable state of mental and physical health, cited under article 16 above, the right to property, and the protection accorded to the family forbids the wanton destruction of shelter because when housing is destroyed, property, health and family life are*

*adversely affected. It is thus noted that the combined effect of articles 14, 16 and 18(1) reads into the Charter a right to shelter or housing which the Nigerian government has apparently violated.'*

## **The right to property and freedom from eviction**

Linked to the right to housing, the right to property is set out in Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which provides '(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others, and (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.' This right is of particular relevance to minorities and indigenous peoples in the context of urbanization, since indigenous peoples are frequently forced off their ancestrally owned land for it to be developed and/or used for extractive industries, and minorities' property rights are often ignored as a result of institutionalized discrimination or denied in the context of post-conflict situations, when they seek – unsuccessfully – to return to their homes.

Somewhat controversially, the right to property has never been expressly recognized in the other key UN human rights treaties – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) or the ICESCR – yet it has been incorporated into the key regional human rights treaties.

In the European context, the right to property is enshrined in Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which provides:

*'(1) Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.*

*(2) The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties.'*

Jurisprudence before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has established

that Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 covers three principles, namely: (1) enjoyment of possessions; (2) the qualified prohibition on deprivation of property; and (3) qualified state control of the use of property.<sup>3</sup> The ECtHR has reiterated that these three principles should not be viewed as forming one concept of property protection: that is, the enjoyment of possessions is guaranteed, but this guarantee is not without limits. In particular, the second and third principles covered by Article 1 of Protocol 1 have to respect the principle of proportionality.<sup>4</sup> In other words, any interference with the right to property has to satisfy three ground rules: it must be in accordance with the law,<sup>5</sup> pursue a legitimate aim<sup>6</sup> and strike a fair balance between the individual right to property and interest of the general public.<sup>7</sup>

According to Article 14 of the African Charter, 'The right to property shall be guaranteed. It may only be encroached upon in the interest of public need or in the general interest of the community and in accordance with the provisions of appropriate laws.' The test laid out in Article 14 of the African Charter is conjunctive. That is, in order for an encroachment not to be in violation of Article 14 it must be proven that the encroachment was in the interest of the public need/general interest of the community and was carried out in accordance with appropriate laws.<sup>8</sup> The requirement that any encroachment on property rights be in accordance with the 'appropriate laws' incorporates both domestic and relevant international laws.

The ACHPR has recognized in its jurisprudence that land can constitute property for the purposes of Article 14 of the African Charter.<sup>9</sup> It has also found that the right to property includes the right to have access to one's property and not to have one's property invaded or encroached on.<sup>10</sup> The ACHPR has expressly recognized that 'owners have the right to undisturbed possession, use and control of their property however they deem fit'.<sup>11</sup>

In the Latin American context, the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR) recognizes the right to protection of property, including the right to 'just compensation'. The ACHR also prohibits usury and other exploitation, which is unique among human

rights instruments. Article 21 of the ACHR states that:

*'Everyone has the right to the use and enjoyment of his property. The law may subordinate such use and enjoyment to the interest of society; (2) No one shall be deprived of his property except upon payment of just compensation, for reasons of public utility or social interest, and in the cases and according to the forms established by law. (3) Usury and any other form of exploitation of man by man shall be prohibited by law.'*

### **Indigenous peoples' rights over ancestral land**

In relation to indigenous peoples, both international and domestic courts have recognized that they have a specific form of land tenure that creates a particular set of challenges for communities affected by urbanization and/or natural resource extraction. Common difficulties faced by indigenous peoples have included the lack of 'formal' title in their historic territories, the failure of domestic legal systems to acknowledge collective property rights, and the claim of formal title to indigenous land by colonial and post-colonial government authorities. In combination, this has led to many cases of displacement from a people's historic territory, often linked with urbanization.

A first step in the protection of such rights in the African context is the acknowledgement that the rights, interests and benefits of indigenous communities in their traditional lands constitute 'property' under the African Charter. In this context, the ACHPR concluded in the *Endorois* decision that the indigenous pastoralist Endorois community had collective rights in their ancestral lands around Lake Bogoria:

*'[T]he State ... has a duty to recognize the right to property of members of the Endorois community, within the framework of a communal property system, and establish the mechanisms necessary to give domestic legal effect to such right recognized in the Charter and international law.'*<sup>12</sup>

The leading Inter-American human rights case law on the issue of collective property rights unanimously supports the protection of property rights 'in a sense which includes, among

others, the rights of members of the indigenous communities within the framework of communal property'.<sup>13</sup> It stated that *possession* of the land should suffice for indigenous communities lacking real title to obtain official recognition of that property.<sup>14</sup> In a case concerning the indigenous Mayagna community against the government of Nicaragua, which granted a concession over their communally owned land for commercial development without seeking community consent, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) set out its concept of indigenous property rights, as follows:

*'Given the characteristics of the instant case, some specifications are required on the concept of property in indigenous communities. Among indigenous peoples there is a communitarian tradition regarding a communal form of collective property of the land, in the sense that ownership of the land is not centered on an individual but rather on the group and its Community.'*<sup>15</sup>

The point was later reiterated by the IACtHR in its decision in the case of *Yakye Axa*, in which it found:

*'The culture of the members of the indigenous communities directly relates to a specific way of being, seeing, and acting in the world, developed on the basis of their close relationship with their traditional territories and the resources therein, not only because they are their main means of subsistence, but also because they are part of their worldview, their religiosity, and therefore, of their cultural identity.'*<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, in the *Moiwana* decision, the IACtHR observed that:

*'The Moiwana community members, a N'djuka tribal people, possess an "all-encompassing relationship" to their traditional lands, and their concept of ownership regarding that territory is not centered on the individual, but rather on the community as a whole.'*<sup>17</sup>

The approach of both the ACHPR and the IACtHR is affirmed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP),

which in Article 26 provides that:

1. *Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.*
2. *Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.*
3. *States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.'*

### **Forced evictions**

In its General Comment No. 7, CESCR stated that:

*'Forced eviction and house demolition as a punitive measure are also inconsistent with the norms of the Covenant ... States Parties shall ensure, prior to carrying out any evictions, and particularly those involving large groups, that all feasible alternatives are explored in consultation with the affected persons, with a view to avoiding or at least minimizing, the need to use force. Legal remedies or procedures should be provided to those who are affected by eviction orders. States Parties shall also see to it that all the individuals concerned have a right to adequate compensation for any property, both personal and real, which is affected.'*<sup>18</sup>

The legal requirement to seek the meaningful participation of those affected by evictions and – in the case of indigenous peoples – the requirement to seek their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), is well-established in international law (and discussed further under the section on the right to development). Effective participation in transparent decision making processes that affect ownership, tenure and use of land is key in ensuring that the rights of individuals and communities are protected. In this respect, states parties should respect the principle of FPIC of indigenous peoples in all matters covered by their specific rights, including in relation to land. The CESCR has

**Right:** Youths play football on a road that bisects the residential blocks of Lunik IX, a decrepit housing estate in Kosice, Slovakia, almost entirely populated by Roma. *Panos/Björn Steinz*

also extended the obligation to obtain FPIC to include minorities and other communities where preservation of their cultural resources, especially those associated with their way of life and cultural expression, are at risk.<sup>19</sup>

The ACHPR has also found that forced evictions by their very nature cannot be deemed to be 'in accordance with the law' under Article 14 of the African Charter.<sup>20</sup> The 'law' in this sense refers to both national and international law,<sup>21</sup> and requires consultation and compensation.<sup>22</sup> In reaching this conclusion, the ACHPR relied on the ECtHR's ruling in *Akdivar and Others v. Turkey*, where the Grand Chamber concluded that forced evictions and destruction of the applicants' houses amounted to a serious interference with the rights protected under Article 8 (which protects the right to private and family life, home and correspondence) and Article 1. Protocol No.1 of ECHR.<sup>23</sup>

### **Right to freedom from discrimination**

The right to freedom from discrimination is a fundamental principle of international human rights treaties, enshrined in a number of international human rights treaties. These include the UDHR (Article 1 and 2), ICCPR (Articles 2, 26 and 27), ICESCR (Article 2), the ECHR (Article 14 and Protocol 12), the African Charter (Article 2) and ACHR (Article 1). In essence, the principle of non-discrimination provides that minorities and indigenous peoples have a right not to be discriminated against on the basis of, *inter alia*, race, nationality, ethnic or indigenous origin, religion or language. Unfortunately, it is often the case that minorities and indigenous peoples suffer disproportionately high numbers of violations of their housing, property and other rights as a result of institutionalized discrimination and societal prejudice. For example, as explained further below, the UN Human Rights Committee has found in a number of cases that illegal eviction, destruction of a family's belongings and termination of property rights violate both Articles 17 and 23 of





the ICCPR, as well as Article 2 of the ICCPR, which provides for non-discrimination.

According to established case law of the ECtHR, 'a difference of treatment is discriminatory if it has no objective and reasonable justification, that is, if it does not pursue a legitimate aim or if there is not a reasonable relationship of proportionality between the means employed and the aim sought to be realized'.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the ACHPR has held that 'A violation of the principle of non-discrimination arises if: a) equal cases are treated in a different manner; b) a difference in treatment does not have an objective and reasonable justification; and c) if there is no proportionality between the aim sought and the means employed'.<sup>25</sup>

In practice, when it comes to racial or ethnic discrimination (which is usually applicable to minorities and indigenous peoples), the burden of proof on the government in proving an objective and reasonable justification is especially high, since it has been classified to be a 'particularly invidious kind of discrimination'.<sup>26</sup> Direct and explicit racial discrimination by state authorities is considered among the most egregious types

of discrimination, the prohibition of which is widely accepted as customary international law and even *jus cogens* (i.e. a fundamental, binding principle from which no derogation by a state is permitted).<sup>27</sup> Therefore, a respondent government will bear a very heavy burden when seeking to establish an objective and reasonable justification for direct racial or ethnic discrimination against a community which, it is well-established, requires special protection.

### **Roma**

Roma<sup>28</sup> face an acute crisis in relation to extreme levels of social exclusion, of which forced evictions are only a symptom (albeit often reaching the severity of the demolition of their homes). Urbanization of the rural Roma population throughout Europe, as part of a wider assimilation as well as deliberate interventions on the part of local and national authorities, has caused untold problems. Previously accustomed to moving between settlements, Roma communities have been allocated municipal apartments and they have faced forced eviction from their homes, way of living and livelihoods. In other cases, where urbanization has resulted in



city development, Roma settlements have been destroyed and they have been settled in locations far away from any basic infrastructure, schools, health and social services.

All of this flies in the face of the protections afforded to Roma under international law. For example, UN CESCR General Comment No. 7 on the right to adequate housing imposes an obligation upon governments to ensure that, 'where evictions do occur, appropriate measures are taken to ensure that no form of discrimination is involved'.<sup>29</sup> The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights has stated that Articles E and 31 of the revised European Social Charter 1996<sup>30</sup> – which protect the right to non-discrimination and the right to housing – will be violated 'when the state, in evicting persons or destroying their property appears to single out an ethnic group for more severe treatment than persons generally'.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the Commissioner has stated 'Articles 8 and 14 of the ECHR will be violated when the state fails to provide adequate remedies for unlawful destruction of their homes (whether by private individuals or by agents of the state) to members of a particular ethnic group'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, when public authorities have explicitly treated an ethnic group such as Roma differently in relation to housing, it will be impossible to justify such discrimination unless it is based on positive measures. The ECtHR specifically found, in *Orsus v. Croatia*,<sup>33</sup> that 'as a result of their history, the Roma have become a specific type of disadvantaged group and vulnerable minority ... They therefore require special protection.' Specific case law concerning discrimination against Roma is set out below under the section on the right to privacy, home and family life.

### **The right to respect for private and family life, and home**

The right to respect for private and family life, and home, is protected in a number of international and regional human rights instruments. Specifically, Article 17 of the ICCPR provides '1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation; 2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the

law against such interference or attacks', while Article 23 (1) states 'The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.' The UN Human Rights Committee has found in a number of cases that illegal eviction, destruction of a family's belongings and termination of property rights violate Articles 17 and 23 of the ICCPR, in conjunction with Article 2 ICCPR, which provides for non-discrimination.<sup>34</sup>

Article 8 of the ECHR provides similar protection, and has frequently been relied on in conjunction with the right to non-discrimination, to protect the situation of the Roma. Article 8 states:

*'1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.  
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.'*

The ECtHR has specifically applied these principles in practice, finding a violation of Articles 8 and 14 in the case of *Moldovan and Others v. Romania*, where destruction of Roma property was motivated by the applicants' Roma origin:<sup>35</sup>

*'The applicants' Roma ethnicity appears to have been decisive for the length and the result of the domestic proceedings ... repeated discriminatory remarks made by the authorities ... determin[ed] the applicants' rights under Article 8, when rejecting claims for goods or furnishings, and their blank refusal ... to award non-pecuniary damages for the destruction of the family homes ... the decision to reduce the non-pecuniary damages was motivated by remarks related directly to the applicants' ethnic specificity.'*<sup>36</sup>

As the government had provided no justification for this difference in treatment, the Court found a violation of Articles 14 and 8, *inter alia*.

In *Yordanova v. Bulgaria*,<sup>37</sup> a case which

concerned a Roma community living in Sofia, Bulgaria, on land owned by the state, but who had been in residence in very basic conditions since the 1960s until the municipal authorities transferred the title to the land to a private investor in 2005, the ECtHR similarly found a violation of Article 8. In this case, the fact that the applicants were part of a community in which members have developed strong social links was a significant consideration in the Court's reasoning. The Court made it clear that such cases should not be treated the same way as routine removal cases, and that cases where a whole community and a long period are concerned should be treated differently.<sup>38</sup>

### The right to development

The right to development is a corollary of the right to self-determination.<sup>39</sup> The African Charter is the only human rights treaty which legally binds states parties to respect the right of peoples to development. Article 22 provides:

*'1. All peoples shall have the right to their economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity and in the equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind.  
2. States shall have the duty, individually or collectively, to ensure the exercise of the right to development.'*

However, the Charter, and by extension the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights and the ACHPR, draws inspiration for the right to development from the 1986 UN General Assembly Declaration on the Right to Development (DRD),<sup>40</sup> the work of the UN Independent Expert on Development, the UN Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development, alongside the UN High-Level Task Force on the Implementation of the Right to Development. Additionally the ongoing work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and, in particular, the annual *Human Development Reports* provide further interpretive material, as can the constitutions and case law of the numerous African countries that have incorporated the right to development into their municipal law.<sup>41</sup>

The ACHPR has found violations of Article

22 of the African Charter on four different occasions.<sup>42</sup> Of those, the most significant, and recent, is the *Endorois* decision,<sup>43</sup> in which the Commission held that Kenya had violated the Endorois' right to development in failing to adequately involve them in the development process on their ancestral lands, and in failing to ensure the continued improvement of the well-being of the community. The ACHPR, in reaching this decision, highlighted two important facets of the right to development: that it is 'both *constitutive* and *instrumental*, or useful as both a means and an end'.<sup>44</sup> There is, accordingly, both under the jurisprudence of the ACHPR and within the scheme envisaged by the DRD, (1) the right to participate in the development process; and (2) the right to a substantive improvement in well-being.

Article 2(1) of the DRD states the principle that '[t]he human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development'. Further, the right to development, under the DRD and the African Charter, is a right of *peoples*. This is clarified in the DRD when it is made clear that the right is an 'inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and *all peoples* are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development'.<sup>45</sup>

The scope of the right, then, is not restricted to indigenous peoples but is extended to 'all peoples'. Additionally, under international law, the DRD suggests that the right is owed to individuals ('every human person') as well as collective groups of people. Accordingly, under the African Charter, while in order to claim the benefit of this right it is sufficient that a group is a recognized indigenous community, it is by no means necessary.

Article 2(3) of the DRD notes that the right to development includes the 'active, free and meaningful participation in development'. Peoples shall experience 'constant improvement of the well being of the entire population and of all individuals'. Thus, as recognized in the *Endorois* decision, it has both procedural and substantive elements. Fulfilling only one of these two prongs will not satisfy the right to development; while violating either will

constitute a violation.

The state, acting at the national level, bears the primary duty for ensuring the realization of the right to development.<sup>46</sup> As the African Charter makes clear, the state must act individually or collectively.<sup>47</sup> Further, recognizing the right to development requires fulfilling five main criteria. Development must be equitable, non-discriminatory, participatory, accountable and transparent. Equity and choice are especially important, ‘over-arching theme[s]’ in the right to development.<sup>48</sup> The income or other benefits derived from development must be equally distributed.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the UN Task Force on the Implementation of the Right to Development stated that ‘development had to be grounded in sound economic policies that fostered growth with equity’.<sup>50</sup>

The previous UN Independent Expert on the right to development, Arjun Sengupta, has used the example of housing to illustrate the importance of choice and self-determination. Development is not simply the state providing housing for particular individuals or peoples; development is instead about providing peoples with the ability to choose where to live: ‘The state or any other authority cannot arbitrarily decide where an individual should live just because the supplies of such housing are made available’.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

International law, and regional and international jurisprudence, has played a key role in establishing standards which states must meet when considering urban development. Minorities and indigenous peoples must be appropriately consulted in matters which affect their property, their land, and their private, home and family life. More importantly, they must be treated equally within the development process: they must not suffer discrimination. Unfortunately, an examination of the situation of the Roma has shown that governments, and indeed societies, still have far to go where these norms are concerned. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 See further CESCR, General Comment No. 4, *The Right to Adequate Housing* (Sixth session, 1991) (E/1992/23), para. 8, and CESCR, General Comment No. 7, *Forced Evictions and the Right to Adequate Housing* (Sixteenth session, 1997) (E/1998/22).
- 2 See *The Social and Economic Action Rights Centre (SERAC) and the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) v. Nigeria* (2001) ACHPR 60 (ACHPR 2001) Communication 155/96 (also known as ‘the Ogoni case’).
- 3 See e.g. *Sporrong and Lönnroth v. Sweden*, Application No. 7151/75, 7152/75, judgment of 23 September 1982, para. 61.
- 4 *Beyeler v. Italy*, Application No. 33202/96, judgment of 5 January 2000.
- 5 *Saliba v. Malta*, Application No. 20287/10, judgment of 22 January 2013, para. 37.
- 6 *Beyeler v. Italy*, *supra* note 4, para. 111.
- 7 *Valkov v. Bulgaria*, Applications Nos. 2033/04, 19125/04, 19745/04, 19490/04, 19495/04, 19497/04, 24729/04, 171/05, and 2041/05, judgment of 25 October 2011.
- 8 *Centre for Minority Rights Development and Minority Rights Group International on behalf of Endorois Welfare Council v. Kenya* (‘Endorois’) Communication 276/2003, para. 211.
- 9 *Malawi African Association and Others v. Mauritania and Others v. Mauritania* (2000) ACHPR, Communications 54/91, 61/91, 98/93, 164/97–196/97 and 210/98, para. 128; see also *Endorois*, *supra* note 8, para. 187.
- 10 See *Social and Economic Action Rights Centre (SERAC) and the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) v. Nigeria*, *supra* note 2, para. 54; also see *Endorois*, *supra* note 8, para. 190.
- 11 *Huri-Laws v. Nigeria*, (2000) ACHPR, Communication 225/98, para. 52.
- 12 *Endorois*, *supra* note 8, para. 196.
- 13 IACtHR *The Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni Community v. Nicaragua*. Judgment of August 31, 2001. Series C No. 79, para. 148.
- 14 *Ibid.*, para. 151.
- 15 *Ibid.*, para. 149.
- 16 IACtHR, *Yakye Axa Indigenous Community v. Paraguay*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of June 17, 2005. Series C No. 125, para. 135.
- 17 IACtHR, *Moiwana Community v. Suriname*, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of June 15, 2005. Series C No. 124, para. 133.
- 18 CESCR, General Comment No. 7, *Forced Evictions and the Right to Adequate Housing*, *supra* note 1, paras 12–13.
- 19 CESCR, General Comment No. 21, *Right of Everyone to Take Part in Cultural Life*, para. 55(e); see also UN Human Rights Committee, *Angela Poma Poma v. Peru*, Communication 1457/2006, 27 March 2009, which links FPIC to ‘the admissibility of measures which substantially compromise or interfere with the culturally significant economic activities of a minority or indigenous community’.
- 20 *Endorois*, *supra* note 8, para. 218.
- 21 *Ibid.*, para. 219.
- 22 *Ibid.*, para. 255.
- 23 *Akdivar v. Turkey*, Application No. 21893/93, judgment of 16 September 1996, paras 85–88.
- 24 *Abdulaziz, Cabales and Balkandali v. United Kingdom*, Application Nos 9214/80, 9474/81, 28 May 1985, para. 72.
- 25 *Kenneth Good v. Republic of Botswana* (2010) ACHPR, Communication 313/05, para. 218.
- 26 *Chapman v. UK*, Application No. 27238/95, 18 January 2001, para.176 (citing *Nachova and Others v. Bulgaria* [Grand Chamber], Application No.s 43577/98, 43579/98, 6 July 2005, para. 145); *Timishev v. Russia*, para. 56;

- affirmed in *Sejdic & Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina*, para. 43.
- 27 See e.g. International Court of Justice Namibia Case 1971, para. 17; Dissenting Opinion of Judge Tanaka in the South West Africa Cases (Second Phase), ICJ Reports (1966), para. 298; Advisory Opinion 18/2003 of the IACtHR, declaring non-discrimination a principle of *jus cogens*, because the entire legal structure of public order rests on it; McCrudden, C., 'International and European norms regarding national legal remedies for racial inequality', in S. Fredman (ed.), *Discrimination and Human Rights: The Case of Racism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.
- 28 Roma are, of course, not the only minority group to suffer in this way: many other minorities and indigenous communities (for example, the Dalits) have also experienced similar treatment at the hands of their governments and their fellow citizens. However, unlike Dalits, Roma have been able to challenge this treatment before regional bodies – including the ECtHR – providing some interesting jurisprudence for consideration in this chapter. For that reason, and for that reason alone, jurisprudence involving Roma has been selected for inclusion.
- 29 *Supra*, note 1, para. 10.
- 30 Article E states:  
*'The enjoyment of the rights set forth in this Charter shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national extraction or social origin, health, association with a national minority, birth or other status.'*
- Article 31 provides:  
*'With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to take measures designed: 1) to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; 2) to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; and 3) to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.'*
- 31 Recommendation of the Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of the right to housing, Strasbourg, 30 June 2009, CommDH (2009) 5, para. 4.2.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Orsus and Others v. Croatia*, Application No. 15799/03, 16 March 2010, para. 147.
- 34 See, for example, *Vojnovic v. Croatia*, UN Human Rights Committee, Communication 1510/2006, 30 March 2009.
- 35 Application No.s 41138/98 and 64320/01; 12 July 2005.
- 36 *Ibid.*, paras 139–40.
- 37 Application No. 25466/06; 24 April 2012.
- 38 *Ibid.*, para. 121.
- 39 Article 22(2) of the African Charter.
- 40 Annex to the UN General Assembly Resolution 41/128 (4 December 1986) (A/RES/41/128). Later reaffirmed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993 (A/CONF.157/23), para. 10: *'The World Conference on Human Rights reaffirms the right to development, as established in the Declaration on the Right to Development, as a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights. As stated in the Declaration on the Right to Development, the human person is the central subject of development.'*
- 41 Both Ghana and Uganda have included the concept as a principle of national policy. The Constitutions of Benin, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi and Senegal also contain a justiciable right to development.
- 42 The *Endorois* decision, *supra* note 8; *Sudan Human Rights Organization & Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) v. Sudan* (2009) ACHPR Communications 279/03–296/05; *Kevin Mgwanga Gunme et al. v. Cameroon*, Communication 266/03; *Democratic Republic of Congo v. Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda* (2003), ACHPR Communication 227/99.
- 43 *Endorois*, *supra* note 8.
- 44 *Ibid.*, para. 277.
- 45 Article 1(1) of the DRD (emphasis added).
- 46 See Article 3 of the DRD.
- 47 See Article 22(2) of the ACHPR.
- 48 *Endorois*, *supra* note 8, para. 277.
- 49 Sengupta, A., *Development Cooperation and the Right to Development*, Boston, MA, François-Xavier Bagnoud Center Working Paper No. 12 (2003).
- 50 *Review of the Progress in the Promotion and Impact of the Right to Development: Considerations of the Report of the High Level Task Force on the Impact of the Right to Development* (2001), Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2005/WG.18/2), para. 10.
- 51 Sengupta, *supra* note 49 at p. 8.



MOROCCO

TUNISIA

ALGERIA

LIBYA

EGYPT

Western Sahara

MAURITANIA

MALI

NIGER

ERITREA

SENEGAL

THE GAMBIA

GUINEA-BISSAU

GUINEA

BURKINA FASO

CHAD

SUDAN

DJIBOUTI

SIERRA LEONE

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

GHANA

TOGO

BENIN

NIGERIA

CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.

SOUTH SUDAN

ETHIOPIA

LIBERIA

CAMEROON

SÃO TOME AND PRINCÍPE

EQUAT. GUINEA

GABON

REP. OF THE CONGO

DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO

UGANDA

KENYA

SOMALIA

RWANDA

BURUNDI

INDIAN OCEAN

ATLANTIC OCEAN

ANGOLA

ZAMBIA

MALAWI

TANZANIA

MADAGASCAR

NAMIBIA

BOTSWANA

ZIMBABWE

MOZAMBIQUE

SWAZILAND

LESOTHO

SOUTH AFRICA

# Africa

Inga Thiemann, Paige Wilhite Jennings  
and Laura A. Young



# East Africa and the Horn

Laura A. Young

Conflict over land and natural resources continued to dominate the landscape for minorities and indigenous peoples in East Africa during 2014. Major issues included large-scale protests in Ethiopia related to the expansion of Addis Ababa, the hearing of the first indigenous rights case at the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights on Ogiek land rights in Kenya, and continuing disputes over the rights of communities across the region to benefit from the exploitation of natural resources in their territories. The failure of East African governments to effectively implement legal and policy frameworks that could substantially enhance the situation of minority and indigenous peoples remains a significant challenge throughout the region. For instance, the Kenyan government's inability to date to pass required legislation on community land and evictions or to operationalize the Constitution's provisions on affirmative action in relation to minority communities reflects the slow rate of progress on these types of issues.

Urbanization in East Africa is a critical issue; it is one of the fastest urbanizing regions in the world, with a projected urban growth of 5.35 per cent between 2010 and 2020. Between 1960 and 2010, the population living in cities increased from 6 million to more than 77 million. This rapid change in East Africa's landscape is having important impacts on economics, climate, health, conflict, culture and gender roles, as well as almost every other aspect of daily life in the region. It is also having significant impacts on minorities and indigenous peoples.

**Right:** An Anuak woman works on her family's banana plantation in the village of Karmi, in Ethiopia's Gambella Province. The Anuak community were relocated to the site as part of the Government 'villagization' program. *Panos/Robin Hammond*

Conflict and climate change have for many years had a disproportionate impact on minorities and indigenous peoples in East Africa. As these issues continue to cause population displacements in the region, minorities and indigenous peoples find themselves forced to migrate to urban areas for survival. These types of population displacements often create vulnerable female-headed households in urban and peri-urban areas. East African indigenous peoples, who consist mainly of pastoralists and hunter-gatherer groups, can find the transition to urban life particularly challenging. Forced into environments where their traditional livelihoods are unavailable, they adopt a multitude of coping strategies. As described in a study by UN-Habitat, some of these strategies 'include the commoditization of certain aspects of their culture such as performing traditional dances for the entertainment of tourists, selling traditional handcraft, herbs and medicinal plants... Women engage in beadwork and in making and selling handicrafts as well as in selling medicinal herbs.' Despite these coping strategies, poverty and inequality remain defining characteristics of East Africa's urban areas, whether in large capital cities or in smaller urban areas. When this pattern of inequality intersects with the consistent marginalization of minority and indigenous communities, one finds minority groups in urban areas at the extreme end of the inequality scale.

## Ethiopia

Minority and indigenous communities in Ethiopia include Afar, and indigenous Anuak, Oromo, Somalis and many other ethnic groups. Muslims also are a significant religious minority in the predominantly Coptic Christian nation. Despite a federalist constitutional structure that provides important autonomy and cultural rights for Ethiopia's diverse communities, many of Ethiopia's minorities and indigenous peoples continue to be marginalized. Repeated reports



of human rights violations as a result of the Ethiopian government's development strategy in the Lower Omo Valley and the Gambella led the US Congress to take action through its 2014 Appropriations Act. The legislation specifies that funds for development cannot be used to support activities that directly or indirectly involve forced evictions, and that the use of funds shall be subject to a process of prior consultation with affected communities. While this was a significant victory for communities in the Lower Omo Valley and the Gambella, the impact of these provisions on the government's policies remains to be seen.

The creation of large-scale agricultural plantations in the Gambella region continued in 2014. Indigenous communities in Ethiopia's Gambella region have been in conflict with the government over plans to convert thousands of hectares into large-scale agricultural plantations. Anuak communities took action through the World Bank's Inspection Panel to protect their rights to land and culture in the face of large-scale land dispossession. Controversies over the development of the Gibe III dam also continued during the year. The dam threatens to damage the local environment and livelihoods

of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people who have lived in the Lower Omo region for centuries. Despite significant concerns about the social and environmental impact of the dam, particularly on pastoralist communities, the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation reported at the end of the year that the project was 89 per cent complete.

Reports indicate that Majengir hunter-gatherers have also been the victims of land loss and increasing violence in relation to plans for large-scale coffee production, including the detention of Majengir leaders in 2014. Evidence from satellite imagery indicates that development projects in the Lower Omo Valley have significantly reduced grazing lands for the multiple pastoralist communities who live in the region. These changes in land use patterns have led to increased conflict in the region. For example, indigenous Suri pastoralists have come into conflict with neighbouring communities and with the government as a result of being accused of trespassing on traditional grazing lands that were converted into a palm oil plantation. The Ethiopian government has initiated a process of small-scale urbanization, known as *sefara*, to induce or coerce the non-sedentary Suri into

giving up their traditional pastoralist lifestyle and settling in small towns.

Similarly, the government's controversial use of 'villagization' has continued for a number of years and involved the planned relocation of the majority of Gambella region's rural residents to officially designated settlements. The process has been widely criticized by human rights groups, who have reported evictions, violence, intimidation and sexual assault by police and military enforcing the policy. Though justified by authorities as a means to provide communities located in underpopulated areas with better access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, the relocation sites have in practice often proved inhospitable, with much of the promised development and infrastructure failing to materialize. In some instances, according to previous research by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Anuak families have been forcibly relocated from urban areas to government villages with limited services or infrastructure, undermining access to essential services such as education. The organization expressed concern that the underlying motive in these cases was to release valuable land for private investment.

Ethiopia, though largely rural, is urbanizing rapidly. Addis Ababa – the capital and home to the offices of the African Union – is projected to grow by more than 60 per cent between 2010 and 2025. The city reportedly has the highest slum incidence in the world, with poor access to basic services even for those living outside the slums. This is placing increasing pressure on the surrounding Oromia region, particularly with the proposed implementation of the government's Addis Adaba Integrated Development Master Plan. The plan to expand Addis Ababa would bring multiple towns in the surrounding Oromia region under its jurisdiction.

However, the Ethiopian Oromo community, the largest ethnic group in the country, has long been in conflict with the central government. The conflict has deep historical roots in the displacement of Oromos from their traditional territory, which is now home to Addis Ababa, and in Ethiopia's constitutionally established federal structure. Currently, towns in the Oromo region fall under the administration of the Oromo regional authority, and the

Oromo language is officially used for education, business and public service. Should the towns be absorbed into Addis Ababa, they would fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government and, among other changes, the official language would change to Amharic. The announcement of the central government's plans to expand the boundaries of Addis Ababa provoked protests by Oromo students during the year. As with past protests by other Ethiopian minority groups, the government reportedly used excessive force, including beatings of protesters, arbitrary arrests and detentions which led to the deaths of dozens of students.

## Kenya

Land rights continued to be a major issue for minority and indigenous communities in Kenya during 2014. In January, thousands of Sengwer were forcibly removed from Embobut forest, in the western part of the country, and their houses torched by armed members of the Kenyan Forest Service. This was in direct violation of a 2013 High Court injunction prohibiting evictions of the community. The government justified its actions against members of the indigenous community, who have been labelled as 'squatters' despite their long-standing ancestral claims, as a necessary measure to protect local water supplies and biodiversity. The territory lies within the World Bank-funded National Resource Management Project (NRMP), a multi-year programme designed to strengthen environmental conservation in the Cherangany Hills. However, the NRMP has been accused of failing to address indigenous land rights issues, as well as moving the boundaries of the Cherangany forest reserves so that Sengwer homes were relocated without consultation. Following a complaint by the Sengwer community in 2013, the World Bank's Inspection Panel launched an investigation and concluded, in a report leaked to the media, that the NRMP had failed to follow basic safeguards and had neglected to involve the indigenous community. Nevertheless, the World Bank concluded that despite these issues the NRMP was not linked to the evictions. The displacement of Sengwer continued into early 2015, with ongoing evictions and house burning by Kenyan Forest Service guards.

**Right:** An elder Endorois woman in a small town in Kenya's Rift Valley. The Endorois are fighting to achieve implementation of the 2010 African Commission decision granting them rights to Lake Bogoria. *Minority Rights Group/Rebecca Marlin*

The ongoing land rights case brought by the Ogiek hunter-gatherer community was heard before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in November 2014. The case was referred to the Court in 2012 by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. MRG has represented the Ogiek community in their litigation at the regional level since the case began with a Communication at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2009. The Ogiek are trying to achieve a permanent resolution to their decades-long struggle for recognition of their rights to inhabit their traditional territory in the Mau forest. A judgment in the case is expected in 2015.

The Endorois community continued to advocate for implementation of a 2010 decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights that ruled that the government must reconstitute their ancestral land, compensate them for the eviction and loss of access to their land, and pay royalties for developments which occurred on it. The government in 2014 established a Task Force to undertake implementation of the decision. The Task Force will be addressing restitution of the land to the Endorois, compensation for losses resulting from their eviction and benefit-sharing of royalties derived from lucrative bioenzymes and rubies found on the land. The Task Force's mandate provides that it may 'solicit, receive and consider views from members of the public and other interest groups', but it does not require consultation with the Endorois community, nor is there any Endorois representative on the Task Force.

The multi-country Lamu Port, South Sudan, Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor continued to move ahead in 2014. The massive project is designed to bring investment, infrastructure and in some cases the creation of entire new cities along a corridor in northern Kenya that has historically been ignored from a development perspective. It has already led



to increased land speculation along the entire corridor, which stretches through territories that have been inhabited by pastoralists and hunter-gatherer communities for centuries. The port component of the project is being built in Lamu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to indigenous hunter-gatherer communities, fishing communities and several pastoralist groups. The first stages of construction began in 2014 amid substantial concerns over the environmental, health, and livelihood impacts of the massive changes, although the project continues to be challenged by litigation from multiple parties.

Though around three-quarters of the country's population still reside in rural areas, Kenya is one of the fastest urbanizing countries in the world. Nairobi, the capital, is projected to grow by almost 80 per cent between 2010 and 2025. It currently hosts more than 200 informal settlements, also known as urban slums, where living conditions are among the worst in Africa



because population densities reach up to 26,000 people per square kilometre. High population density, poverty and lack of services have combined with a volatile political environment where neighbourhoods are strongly politicized along tribal lines. Certain Kenyan minority communities, including Asians, Nubians and Somalis, have significant urban populations and are particularly affected by this trend of rapid and largely unmanaged growth. Maasai indigenous to the area, in particular, have suffered displacement from their land over the last century as Nairobi has steadily expanded. Farmers and developers have seized large swathes of their grazing lands, leading to the erosion of traditional livelihoods as pastoralism has become increasingly untenable.

Part of the conflict over land in many of Kenya's informal settlements, as well as in rural areas inhabited by Kenya's indigenous communities, is the lack of an effective legislative regime controlling land tenure and the manner in which evictions are to be carried out when people occupy land informally. The Community Land Bill and the Evictions and Resettlement Bill were introduced in parliament in 2014, but remain stalled because of their controversial nature and lack of effective public participation. Forced evictions and the proliferation of informal settlements remain significant issues in Kenya's other major cities, such as Mombasa and Kisumu. Kenya's indigenous coastal communities, broadly known as the Mijikenda, often can only access land as squatters or through the informal market as tenants because of the historical and legal complexities of land titling at the coast, as well as continual land grabbing. This situation leads to ongoing evictions as land values along Kenya's Indian Ocean coast continue to increase.

In Nairobi, one of the most well-known informal settlements is Kibera. Though historically it was Maasai grazing land, the area was ceded to the British colonial government in the 1904 Maasai Agreements and later designated as a settlement for the Nubian community, who are descendants of Sudanese members of the King's African Rifles who served in Uganda and Kenya. Previously an agricultural and residential settlement for the Nubians, Kibera has been reduced to one of the world's most

notorious slums through successive invasions and land grabbing. After Kenya's independence, the Nubian community also effectively became stateless because the government refused to recognize them as citizens, although most had been born in Kenya and any ties with Sudan had been severed decades earlier. After decades of struggle to receive recognition of their claim to Kenyan citizenship as well as title to their land in Kibera, conflict over land titles erupted again in 2014. The Nubians claim that the land allotted to them in Kibera during colonial rule was originally more than 4,000 acres. A proposal by the current government to issue titles to the Nubian community led to riots and the title handover was cancelled at the last minute.

Another area with a large minority population is Eastleigh, where a large proportion of Nairobi's Somali population resides. The district has repeatedly been a target in the wake of security incidents associated with the militant group al-Shabaab, including two attacks in Mombasa and Nairobi in March 2014. Following these incidents, the Kenyan government initiated 'Operation Usalama Watch', which led to the round-up and detention of more than 4,000 Somalis in a stadium on the outskirts of Nairobi. Reports of extortion, inhumane detention conditions, sexual assaults, arbitrary arrest, as well as the summary deportation of Somalis found without identity papers, were widespread during the operation.

As with previous security crackdowns, the focus was concentrated primarily in Eastleigh, with the interior minister announcing on 5 April 2014 that 6,000 police were to be deployed in the area to round up foreign nationals. Even before the second attack took place in a busy area of Eastleigh on 31 March, killing six people, the government had already announced plans to relocate urban refugees to camps outside Nairobi, such as Dabaab. This encampment policy has been promoted by the government for a number of years, particularly in the wake of violent incidents, despite a 2013 court ruling that condemned it as illegal. Previous anti-terror operations, such as the 2011 security crackdown, have specifically targeted Eastleigh and its Somali residents. Buildings in the area, particularly those near the airport, have been demolished as

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**Case study** by *Rebecca Marlin*  
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# Urban migration and the loss of traditional culture among Endorois youth in Kenya

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Indigenous Endorois had inhabited Lake Bogoria for centuries when, in the 1970s, the Kenyan government forcibly removed them from their ancestral land. Their eviction brought to an end a unique way of life rich with culture and tradition, and they have been advocating for the rightful return of their land ever since. Despite a 2010 ruling by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in their favour, secured with MRG's support, the government has yet to comply.

In October 2014, MRG spent three weeks visiting the areas near Lake Bogoria where the community is now based, and interviewed nearly 500 Endorois about their lives. Many Endorois described how, while living at Lake Bogoria, they engaged in a variety of cultural and religious activities, such as worshipping at the graves of their ancestors, collecting herbs for medicinal purposes and practising initiation ceremonies. As pastoralists, they followed the natural grazing patterns of their livestock, and maintained beehives to collect honey.

In the 40 years since their displacement, however, the Endorois have been struggling to maintain their traditions, while living in marginal areas with extremely limited access to health care, basic infrastructure and education. As a result, younger generations have made efforts to better their lives by heading to cities such as Eldoret, Nakuru and Nairobi. Their reasons for moving are varied: some are in search of higher education, others are looking for employment, while many are also seeking

to escape frequent outbreaks of violence as a result of cattle-rustling carried out by neighbouring communities.

Some Endorois youth, frustrated by their marginalized status, also leave in the hope of securing greater recognition within Kenyan society. One Endorois attending law school in Nairobi discussed the numerous challenges facing young Endorois, such as ongoing government repression, exclusion from local job recruitment, leadership problems and their continued stigmatization. He explained that these factors 'have caused the youth to move away from Endorois land in order to disassociate from the community and be given greater consideration by Kenyan leaders'.

Migration to urban areas has produced benefits and challenges for Endorois families. On the positive side, it has given young Endorois access to higher education and frequently the skills they gain may be used to improve the lives of their community as well. Endorois who find employment in cities are also able to send some of their wages home to their families, where they are desperately needed.

At the same time, Endorois who move to larger cities report that they face discrimination based on their minority status and often are only able to find employment in non-permanent or contract-based jobs, usually in private security or domestic work. Endorois employed in this way are rarely given time off by their employers to visit their families, who often can only be reached after a long journey through remote and potentially dangerous areas. The result is that many young Endorois end up not returning home for extended periods, and find themselves increasingly out of touch with day-to-day life within the Endorois community.

Endorois tradition is passed down from elders to youth, with frequent interaction between the two groups. With more and more from the younger generation leaving their rural communities, however, this chain has been broken. Almost all Endorois



surveyed, both elders and youth, reported that they felt the younger generation were losing their culture. One Endorois woman remarked that it was sad to see so many Endorois leaving at a young age for cities, because 'this is the time when the younger generation is expected to learn how ceremonies are conducted. Generations to come will lose the unique Endorois culture and livelihood as they are continuously exposed to urban culture.' Endorois also find that it is frequently those who might become Endorois leaders who are most likely to leave. 'The community is affected when the youth move out, leaving them without energetic and visionary people,' said one Endorois man. 'Those with ideas do not share them with the community and the community is left behind.'

Endorois are therefore struggling to develop a way to maintain their traditions in the face of the strong draw of the cities, but many feel defeated. A majority of those surveyed believed that the only way to ensure Endorois youth remained in the community was to regain access to their territory at Lake Bogoria, where they could fully reinstate their traditions and offer a more attractive future to the next generation. Despite the government's obligation to restore their land, return remains a distant reality for Kenya's Endorois, who must now struggle with the loss not only of their culture, livelihoods and traditions, but their youth as well. ■

**Right:** Makeshift houses of Gaboye families in a village in Hargeisa, Somali. The Gaboye minority are among the most vulnerable in Somalia.

*Somaliska Fred/Andreas Ragnarsson*

potential security threats.

Kenya also has a significant Asian minority, primarily Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims of Indian origin, who are largely based in the country's major urban centres. Though they have long played an important role in the country's economy, the perceived wealth of the community has also been a source of resentment among other groups. These tensions were brought into focus during the year in Kisumu, Kenya's third largest city, when the minority Sikh community erected a statue to celebrate 100 years of settlement in the city. However, angry responses from some prominent local Christian preachers led to violence, hate speech and the vandalization of the statue. Ultimately, the Sikh community decided to remove the statue after attempts to negotiate on the matter failed to resolve the conflict, though restoration work was subsequently undertaken on the statue. The next month, the Sikh community was nevertheless able to celebrate its centenary without serious incident, with local leaders celebrating its contribution to the city's history.

## Somalia

Despite continuing international intervention and the presence of more than 20,000 African Union troops in Somalia, political instability increased in 2014 and attacks by the militant group al-Shabaab continued inside Somalia and throughout the East Africa region. Attacks late in 2014 along the Somali-Kenyan border and on the African Union's main military base in Mogadishu highlighted the continuing and significant threat from al-Shabaab. With increasing instability inside Somalia, minority groups such as Bantu and Banadiri continue to face vulnerability and exclusion. Other vulnerable groups include occupational minorities or clans that are associated with specific trades, such as Gaboye, Tumal and Yibrow, who work as blacksmiths, carpenters, tanners, barbers and in other trades.

The importance of the clan governance system



in the different regions of Somalia is reflected in lower levels of political representation. In South-Central Somalia, for example, though minorities are estimated to make up anything between a fifth and a third of the total Somali population, the parliament's 4.5 power-sharing formula provides equal political representation to the four major clans while leaving only a half share for the rest of the Somali population. However, the limited reach of central authorities in many areas enhances the importance of clan-based security structures and governance through *xeer*, the complex system of traditional customary law from which many minority groups are sidelined. This exclusion from the dominant clan structure, or membership in a weaker clan, leaves minority groups more vulnerable to property-grabbing, physical attacks, killings and general discrimination. Research by MRG during 2014 in Somalia found that clan-based hierarchies continued to enable widespread sexual violence and other rights abuses against minorities, particularly women.

In Mogadishu, for example, urbanization patterns have become dominated by clans,

ensuring that residence in specific neighbourhoods is controlled by clan affiliation. Urban areas, especially in conflict-affected countries such as Somalia, often present very high risks for women, especially women who may be outside the protection regime of a dominant clan. The clan networks dominating residential patterns in Mogadishu also extend to the displaced people's settlements around the city. Accordingly, those who fall outside the clan structures, specifically minority groups, often cannot access basic services provided for displaced people in the camps, such as water, food and health care.

Clan politics in urban areas can be especially intense as dominant groups monopolize local political structures. In Mogadishu, for instance, municipal government positions are occupied almost exclusively by Hawiye. The common perception among clan members that Mogadishu and surrounding areas, as territory traditionally inhabited by Hawiye, belong solely to their clan has left them reluctant to share land and other resources with other communities, despite the fact that, as the capital, it now accommodates a wide variety of groups.

## Minorities on the margins of Mogadishu

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Mogadishu, one of the oldest cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, has undergone tremendous population growth over the last century. This has been accompanied by the development of informal settlements, or *obbosibo*, which have sprung up across the city with little or no planning. As far back as the 1960s, donor-financed and government-led initiatives attempted to address the issue through the construction of affordable housing. These efforts were ultimately unable to keep up with the influx of migrants to the city, however, and today many of its inhabitants live in congested conditions without access to basic housing materials or public services. Despite its troubles, Mogadishu continues to attract large numbers of new arrivals, with an annual population increase of almost 9 per cent.

Though no precise figures are available, evidence suggests that minority groups make up a disproportionate part of the population of the overcrowded and unhygienic *obbosibo* that run through the city. More often than not, minority populations have ended up in Mogadishu after being displaced by conflict, hunger or land grabbing elsewhere, usually southern Somalia. Yet their lives in the capital's informal settlements continue to be plagued by insecurity, sexual violence and discrimination, making it almost impossible for them to make ends meet. Furthermore, the forcible appropriation of their land by members of dominant clans makes returning home an unfeasible option.

Minority women and youth living in *obbosibo* are particularly vulnerable as many lack connections and extended family support. As a result, they often find themselves

excluded from livelihood opportunities by majority groups. Women tend to work in informal sectors such as domestic work, where they are frequently subjected to gender-based violence or denied payment. In these harsh conditions one of the coping strategies employed by minority households is child labour, with the youngest family members sent out at an early age to earn money as herders, shoe shiners or street vendors.

With limited employment opportunities, many families living in informal settlements rely on hand-outs from international and local donors. Yet, in line with other forms of discrimination perpetrated against minorities, humanitarian aid is systematically diverted from those who need it most. The informal settlements are often run by powerbrokers who administer the camps; these so called 'gatekeepers', comprising local land-owners, government officials and businessmen, are drawn exclusively from majority clans. Together they monopolize control over those migrating to the city, requisitioning public and private property to house displaced communities – often minorities – in return for monetary or other forms of payment. In this context, the mismanagement of humanitarian assistance continues to fuel the power of gatekeepers in the overcrowded and unprotected settlements.

Today, Mogadishu continues to grapple with the issue of *obbosibo*. But instead of constructing alternative affordable housing or attempting to tackle the unsafe living conditions in settlements, the government has embarked on a campaign of forcible evictions. Between January and December 2014, over 32,500 individuals were forcibly evicted from public and private land and buildings in Mogadishu. While no disaggregated statistics are available to identify the proportion of minority groups among the victims, the vast majority (over 90 per cent) of evictees were IDPs, who heavily originate from minority groups. Other IDPs remain at imminent risk of

forced evictions. Most recently, in March 2015, Somali state security forces forcibly evicted an estimated 21,000 IDPs from informal camps in the Kahda district of Mogadishu, with security forces destroying shelters and beating those resisting orders to vacate. No adequate notification, compensation or resettlement option is provided to the communities displaced.

These evictions reflect a broader context where decisions over land, housing and other issues are routinely made by dominant groups – in this case, Mogadishu’s majority-dominated local authorities – without any form of consultation with those communities, usually minorities, most affected. Despite Mogadishu’s rich and diverse population, power continues to be narrowly concentrated with majority clan members. This has serious implications for the city’s future. Without a concerted effort to recognize and integrate them, its marginalized minority population will remain homeless, hungry and exposed, moving from one informal settlement to the next – a situation that will not only further entrench their secondary status in Somalia, but also perpetuate the sad legacy of Mogadishu’s *abbosibo* for generations to come. ■

## South Sudan

The conflict in South Sudan continued throughout 2014, despite repeated attempts at brokering a lasting peace agreement between the warring factions. The conflict has subsumed and exacerbated ongoing conflicts between ethnic minorities and the national government and army, primarily controlled by the largely Nuer and Dinka ethnic leaders. This has been particularly the case in Jonglei State, where conflict has been a consistent feature of life over the past several decades. By the end of the year, the UN reported that tens of thousands had been killed and 1.9 million people displaced by the conflict.

Jonglei is home to multiple ethnic communities and sub-groups, including Anuak, Dinka, Jiye, Kachipo, Murle and Nuer groups. Bor town, an urban centre and the capital of Jonglei State, is particularly multi-ethnic, including foreign nationals who live in the town to conduct business. Bor was hard-hit during the early days of the fighting. The UN Mission in South Sudan reported that South Sudanese minorities such as Anuak, Murle and Shilluk, as well as foreigners from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, appeared to be specifically targeted. By the end of 2014, various parts of Jonglei State were still being contested by government forces, opposition forces and an ethnic militia. An August 2014 report noted that Jonglei State had the highest number of displaced people and the highest food insecurity rate in South Sudan. There is substantial concern that as the rainy season comes to an end in 2015, extensive fighting will erupt again.

The national conflict between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar has exacerbated long-standing tensions between communities over land rights, lack of community-centred development and violent rivalries that have developed over centuries. Research conducted by MRG in 2014 highlighted the underlying grievances among minority communities in Jonglei, including lack of access to water, conflicts over dry-season grazing areas, violent cattle raids and the manipulation of vulnerable populations by local politicians. The national conflict has worsened these underlying problems, given that many

development projects have been halted and public assets such as schools, medical facilities and water access points have been attacked or destroyed. Though the South Sudan peace process continued throughout 2014, it has largely focused on the national-level conflict between Kiir and Machar to the exclusion of many of the other fighting groups that have become part and parcel of the conflict. Concerns have been raised that this strategy cannot lead to lasting peace and will not address many of the concerns of minority communities in the country.

Urban growth in South Sudan has in recent years been accelerated by large-scale displacement. In Yei, for example, previous research has highlighted how increasing pressure on land and the return of the town's Kakwa inhabitants around the time of the country's independence in 2011 exacerbated tensions with the largely Dinka displaced. More recently, however, major urban centres have been devastated and depopulated by renewed conflict. In Bor, for example, after the town was occupied by opposition forces with support from thousands of Nuer militias in December 2013, the largely Dinka residents were targeted and forced to flee. The UN estimated that in Bor town alone 5–10 per cent of housing, as well as the central market, had been destroyed during the early fighting. After changing hands a number of times, the town was recaptured by government forces in January 2014. There were subsequent reports of repeated attacks on displaced Nuer based in the UN-managed camp near Bor by government soldiers. While some of the country's large displaced population has been able to return to their home towns, many remain in a limbo.

Despite the conflict, plans for a new national capital of South Sudan remain on the table. This has come in part because of objections by the Bari community who are the traditional inhabitants of Juba, the current capital. Bari have for several years expressed concerns about Juba's rapid expansion and the resultant land grabbing and absorption of Bari villages. The population of Juba has doubled since the end of the war for independence in 2005. Bari community leaders have petitioned the government to speed up the relocation of the capital to a new site, noting that they agreed to Juba becoming the seat of the

**Right:** A Batwa girl stands overlooking the forest area where her community lived before being evicted, Kisoro, Uganda, 2014. *Emma Eastwood/ Minority Rights Goup*

government as an interim measure and that their constitutionally protected community land rights are under threat.

## Uganda

Conflict over land and natural resources remained a defining feature of life in Uganda for minorities and indigenous peoples in 2014. In July, the Rwenzori region of Western Uganda erupted into conflict, affecting multiple communities in Kasese, Bundibugyo and Ntoroko districts. These areas are home to, among others, the pastoralist Basongora, and in recent years have witnessed renewed violence. These outbreaks have reignited long-standing conflicts over political power and land rights between pastoralists and agricultural communities in the region. The region is also experiencing rapid population growth which is contributing to the scarcity of available land and natural resources for the diverse communities that inhabit the area. Advocacy groups, including MRG, urged the Ugandan government to address the long-standing root causes of conflict in the region.

Batwa communities in Uganda continued to experience violations of their rights in 2014. According to reports from the United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU), Batwa houses were burned to the ground in Kisoro in June 2014. The incident, which led to the destruction of 13 homes and to many Batwa fleeing their residences, was an outbreak of a long-standing conflict between Batwa and a neighbouring community. On a positive note however, in Kabaale, members of the Batwa community were able to purchase land for settlement through the assistance of UOBDU. Land will be held by the Batwa as a community and will support enhanced development for the community in the area.

Free, prior and informed consent in relation to mining in the Karamoja region continues to be a concern. MRG reported on this issue in 2011, highlighting the environmental concerns and human rights violations against local populations





associated with mineral exploration in the area. A 2014 HRW report again documented the issue, making clear that little progress has been made in relation to the rights of communities in the region. Indeed, in recent years, the extractive industry in Uganda has undergone significant growth, without attendant monitoring and regulation to ensure that the interests of communities are protected. This has exacerbated the difficulties experienced by the agro-pastoralist Karamajong people living in the region, including climate change, land rights issues and violent disarmament operations by government forces.

The poverty and lack of opportunities in the region has pushed some Karamajong to migrate to urban areas such as Kampala, where they typically face exploitation, discrimination and periodic round-ups by security forces. Many end up begging for their survival, particularly Karamajong women and children, who are especially vulnerable to exploitation. There is also evidence in recent years that issues such as alcohol abuse have become more common among urban Karamajong migrants. Other urban minority groups, such as Uganda's

Nubian population, reside in poorly serviced and unsanitary slums. Acholi Quarter in Kampala, for example, is largely populated by formerly rural Acholi from Northern Uganda, uprooted by years of conflict and now caught in a situation of prolonged displacement. Though some sense of a community and identity has persisted among residents, the area is characterized by sub-standard housing, poor environmental health and limited livelihood opportunities.

During the past several years, Uganda has embarked on an extensive process of policy development around land, housing and urban development, with a draft National Land Policy now approved but not yet officially gazetted as of the end of 2014. The policy acknowledges the role that conflict, instability and rural poverty have played in driving urban migration, as well as the prevalence of slum dwellings in urban areas. It also recognizes the particular vulnerability of marginalized groups such as women, children and IDPs, committing the government to 'ensure that both women and men, including children, enjoy equal rights and opportunities with regard to access to affordable urban services without discrimination' and to 'put in place



measures to address the issues of internally displaced persons.’ Despite these commitments, the description of such strategies and measures is vague and contains no detail in relation to key populations such as minorities or indigenous peoples. As policy development moves forward, the reality of such commitments will be seen in implementation.

# West and Central Africa

Paige Wilhite Jennings

The year 2014 saw increasing sectarian conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria, with cross-border attacks spreading strife into neighbouring countries. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mali, some progress towards peace at the start of the year was followed by ongoing violence in certain areas, causing continued insecurity and displacement. West Africa, particularly Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, faced a devastating outbreak of the Ebola virus which decimated health services and brought travel, trade, agriculture and other production to a near halt.

While many of the countries in West and Central Africa remain largely rural, both regions are urbanizing rapidly and struggling to keep pace with this growth: the overwhelming majority of West Africa’s urban population, for instance, is believed to be living in slums. Migration from particular rural areas often over time encourages other community members to relocate, particularly as remittances can raise hopes of increased wages in cities. In some circumstances this can contribute to the creation of ethnically based migrant neighbourhoods within urban centres. In responding to these ‘pull’ factors, however, migrants can encounter discrimination and resentment from the established or dominant population, particularly

**Right:** ‘The forest used to be for the Ba’aka but not anymore. We would walk in the forest according to the seasons but now we’re afraid.’ say the Ba’aka of Cameroon. *Survival International*

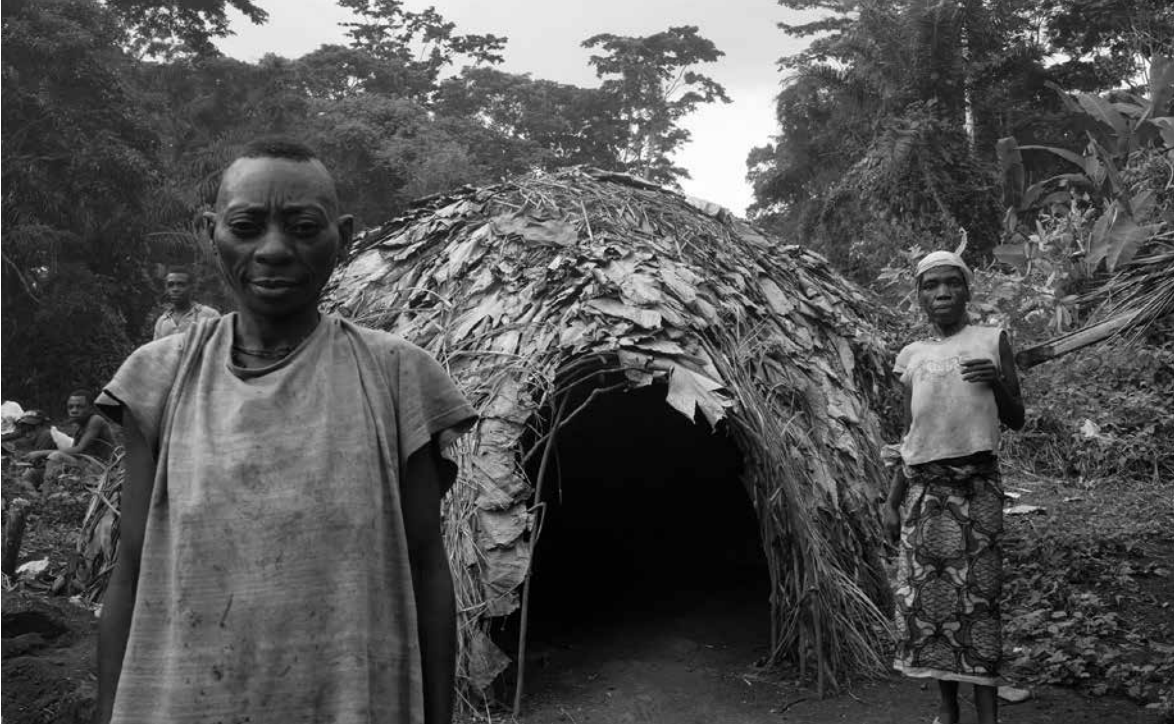
in countries with pre-existing tensions between ‘indigenous’ and ‘settler’ populations. In some situations, competition for scarce resources or resentment of the success of certain migrant communities can exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions.

West Africa’s urban centres are concentrated along its low-lying coastline and are vulnerable to the impact of climate change, particularly rising sea levels, with densely populated slums populated by the most marginalized groups especially vulnerable. In the Sahel, meanwhile, desertification is pushing both farming and pastoralist populations south, heightening tensions over land, water and other resources, and stimulating urban migration among rural communities. Conflict-induced displacement, often arising from ethnic tensions, has led to significant urban growth accompanied by a decline in living conditions and a rise in unemployment. The poorest live in informal settlements on the periphery of urban centres, in conditions where, given the region’s diverse ethnic make-up, differences between groups can be easily exploited.

## West Africa

### Cameroon

In 2014 Cameroon’s northern region faced an increasing threat from Boko Haram, an armed extremist group based in Nigeria that aims to set up an Islamic state. Despite joint military efforts between Cameroon and Nigeria to subdue Boko Haram, it increased cross-border operations in Cameroon’s rural and impoverished far north, attacking and shelling groupings of Nigerian refugees and restricting humanitarian aid efforts. It also targeted Cameroonian villages, churches and security forces, killing, wounding or displacing minority Christians and majority Muslims alike. Some of those displaced sought refuge in regional towns such as Kolofata and Mora, or in the regional capital Maroua,



but as Boko Haram encroached further into Cameroon's territory, others reportedly went further south, out of danger, to Yaoundé. By late 2014 scores of schools had been closed in response to cross-border attacks and kidnappings, and the school buildings occupied by those fleeing Boko Haram. Community leaders reported that some young Cameroonian Muslims had been coerced into joining Boko Haram or reportedly recruited by the offer of a cash payment upon joining, a powerful incentive in the poor region.

February saw the beginning of a mass return to east Cameroon of Cameroonian Muslim migrants who had been living in the CAR until violence at the hands of armed Christian and animist self-defence 'anti-balaka' ('anti-machete') militias forced them to flee the country. In addition, large numbers of largely Muslim CAR refugees fled to Cameroon. During 2014, more than 187,000 CAR refugees fled to neighbouring countries. By the end of the year, UNHCR was using planning estimates for approximately 210,000 CAR refugees in Cameroon alone. Many took refuge in towns and villages somewhat inside Cameroon, away from the border, to avoid attack. By doing so they transformed a swathe of formerly majority Christian settlements into

majority Muslim ones. In some areas conflict has broken out with local residents over resources, such as access to health services and shelter. Food supplies have been stretched past capacity, causing hardship for locals and refugees alike, and fuelling competition and resentment between them. Cattle-herding Peuhl (also known as Mbororo) refugees – targeted in the CAR for their perceived wealth and livestock – have also struggled to locate adequate grazing land for their cattle, at times resulting in disputes over grazing land and other resources with local farmers, who are largely Christian.

Among Cameroon's indigenous peoples, reports continued of the displacement of Ba'aka, traditional forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers, by logging and other development activities. Many have been forced to move to villages and roadside settlements elsewhere, where they face exclusion, poverty and related problems ranging from malnutrition to alcoholism. In 2014, some Ba'aka were reportedly denied access to their ancestral lands and suffered abuse at the hands of security forces deployed to curb poaching and enforce conservation norms.

Cameroonian Mbororo pastoralists, believed to make up 12 per cent of the population, at times conflicted with sedentary farmers, ranchers,

agro-industrial businesses and newly established national parks over issues around land use. In April, Rita Izsák and James Anaya, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the then UN Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples' rights, expressed concern at the reported eviction of Mbororo families from their ancestral lands in western Cameroon, in the context of a long-standing land dispute with the Catholic University in Bamenda. An estimated 300 people had been made homeless. The university claimed that it had provided compensation, whereas the community stated that it had been misled and would never have agreed to leave their homes.

Cameroon has urbanized rapidly over the last three decades, in part due to drought and famine. Men from the Mbororo community, for instance, have been forced by drought to abandon pastoralism and search for work in urban centres, leaving their families behind. Climate change has led to the encroachment of invasive plant species, also limiting pasture lands. This has in turn led to a decrease in milk production, traditionally a source of income for Mbororo women; without that extra money, Mbororo women have become more dependent on men for support. These trends have disrupted family structures, damaged family cohesion, and increased the risk of violence against women as well as exposure to HIV/AIDS, among other impacts. More recently, too, conflict has also driven displacement and migration to urban areas, with cross-border attacks by Boko Haram forcing many to flee rural areas for urban centres. In eastern Cameroon, similarly, refugees from CAR have swelled the population of local towns, at times raising tensions with residents and concerns about security.

### **Côte d'Ivoire**

For several decades after independence in 1960, Côte d'Ivoire became the most common destination for West African migrants due to perceptions of its wealth and stability. Many of them settled in urban areas, particularly the economic capital Abidjan. Extensive immigration led to some resentment and insecurity among the pre-existing population, however. Long-standing post-independence president Félix Houphouët-Boigny's administrations practised an informal

quota system to maintain stability by ensuring an ethnic and regional balance in state institutions. Following his death in 1993, dominant political actors – predominantly southern Christians – developed the political concept of '*ivorité*', giving precedence to what they described as 'native' as opposed to 'foreign' citizens. This discourse was used to disenfranchise 'northerners', the majority of them Muslim, for instance by calling their nationality – and thus their fitness to stand for elections – into question.

These issues culminated during the 2010 elections, when Laurent Gbagbo, a southerner, mobilized xenophobic sentiment against his northern opponent Alassane Ouattara. Ouattara, an Ivorian national whose mother was from Burkina Faso, had previously been barred as a 'foreigner' from running for office until the Constitution was revised following the country's 2002 civil war. Following Ouattara's victory, Gbagbo refused to concede and the country descended into armed conflict. Though Ouattara was ultimately able to secure power in 2011 after defeating Gbagbo militarily, the conflict served to further reinforce the country's divisions.

In September 2014, almost three years after its formation, the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CDVR) began public testimony regarding nearly a decade of political violence, including the 2010–11 conflict. Eighty people, including both victims and perpetrators, contributed testimony during three weeks of public hearings; however, the lack of television broadcasting and limited media coverage diminished their impact. In addition, the commission reportedly heard testimony from up to 65,000 people; however, dissatisfaction with its progress, capability and impact in promoting reconciliation remained. One issue affecting its credibility was the naming of a former prime minister – a political opponent of Gbagbo and former adviser to Ouattara – Charles Konan Banny, as its chair.

Meanwhile, some of those accused of human rights abuses against Ouattara supporters during the conflict faced trial. Laurent Gbagbo's trial before the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague is set to begin in July 2015. In March, the former leader of his 'Young Patriots' militia, Charles Blé Goudé, was sent before the

ICC and he now faces four charges of crimes against humanity. The trial of Simone Gbagbo and another 82 of her husband's supporters opened in Abidjan in December, with the former first lady receiving a 20-year prison sentence in March 2015. Four years on from the conflict, however, no Ouattara partisans have been brought before the courts, despite domestic and international findings that both sides committed abuses. This imbalance continued to undermine national reconciliation and public trust in the justice system.

The failure of authorities to disarm and disband armed groups on both sides, and to rehabilitate and reintegrate former combatants, has contributed to many marginalized youth joining armed gangs. This has led to serious security concerns in areas of Abidjan. Though some have been integrated into the security forces, problems persist. In November, for instance, former combatants demonstrated to demand back pay and benefits that had been promised to them. Evidence that the underlying problems of ethnic tensions were still unresolved came in March 2014 when Gbagbo's party, the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), accused Ouattara's government of manipulating the country's census to bolster his support. These ethnic and political tensions may flare again in the run-up to presidential elections set for October 2015.

More than half (53 per cent) of Côte d'Ivoire's population now live in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to continue to rise for decades to come. The rise in urbanization has helped to fuel ethnic conflict, exacerbating tension and resentment between groups over access to resources, political influence and other issues. The impacts of this rapid growth have also been felt outside urban areas, with Prime Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan reporting in October 2014 that more than three-quarters of the country's forests had disappeared in the last 50 years due to increasing urbanization and the spread of agriculture. This has heightened competition for land, particularly in western Côte d'Ivoire, exacerbating communal tensions between 'native' land-owners and those perceived by them as migrants or immigrants. Some of those displaced from the west during the post-electoral conflict of 2010–11, primarily Gbagbo

supporters of Guéré ethnicity, have since returned home to find their houses and land occupied by Ouattara supporters – a situation that could lay the foundation for further conflict in future.

## Mauritania

In Mauritania the Haratine minority, known as 'Black Moors', were enslaved by the dominant Arab Berber population over centuries in a system of hereditary slavery. Though slavery has been banned in Mauritania several times, most recently in 2007, the law has not been enforced and in reality the practice persists. In 2014, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, Mutuma Ruteere, reported that an estimated 50 per cent of Haratines face *de facto* slavery, including as domestic servants and bonded labourers. In November, the Walk Free Foundation also reported that Mauritania had the highest proportion of slaves to population in the world.

In 2013 the government set up an agency ('Tadamoun') to fight poverty and the legacy of slavery. However, its functionality and effectiveness to date have been questioned by some observers, who have expressed doubts about its credibility and efficiency. NGOs in particular continue to press for the ability to bring complaints themselves on behalf of victims, arguing that this presents a more credible option for those who have suffered slavery. In March 2014, the government formally adopted a road map for the implementation of UN anti-slavery recommendations. Critics expressed concern at the lack of civil society involvement in the road map framework, which they say places the process solely under state control. They point to the role of the authorities in maintaining the practice of slavery in the past, as well as to more recent reports of official complicity in these abuses, such as a December 2014 complaint against family members of Lemina Mint El Ghotob Ould Momma, the serving government minister for social affairs concerning children and the family.

Haratines, whether slaves or free, face ongoing discrimination and marginalization across Mauritanian society. In April 2014, anti-discrimination activists held a march in the



**Left:** Biram Dah Abeid, a Haratine anti-slavery activist, was arrested in November 2014. *Emiliano Granado*

capital Nouakchott to mark the first anniversary of the 2013 Haratine Manifesto, which called for equality and fulfilment of a broad spectrum of political, economic and social rights. In presidential elections in June, eventually won by the incumbent, slavery was also highlighted as an issue. The second-running candidate, with 8.9 per cent of the vote, was long-standing anti-slavery activist and head of the civil society group Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA), Biram Dah Abeid. However, Abeid was arrested in November 2014 with at least seven others, including IRA members, in the context of a peaceful campaign against slavery and in favour of agrarian reform. International legal experts expressed grave concerns about their access to due process. In January 2015 Abeid and two others were tried on charges of belonging to an illegal organization, leading an unauthorized rally and violence against the police. They were convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Police used tear gas and batons to disperse protesters against the verdict.

Mauritania faces perennial drought and food insecurity, exacerbated by climate change and depletion of natural resources. The World Food Programme estimates that between 20 and 30 per cent of the population suffers from high food insecurity. These factors have contributed to increasing urbanization, with around three-fifths of the country's population now living in towns and cities, particularly the capital of Nouakchott. In times of drought, even nomadic groups have tended to congregate outside urban centres. In some families, men migrate to urban centres alone in search of work, sending remittances back to women and children left behind to farm increasingly unproductive land. The separation has a detrimental effect on family well-being and cohesion, with reports suggesting that divorce and abandonment rates have risen in some communities.

For Haratine slaves, urban migration has long offered the possibility of anonymity and a new start away from the master and his family. Urban areas have provided a relatively safe space for escaped slaves, where they face less risk of recapture, and Nouakchott in particular now hosts a number of NGOs that are able to provide social, moral and legal support for former slaves. However, Haratines are disproportionately concentrated in the city's most deprived areas, with little access to sanitation or basic services. Residents do not have title to the land, and their existence is precarious. Furthermore, they still face ongoing social discrimination. Newly freed slaves, with little education or life skills training, most often end up in low-paid, unskilled and vulnerable positions. For women this includes, for instance, work as market sellers, domestic workers for relatives of their former masters or sex workers. Access to education for Haratine children is also limited, with the city mayor reportedly informing the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism during his visit in September 2013 that around 80 per cent of Haratine children were not in school, partly because of issues surrounding their lack of legal registration. As a result, their marginalization is being replicated among the younger generation.



# Cultural heritage as a vehicle for peace in Timbuktu

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The fabled ‘city of 333 Saints’, Timbuktu, is located in the republic of Mali at the edge of the Sahara desert and near the Niger River. Founded in the 5th century, it was long regarded as a centre for the diffusion of Islam through West Africa and a city of trade, where manuscripts and books were sold for more money than merchandise. By 1988, when Timbuktu was designated as a World Heritage Site for its holy places and their essential role in the spread of Islam in Africa, much of the ancient city still stood as a testament to the city’s golden age. Though many of its monuments were in urgent need of conservation, its mosques, mausoleums and holy places nevertheless offered clear proof of the city’s rich history.

Having survived for centuries, however, Timbuktu received a devastating blow in 2012 when it fell under the control of Ansar Dine, an extremist group who at that time controlled most of northern Mali. Militants set about destroying the city’s mosque, mausoleums, shrines and holy statues in a move described by the ICC as a war crime. It represented an assault on everything that Timbuktu represented, including the values of cultural exchange and peaceful cohabitation. Irreplaceable manuscripts, covering geography, history and religion, were burned and music forbidden, in a country renowned for its rich musical traditions.

The occupation of Timbuktu only came to an end when French and Malian forces

intervened in January 2013, expelling the militants from the city. Though this has restored a measure of stability, the legacy of the occupation and the divisions it created have persisted. In particular, the city’s Arab and Tuareg minorities were subjected to reprisals by other residents who accused them of sympathizing with Ansar Dine. Besides looting of shops and homes, many were reportedly forced to flee the city. However, an organization set up in the wake of the conflict, the Timbuktu Renaissance Action Group, seeks to rebuild social cohesion by reviving what the city came close to losing during its occupation – Timbuktu’s rich and multi-faceted culture.

The planned cultural revival will incorporate music festivals, documentary films, preservation and exhibition of the manuscripts, as well as the creation of a cultural centre in Timbuktu to share them. A prime aim is to return to Timbuktu the ‘Festival au Désert’, once a magnet for musicians and enthusiasts from all over the world who came to enjoy a range of different art forms, including traditional Tuareg music. Though at present the festival is still in exile, efforts to bring it back are ongoing. Other organizations, such as UNESCO, are also supporting heritage restoration, with a number of shrines in the process of being rebuilt – beginning with three shrines of saints with different ethnicities to symbolize Mali’s diversity.

The need to protect cultural heritage in the world we live in is more important than ever, particularly as armed groups increasingly target sites of spiritual or historic significance with the specific aim of creating dissent. By contrast, restoring Timbuktu’s cultural heritage will encourage conciliation and promote a shared sense of belonging while protecting the many distinct identities of its population. ■



## Nigeria

Nigeria is extremely diverse, with hundreds of ethnic groups and even more languages governed through a federal system of 36 separate states, each with their own ethnic and religious composition. Though this has contributed to the country's rich cultural life, it has also at times been the source of tensions between different groups over power and control of local resources. Nigeria's practice, at the state level, of giving groups 'indigenous' or 'native' to each region preferential treatment over 'settler' or 'immigrant' groups – many of whom may have been based for two generations in the areas – has at times contributed to inequality, competition and conflict between ethnicities. The country's presidential, parliamentary and state elections, slated for March and April 2015, saw President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian southerner, defeated by a strong opposition that brought to power Muhammadu Buhari, a former military leader and Muslim northerner.

A key issue in the election was the ongoing campaign of violence perpetrated by the armed group Boko Haram. The group is responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians since launching an armed insurrection in 2009 from its base in the city of Maiduguri in north-eastern Nigeria. In August 2014, the group declared an Islamic state in the areas of north-east Nigeria then under its control. While Boko Haram has targeted Christians, a minority in Nigeria's largely Muslim north-east, the bulk of its victims have reportedly been fellow Muslims. Boko Haram is known for targeted attacks on moderate Muslims whose views conflict with their own.

In 2014 Boko Haram continued its attacks on soft targets, often in urban centres, including bus stations, schools, churches, mosques and markets, as well as continuing to target moderate Muslim politicians and clerics. It also staged attacks outside the northern states most affected, including a bomb that killed 75 people in the capital Abuja in April. The most high-profile incident during the year, however, was the abduction by militants of 276 girls at gunpoint from their secondary school in the north-eastern village of Chibok, Borno State. In a video released by the group, its leader reportedly referred to the girls as 'slaves' and threatened to

sell them 'in the market' or 'marry them off'. HRW has estimated that, since 2009, Boko Haram has abducted over 500 women and girls, targeted for being students or Christian, with victims then coerced into converting to the group's radical version of Islam. In November, a suicide bomb attack staged during assembly at a boys' school in Potiskum killed almost 50 students and wounded nearly 80.

Communal violence also continued elsewhere. Around Jos, Plateau State, in the Middle Belt, violence continued between 'indigene' farmers of the Christian Berom group and Fulani Muslim pastoralists considered 'settlers', with more than 1,000 people killed in the first few months of 2014. Elsewhere, suspected Fulani attackers killed more than 100 people in three largely Christian villages in central Kaduna State in March.

The indigenous Ogoni people of the Niger Delta continued to urge the government to act on the findings of a UNEP (UN Environmental Programme) environmental assessment report into the impact of Shell oil spills on their lands in 2008 and 2009. The UNEP report was released in 2011, but the devastation caused by the spills remains, endangering the living conditions and livelihoods of residents of small villages and towns such as Yenagoa. The damage to surrounding agricultural land, and other stresses brought on by the urbanization of the region related to the oil industry, has forced many Ogoni to migrate in search of work, further disrupting the traditional culture and cohesion of the group.

Nigeria's population is relatively urbanized, with around half the population now based in towns or cities. Lagos, with over 11 million inhabitants in 2011, is now Africa's most populated city. With roughly three-quarters of the country's industrial base, as well as the bulk of its financial and commercial resources, it is now the main destination for rural migrants in search of employment. Unsurprisingly, it is also the Nigerian city most affected by unplanned, unregulated growth. Though the capital concentrates many of the country's ethnic groups, other sources indicate that this is not an accurate image. Some describe the centre as largely populated (and controlled) by 'native' Lagos-dwellers, while the slums and shanty

towns on the periphery are largely made up of migrants from other regions, at times grouped in ethnically oriented neighbourhoods. While Lagos State itself now offers a relatively open system of registration to all residents, regardless of their ethnicity or place of origin, in many urban areas elsewhere inequalities between relatively privileged 'indigenes' and the 'settler' populations are sharply evident, in areas such as land rights, service access and other benefits. As pressure on land increases with rapid population growth and migration, these disparities have the potential to create further conflict if unaddressed.

## Central Africa

### Burundi

Conflict around land, sharpened by population growth and the scarcity of arable land, continued in Burundi during 2014. The government established a Land Commission on 31 December 2013, with a special court to deal with land issues subsequently established in April. These measures were perceived by some as potentially prioritizing the interests of repatriated citizens, primarily members of the Hutu majority, with the risk of creating further friction with the Tutsi minority.

Tensions have been further heightened by upcoming presidential elections, set for June 2015. Observers have called for an official investigation into claims that the military had supplied arms to the youth wing of the ruling party, the Hutu-dominated National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces (CNDD-FDD), which has been accused of political violence, intimidation and even killings of opposition supporters. These warnings came within a broader climate of repression against perceived government opponents. Following a one-day mass trial in March that failed to respect defendants' rights to due process, 48 people, mainly activists from one opposition party, were given sentences ranging from two years to life imprisonment. Some had been arrested in clashes with police, others while jogging; the authorities claimed that the latter were planning to converge and stage an unauthorized political demonstration.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly passed

a law establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in April. The TRC is mandated to investigate past human rights abuses carried out during the country's various episodes of inter-ethnic violence between its Hutu majority and Tutsi minority since independence. Its commissioners include six Hutus, four Tutsis and one Twa. They were selected and sworn in to their positions in December. Critics noted that the government had disregarded some of the recommendations of the public consultation process, with implications for the credibility of the TRC, the involvement of civil society organizations and its accessibility to victims of all ethnic groups and political affiliations.

A court enquiry into the massacre of more than 150 Tutsi refugees, primarily women and children from South Kivu, DRC, at the Gatumba UNHCR site in Burundi ten years ago, opened on 1 December. Responsibility for the attack was claimed by the largely Hutu rebel group National Liberation Forces (*Forces nationales de libération*, FNL). In 2014, Burundi's army reportedly clashed several times with the FNL in South Kivu.

Burundi's population is still largely rural, with only one in ten people living in urban areas. Burundi is highly vulnerable to natural hazards: the capital Bujumbura, on the shores of a lake surrounded by steep hills, faced severe flooding and mudslides following heavy rains in February 2014. At least 68 people were killed and 20,000 displaced, including residents of the city's precarious shanty towns, home to many poor and marginalized groups including returning refugees from DRC previously displaced by the country's ethnic conflict. The government has attempted to provide vulnerable urban residents, including landless, displaced or returning groups, with secure housing through the establishment of planned 'peace villages' that include a mix of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa residents to promote social harmony and inter-ethnic interaction. Some of these settlements are located on Bujumbura's outskirts. While they face a number of challenges, they represent Burundi's ambition towards ethnic integration – an important development for a country where, during the conflictive 1990s, many neighbourhoods in Bujumbura divided along ethnic lines, with residents driving



**Above:** Bangui Muslim women and children crowd the floor of a Catholic Church in Boali, Central African Republic, 2014. The priest gave them sanctuary from Christian vigilante groups seeking to attack and kill Muslims in response to the 2013 *Seleka* rebellion. *Panos/Sven Torfinn*

out neighbours of the opposing ethnicity and other, ethnically mixed neighbourhoods saw violent combat between Tutsi and Hutu militias. According to a 2013 study, the record of the peace villages is mixed, with at least some inhabitants facing social exclusion and experiencing tensions with surrounding communities.

### Central African Republic

In 2013, a loose coalition (*Seleka*) of largely Muslim insurgent groups, angered by what they perceived as the marginalization and exclusion of northern Muslims from the benefits of CAR's vast resource wealth, advanced south, dislodging François Bozizé's government in March. *Seleka* forces were accused of egregious abuses against the mainly Christian civilian population in their path, including massacres, sexual violence,

recruitment of children and mass displacement. In December 2013, on the eve of the arrival of a French force sent to quell the violence, armed Christian and animist self-defence 'anti-*balaka*' ('anti-machete') militia, with some support from soldiers of the defeated army, took the offensive. They staged revenge attacks in Bangui, not only on suspected rebels but also indiscriminately on the local Muslim population, perceived due to their religion and language as sympathizing with the insurgency.

In January 2014, *Seleka* leader Michel Djotodia ceded power under international pressure. Catherine Samba-Panza, a Christian who had been appointed mayor of Bangui by Djotodia, was elected president of the interim government. The French force disarmed some *Seleka* fighters, who then withdrew from the south and west of the country, regrouping in the north and east. Anti-*balaka* forces took advantage of its retreat to conduct further attacks on Muslim communities. Muslim foreign nationals and many from CAR's previously well-established Muslim minority fled for their lives. Despite its roots in political and economic issues, the conflict took on an increasingly sectarian tone, with abuses

and reprisal attacks escalating and spreading throughout the country. As the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay condemned the television broadcasting of hate speech against Muslims by anti-*balaka* militia, the latter moved from staging revenge attacks to what some described as a deliberate campaign to clear the country of all Muslims, either through killings or forced displacement.

The presence of African Union (AU), French and subsequently European Union troops was not enough to stop the violence. Humanitarian workers and international troops themselves came increasingly under attack. In some instances, Chadian and other soldiers among the AU peacekeepers were accused of targeted violations against suspected anti-*balaka*. Entire neighbourhoods of Bangui were emptied of Muslims, as were towns in western CAR that had been home to thousands of Muslims, with columns of evacuating civilians deliberately attacked by anti-*balaka* fighters. Anti-*balaka* were also reported to prey increasingly on non-Muslims, particularly among the displaced populations. Some abuses and retaliatory violence against Christian communities by *Seleka* during and after their retreat were also reported. As the year went on, splits were reported within both *Seleka* and anti-*balaka* forces, adding an intra-communal element to some of the violence. In July, *Seleka* and anti-*balaka* leaders signed a ceasefire, along with CAR's Christian archbishop and leading imam, both strong advocates of tolerance. However, no agreement was reached on disarmament, and clashes continued.

A new UN force was deployed to replace the AU force in September 2014. However, it was unable to prevent ongoing violence, as all armed groups targeted civilians who they believed supported opposing sides. While much of the violence was following the *Seleka* onslaught and its subsequent collapse, some of it was reportedly rooted in long-standing tensions between farmers and pastoralists, including the nomadic Muslim Peuhl (Fulani) minority, who in the current climate were perceived as supporting *Seleka*. Past instances of encroachment onto farmland as well as crop damage by pastoralists' herds added to the more immediate resentments that drove the anti-*balaka* violence. Moreover, some Peuhl were

themselves responsible for attacks on Christians, often in revenge for violence against their own community. In any event, according to HRW, by the end of 2014, Peuhl made up a very large majority of the inhabitants in almost all of the CAR refugee camps in Cameroon.

CAR's Muslims, who had made up about 15 per cent of the national population, were divided between pastoral farmers and herders, living mainly in the country's north-east, and a largely urban merchant class based in Bangui and other provincial towns such as Bria, a centre of the diamond trade. Particularly in urban areas, it was noted that anti-*balaka* and communal violence against Muslims was fuelled not just by sectarian feeling but also by political grievances, economic opportunism and resentment against wealthier Muslims. Muslim Arab traders were particularly vulnerable, as their perceived wealth and relative control over the gold and diamond trades spread anger among poorer communities. Their homes and places of business were typically methodically looted before being destroyed or, at times, occupied by Christians. By mid-year, a reported 80 per cent of Bangui's Muslims had fled. In other areas, the destruction of Muslim homes after looting by anti-*balaka* may be intended to ensure that Muslims cannot return to the area: that is, as part of a concerted effort to segregate and cement control over the territory.

An early exception to the widespread sectarian violence was the central town of Bambari. As violence spread elsewhere, Christian and Muslim leaders worked together to keep the peace in the mixed town, including through messages of tolerance on local radio. However, the peace had collapsed by the end of May when Bambari became part of an unofficial front line between the warring sides, with retaliatory killings carried out by both. The presence of French peacekeepers in the town may have reduced but could not altogether prevent the violence. Attacks by *Seleka* and anti-*balaka* forces reported in and around the city continued: in early July, for instance, *Seleka* reportedly attacked displaced people sheltering in Bambari's cathedral, killing more than 26 people and wounding others. By the end of the year, only a fraction of Bambari's 60,000 residents remained in the town, living in dire circumstances.

By December, over 187,000 refugees, primarily Muslims, had fled the country in 2014 alone, bringing the total number of CAR refugees in the region to more than 423,000. These figures included nearly all of the estimated 130,000 Muslim residents of Bangui. Some Muslims remained, primarily in the east and north; thousands more were isolated in anti-*balaka*-surrounded enclaves across the country, under protection of international troops. Since April, transitional authorities had refused to allow them to leave the country in order to avoid accomplishing the anti-*balaka* aim of the 'ethnic cleansing' of the west. Around 430,000 people were reported to be internally displaced at year's end. Refugees and internally displaced together amounted to nearly one-fifth of the country's population of 4.5 million.

### **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

At the end of 2014 conflict in eastern DRC, with at present no fewer than 54 different armed groups, had caused roughly 430,000 people to flee to neighbouring countries and left some 2.7 million more internally displaced.

### **North and South Kivu provinces**

After the UN Intervention Brigade and DRC troops dislodged a largely ethnic Tutsi armed group, M23, in 2013, the focus turned to the Hutu-dominated Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), under UN sanctions for abuses including ethnically based killings in Rwanda and the DRC. Some FDLR fighters were among the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In July, an international meeting of ministers of defence set a six-month timeframe for the voluntary surrender of the FDLR. It publicly agreed to demobilize, but by year's end had made no serious effort to do so. Humanitarian staff expressed concern at the potential for harm to civilians during any offensive against the FDLR as the group, unlike M23, does not set up discrete camps but rather lives among the local population. Another UN/DRC military operation, in January 2014 in the Beni region of North Kivu against the Ugandan-led Islamist armed group Alliance of Democratic Forces-NALU (ADF-NALU), had caused mass civilian displacement. ADF-NALU, formed with

**Right:** Deforestation is a primary threat to the survival of Twa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who rely on the forests for their livelihoods. *Jan-Joseph Stok*

the aim of creating an Islamic state in Uganda, was reportedly pushed across the border into the DRC in 1995. In the last quarter of the year, ADF-NALU was believed to have been responsible for a series of brutal attacks in Beni in which more than 250 civilians were killed by attackers using knives, hoes and machetes. Tens of thousands fled their homes.

Inter-ethnic violence persisted elsewhere during the year. In February, Hunde and Hutu ethnically oriented militias in Masisi territory, North Kivu, were each accused of carrying out human rights abuses against civilians perceived to support the opposing group, resulting in at least 40 civilian deaths. At the root of the violence is control over land: Hunde leaders claim customary right to it, which has created tensions with Hutu residents.

In June at least 30 people, mostly from the Bafuliro ethnic group, were killed in an attack on an outdoor church service and nearby buildings in the village of Mutarule, South Kivu. Bafuliro had been engaged in a conflict over cattle theft and local power with members of the Banyamulenge Tutsi and Barundi ethnicities living nearby. The head of the UN mission to Congo (MONUSCO) apologized for his troops' failure to intervene despite being repeatedly alerted to the attack. The roots of the Bafuliro-Barundi conflict date back to colonial times, in an ongoing struggle over land and leadership in the Ruzizi plain.

### **Katanga province**

Despite its mineral wealth, the population of resource-rich Katanga suffers from widespread poverty, weak state services and the impact of diseases such as cholera. In this context, land and inequalities create serious tensions that regularly erupt into violence. In the Tanganyika district of Katanga, violence between indigenous hunter-gatherer Twa inhabitants and ethnic Luba, a Bantu group, displaced more than 70,000 people during the year, primarily indigenous Twa. Some Luba accuse Twa of supporting the





armed forces in their fight against the (largely Luba) secessionist Mai Mai militia groups known as Kata Katanga. The struggle is also rooted in social inequalities between the historically marginalized Twa and the more privileged ethnic group, as well as in competition for land and resources.

In July 2014, a proposal for a law on the rights of indigenous peoples was submitted to the DRC legislature for consideration. It is hoped that this will address key issues facing indigenous hunter-gatherer communities such as Twa, including discrimination but also specific government policies such as those around forestry that limit their ability to exercise their traditional livelihoods and land rights.

More than a third of the DRC's population is now urban and this proportion is projected to exceed 50 per cent by 2040, with many concentrated in Kinshasa, Africa's third largest city. Plans for a luxury billion-dollar development on two reclaimed islands on the Congo River

in the capital, dubbed Cité du Fleuve, contrast markedly with the situation of Kinshasa's urban poor, struggling to survive through the informal economy within unofficial settlements on the urban periphery. Kinshasa is ethnically diverse, and has seen tensions between residents seen as 'native' and those perceived as migrants. In Kinshasa this has been heightened by the fact that long-time dictator Mobutu Sese Seko was succeeded in 1997 by Laurent Kabila, the head of a largely Tutsi-led military movement that ousted Hutu refugees and militia from camps in eastern DRC where they had fled following the Rwandan genocide. Opposition to his presidency, and that of his son Joseph, who was elected after his assassination, has at times taken an ethnic slant as ethnicity becomes increasingly politicized.

Many communities in conflict-affected areas have been forced to relocate to cities such as Goma, where they have ended up in a state of protracted displacement in overcrowded settlements on the urban periphery. Residents in



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**Case study** by *Paige Wilhite Jennings*  
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# Promoting peace through sustainable urban development in Kigali

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April 2014 saw the 20th anniversary of the genocide in which an estimated 800,000 people – three-quarters of the Rwanda’s Tutsi minority, as well as moderates from the Hutu majority – were killed in 100 days. While this small landlocked country’s population density, the highest in Africa, may have contributed to social tensions, ethnic differences had long been manipulated and exploited for political purposes in Rwanda. Belgian colonial policies favoured the Tutsis until independence in 1962, when the Hutu majority began to dominate. In the run-up to April 1994, Hutu extremists from the political class, the security forces and the main political party’s armed militia used radio broadcasts from Kigali to incite ethnic hatred, playing on Hutu fears of a Tutsi uprising and coercing ordinary Hutus into taking part. Though orchestrated from the capital, the genocidal campaign took advantage of the hierarchical structures of social organization that permeated the countryside to reach throughout the country.

The slaughter was only ended by the advance from Uganda of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), made up of significant numbers of Tutsi refugees. By July the RPF had defeated the Rwandan army, forcing hundreds of thousands of Hutus, including *génocidaires*, to flee.

Over the last 20 years Rwanda has made great strides in rebuilding its devastated institutions, infrastructure and services, and

has taken important social measures such as those promoting gender equity. The impact of some legal and judicial steps, however, has been mixed. While community-based trials (*gacaca*) and other platforms have dealt with thousands of cases against alleged *génocidaires*, claims of RPF abuses have generally not been investigated. New measures banning identification on ethnic grounds in favour of a common national identity have effectively denied the indigenous Batwa their right to their own identity and culture, and have prevented positive measures to redress the inequalities they clearly face.

In this context, programmes such as the ‘Bye Bye Nyakatsi’ project, aimed at improving housing by replacing traditional thatched roof houses with iron-roofed ones, were found to disproportionately affect the indigenous Batwa minority due to their frequent use of traditional building methods, in the short term appearing to leave many without shelter. Finally, laws prohibiting genocide ideology, genocide denial and sectarianism have in practice been used to limit fundamental freedoms and to punish dissent.

Mass returns of former refugees, alongside rural–urban displacement due in part to fears of ongoing insecurity as a result of the actions on Rwandese territory of armed groups based in the DRC, for instance, have led to one of the world’s fastest urbanization rates: Rwanda’s urban population grew from 385,000 in 1990 to almost 2.5 million today. To cope with pressure on land, the government has developed a national land use plan and framework for land registration and management. Meanwhile the authorities have embraced urbanization as a means of achieving their goal of making Rwanda a middle-income country by doubling the country’s urban share of the population, currently around 18 per cent, to 35 per cent by 2020. According to President Kagame, urbanization is ‘part and parcel of our unity and reconciliation efforts’. An ambitious Master Plan with design input from the US and Singapore is in place for Kigali, which in 2008 became

the first city in Africa to be awarded the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award. Six smaller cities have been identified as poles of growth. The Rwanda Housing Authority is elaborating Local Development Plans for each of the country's 30 districts, with sustainable settlements organized around pre-planned infrastructure.

Critics say, however, that Rwanda's urban development to date has benefited its upper and middle classes to the detriment of its poor. In Kigali, where half of the urban population lives, authorities have systematically removed informal settlers from public land to make way for approved works. It is unclear where they have gone; poor families have been increasingly priced out of urban property as high demand has raised prices.

In order to profit all Rwandese, Rwanda's urban development efforts must meet the needs of its poor for low-income housing and sources of work: otherwise, the new Kigali risks becoming an elite city, with no place or use for low-income Rwandese. For this, however, the authorities must listen, not just to the international developers and experts who have recently been advising it on urbanization, but also to the most marginalized of its people – even when their views contradict official plans for the future. For ultimately, in the words of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, 'a society without room for critical voices speaking freely and peacefully is unsustainable'. Inclusive growth for all in Kigali is therefore crucial in ensuring that Rwanda continues to move forwards from the tragedy of the genocide towards lasting peace and stability. ■

these areas typically struggle with limited basic services such as water or sanitation, chronic economic insecurity and an elevated risk of violence or sexual assault by armed militias. A 2014 profile by the Norwegian Refugee Council of displaced populations in Goma found that a third of those surveyed intended to stay in the city, while others who wished to return were often unable to do so because their land had been forcibly seized – effectively leaving them in a state of indefinite displacement. The situation of displaced populations in Goma and other urban centres in conflict-affected regions of DRC may therefore represent a long-term challenge that will need to be addressed through effective and integrated urban policies to ensure their protection and prevent regular outbreaks of violence.

# Southern Africa

**Inga Thiemann**

## **Namibia**

The year 2014 was an election year in Namibia, with the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) Prime Minister Hage Geingob taking 86.7 per cent of all declared votes and SWAPO maintaining its two-thirds majority. Urbanization was a key topic in the election campaign, as the government plans to spend US\$4.1 billion on urban housing. Though about a quarter of Namibians live in informal urban settlements, Namibia has been praised for its progressive approach to combatting its housing crisis and its pro-poor urban strategies, including significant financial support for self-help grassroots movements and saving groups.

However, the specific needs of minority groups are not always catered for in Namibia, despite a number of government initiatives. According to Namibia's Fourth National Development Plan 2012/20 to 2016/17, the government aims to eradicate extreme poverty, especially in households of 'certain language groups'

previously excluded from the Namibian social protection system despite experiencing extreme deprivation. Nonetheless, San remain Namibia's most disadvantaged group, ranking far lower than the rest of the population with regard to almost all development indicators due to decades of discrimination.

Since 2005, a dedicated government programme, the San Development Programme, exists in the Office of the Prime Minister. However, government officials often demonstrate prejudice and lack of understanding for the San. Despite the concerns raised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, in 2013, there has been no improvement in the political representation of Himba and San, as a third of their leaders have still not been recognized as official traditional leaders and remain excluded from decision making processes at local and national level. In 2014, there was not a single San member of parliament and just one San regional council member.

Though the only San regional councillor is a woman, in general gender inequality is a growing problem among the San community. One reason for this is that the community has been increasingly influenced by the hierarchical structures within wider Namibian society, where men are typically placed above women. Feminist organizations such as the Women's Leadership Centre, founded by Elizabeth Khaxas, aim to build feminist politics based on indigenous cultures in Namibia. The group works with women from the Khwe community in north-eastern Namibia to build their leadership and to educate them on their rights as both women and indigenous people.

Namibian women achieved a victory in 2014 with the Namibian Supreme Court condemning the forced sterilization of three HIV-positive women and acknowledging their lack of consent. Their case is considered a precedent for many more HIV-positive women who have been forcibly sterilized. The ruling could have particular relevance for minority women, as the HIV-infection risk is higher among minority communities due to a lack of public health campaigns in minority languages and insufficient outreach to minority communities living in

**Right:** Crowds of people gathered across South Africa to mourn the death, and celebrate the life, of Nelson Mandela, December 2013. *REUTERS/Mark Wessels*

remote areas.

Physical, social and legal constraints mean state development programmes do not benefit all Namibians to the same degree, and rural–urban inequalities could further exacerbate these disparities. As many minority and indigenous communities still live in conservation areas, forests and national parks, they typically gain less from government initiatives to combat poverty and improve access to health care, as these tend to be focused on the urban poor. Consequently, though the government's plan to invest in urban housing is welcome, it is important that it is balanced with targeted rural development to ensure that the situation of San and other marginalized groups in these areas also improves.

In recent decades, having previously lived almost exclusively in rural areas, a significant proportion of San have resettled in camps or on the edge of townships due to their lack of access to land and the decline in available employment on commercial farms. With few resources or skills applicable to the urban labour market, their situation is especially vulnerable. Many urban San face serious food insecurity and limited prospects of formal employment, with most engaging in odd jobs to survive. Even among other low-income residents, previous research has suggested that San are still far poorer than other squatters.

But while these issues must be addressed with inclusive urban poverty reduction measures, efforts should also focus on rural issues such as agriculture to reduce unemployment – a major driver of migration to urban areas. Other strategies, such as livelihood diversification and training opportunities for San agricultural workers on commercial farms, will also help provide them with a broader set of skills that allow them either to remain in their community or integrate with greater ease into urban labour markets.

## **South Africa**

The year 2014 started as a year of mourning



after the death of Nelson Mandela in December 2013. Politically, the first half of the year was dominated by the general election on 7 May. The African National Congress (ANC) remained in power with a 62.2 per cent share of the votes, down from 65.9 per cent, with the Democratic Alliance (DA) increasing its share to 22.2 per cent and the newly established Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) gaining 6.4 per cent of the votes.

According to an IPSOS survey conducted shortly before the election, less than half (47 per cent) of the population believe that the government has the country's interests at heart, with even lower levels among white (17 per cent) and coloured (23 per cent) citizens.

Land rights and distribution remain unresolved and contentious issues in South Africa. The large majority of the country's land is still owned by

white South Africans, who make up less than 10 per cent of the population. The ANC, despite committing after the end of apartheid to ensuring a significant proportion of land would be redistributed, has so far failed to achieve this. The EFF's leader, Julius Malema – a controversial figure who has two convictions for hate speech and who was expelled from the ANC Youth League in 2012 – has strongly criticized the current system and called for the expropriation of farms owned by white South Africans without compensation.

In June, the ANC signed an amendment to the 1994 Restitution of Land Rights Bill into law, allowing those who failed to file claims in 1998 to still do so now. The bill has received mixed responses, as many claims may contest existing claims filed pre-1998 and create a further backlog. A separate policy is also planned which

could benefit the Khoi and San communities by allowing them, in some instances, to lodge claims for land dispossessed pre-1913. These changes are intended to also include heritage sites, which might benefit other ethnic groups, such as Zulu, who have made claims for certain areas which belonged to former Zulu kingdoms.

The land rights of women from the Muslim minority are also likely to improve following the legal recognition of Muslim marriages for the first time in South Africa in May 2014. Though issues remain about the lack of inclusion of women in the negotiations and the apparent absence of females among the more than 100 officially appointed marriage officers, the decision represents a milestone for the country's Muslim community. Previously, Muslim marriages had no status in South African law, meaning that women could have no legal rights in the event of divorce or the death of their spouses. In August, shortly after the change in law, a landmark case in South Africa reversed the eviction of a Muslim woman following her divorce. The eviction had originally been considered legal, as she had been married in a religious ceremony only and the title deed to her home was in her husband's name.

Twenty years after the abolition of apartheid in 1994, South Africa continues to struggle with its legacy of racial division. These issues came to the fore in July when South Africa's Human Rights Commission found a public school in Bloemfontein guilty of hate speech towards coloured and black pupils. The teachers were accused of racially abusing the students and telling them to go back to the black schools in their townships – the second such incident in Bloemfontein within a year.

Though South Africa has undergone significant transformation in the last two decades, including rapid urbanization, the country's history of racial segregation continues to shape its development. Despite the ANC's pledge in 1994 to provide adequate housing to its citizens, the government's housing programme has been outstripped by the pace of urban migration and reached a backlog in 2013 of 2.1 million planned free housing units for the poor. As a result, a significant proportion of urban residents still face poor living conditions, with around a third based in slums.

Since the end of apartheid, some of the old

structures of white-dominated towns and black-dominated townships on the outskirts of those towns have somewhat broken up. Nonetheless, subsequent surveys suggest that a large proportion of the urban black population is still concentrated in these townships on the urban periphery, where issues such as unemployment, violence and sexual assault are still evident. Despite attempts to counter the ghettoization of these areas – for example, through government investment in public transport in townships – spatial segregation persists. While middle-class blacks have migrated in recent years to formerly white neighbourhoods, the majority of the country's black urban poor remain concentrated in the townships. Though explicit exclusion of blacks is rare and South Africa's social division is now in many ways informed by class, the disproportionate poverty levels among the black population mean that in practice this separation still has strong racial dimensions. In Cape Town, for example, reports suggest that many of the city's black population still feel excluded and unwelcome in the centre and other upmarket neighbourhoods.

The physical and social legacy of apartheid urban planning has contributed to ongoing problems of crime, delinquency and unemployment, particularly among urban youth. Issues such as housing, reinforced by xenophobia, have also led to growing frictions between South Africans and migrant communities from countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. These tensions culminated in the violent outbreak in Alexandra township in Johannesburg in April 2015, killing seven people and injuring many others, making it the country's worst outbreak of xenophobic violence since 2008. The ongoing violence has caused the military to step in, while some migrant countries of origin have arranged for their citizens to return home. A speech by Zulu chief King Goodwill Zwelithini the previous month calling for foreigners to 'pack their bags and go home' was blamed for triggering the violence, though Zwelithini claimed that his comments had been taken out of context.

## **Zimbabwe**

Following the 2013 amendment to the Zimbabwean Constitution, several minority



languages are now officially recognized. However, there has been little progress on the promotion of minority languages since former Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture David Coltart ended his term in office in August 2013. He claimed that any incoming minister would have to honour the language policies in place, but also stated that it was 'too early to say whether the new government will have the political will to promote minority languages'. In May 2014, former Matabeleland South governor Angeline Masuku called for greater promotion of traditional Zimbabwean languages over English, arguing that knowledge of other languages spoken in their regions could help reduce tribalism. Her concern was particularly with regard to the lack of knowledge among some Matabeleland residents of Ndebele.

The San community has also criticized the government for failing to understand their culture and traditions, as the Constitution refers to their language as Khoisan, whereas the correct name of the language is Tshwao. Tshwao is under particular risk of extinction, as some sources suggest that there are little more than a dozen people left who speak the language fluently, with the rest of the San community speaking a diluted version. One of the issues highlighted by San leaders is the fact that the few San children who are able to attend school are taught in Ndebele, and as a result many are increasingly separated from their own culture. Attempts to introduce a Tshwao curriculum are made more difficult by the lack of orthography and phonology for the language. Tshwao has no written records and is currently not systematically passed from one generation to the next. Additionally, the vocabulary reflects the San community's traditional way of life in the bush, and therefore lacks terminology for many aspects of contemporary living. Researchers working on preserving Tshwao and making it usable for younger generations of San have requested support from the Education Ministry to enable them to travel to Botswana and Namibia for learning visits to other San communities.

Other minorities are equally struggling for the promotion of their languages. Kalanga representatives have argued that SeTswana, the language they speak at home, should also

be taught at their schools and be promoted in line with the new Constitution. Kalanga representative Pax Nkomo also questioned the imposition of Ndebele chiefs on Kalanga people in seven districts of Matabeleland South and called on the new Zimbabwean government to 'give Kalanga language affirmative action so we can liberate our culture which was suppressed'. Both San and Kalanga, as well as other linguistic minorities in Zimbabwe, need government assistance to maintain their languages.

Zimbabwe faces acute urban challenges, including inadequate water and sanitation, resulting in diarrhoea, typhoid and other health risks, particularly in its large informal settlements. The government, however, has not only failed to address the problems of corruption and exclusion that have contributed to these issues, but has worsened the situation of many poor and vulnerable communities through aggressive policies of eviction and slum clearance, such as the so-called Operation Murambatsvina – literally, 'Drive Out Rubbish' – in which approximately 700,000 residents were forcibly displaced in a 'clean-up' exercise a decade ago, with foreign nationals particularly targeted.

A key objective of the crackdown was to force residents of informal settlements to 'return' to rural areas. In Matabeleland, where many urban residents were forcibly resettled, the legacy of the clearance has contributed to increasing diasporisation as a result. While the Zimbabwean government is threatening further demolitions in several areas, it has generally failed to provide alternative housing to those it has displaced. This is particularly true for the already poor and marginalized in Zimbabwean society, which includes migrant communities and minorities who have migrated to cities. Protecting marginalized rural communities while improving the living conditions of the urban populations is one of the main challenges facing Zimbabwe. A government-supported initiative, Training for Rural Economic Development, was launched in 2014 with the aim of reducing rural–urban migration by providing more livelihood opportunities in local communities. ■



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**Case study** by *Inga Thiemann*  
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# The San in southern Africa – adjusting to urbanization as a first people

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Southern African countries have urbanized rapidly in the last few decades, with significant impacts on San indigenous populations in the entire region. Urbanization has not only threatened access to land among rural communities but also in areas where some measure of urbanization has taken place, while the government has failed to provide San residents with skills, education or other assets. Very few have been able to find secure and well remunerated work in towns and cities, while many continue to face severe discrimination.

In Namibia, the San's quality of life declined post-independence due to land redistribution and incidents of expulsion from their traditional grazing lands. They faced increasing obstacles to their hunter-gatherer culture, as most land was distributed among other ethnic groups. Post-independence, many San ended up seeking new livelihoods in nearby towns or migrating to communal areas occupied by other groups, for example in the Omaheke Region.

Many San households rely on food donations both from the Namibian government and NGOs, as well as state pensions as livelihood strategies. In many cases a basic government pension is the main source of household income. The Namibian Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2009/10 found that 20.1 per cent of Khoisan speakers were relying on this as their main source of income. The San use the pension money to cover the

costs of basic items for entire households, such as food, clothing and education-related expenses. However, many San households experience debt to the extent that most of the pension is spent on settling household debts on the day of the payout, leaving very little to survive on for the next month and resulting in further borrowing. Rural San often have difficulties accessing government pensions and other support schemes, as they lack identification documents or funds to travel to towns to register.

'Veldfood', a variety of fruits, roots, wild vegetables and worms gathered from uncultivated lands, remains a significant contributor to the San household diet, where possible. Gathering such food is both a cultural practice and a way



of supplementing insufficient and irregular food supplies. However, limitations on San access to land have restricted their ability to gather 'veldfood'. This is particularly true for San in settlements and on resettlement farms on commercial land, in urban areas with access only to small areas of land or on communal plots shared with cattle farmers from other ethnic groups.

The South African example of the San community at the Plantfontein farm shows that urbanization can have negative effects on the community, despite their access to the 'veld'. This community, consisting of San belonging to the !Xun and Khwe groups, lives under difficult sanitary conditions, with unstable

access to water, as well as issues of wastewater from neighbouring communities spilling into their 'veld'. Irregular sanitation servicing of the communities' dry toilets not only leads to increased risk of disease, but also forces many community members to defecate in the open, further contaminating one of the San's vital food sources and undermining a key opportunity for them to maintain deep-rooted cultural practices despite urbanization. ■

**Below: The traditional lifestyles of the San in Botswana, Namibia and across other parts of Southern Africa are constantly under threat from modernization programmes.**

*Aino Tuominen*





Alaska (US)

CANADA

NORTH  
PACIFIC

UNITED STATES

ATLANTIC  
OCEAN

Hawaiian Islands (US)

MEXICO

CUBA

DOMINICAN REP.

Puerto Rico (US)

BELIZE

JAMAICA

HONDURAS

GUATEMALA

EL SALVADOR

NICARAGUA

COSTA RICA

PANAMA

VENEZUELA

COLOMBIA

GUYANA

Guyane (Fr.)

SURINAM

ECUADOR

PERU

BRAZIL

BOLIVIA

PARAGUAY

SOUTH  
PACIFIC

CHILE

URUGUAY

ARGENTINA

# Americas

Mariah Grant, Alfredo Gutierrez Carrizo,  
Janet Oropeza Eng and Carolyn Stephens

# North America

Mariah Grant

Events in North America during 2014 were dominated by protests in the United States against the killings of two African Americans, Michael Brown and Eric Garner, by police. Both incidents were interpreted by demonstrators as reflecting institutionalized racism within the police force, provoking broader discussion of the inequalities experienced by black citizens, particularly in cities. Yet not only are these shared by other marginalized communities, including the country's indigenous population, but they also extend into education, health and employment. These disparities are especially evident in urban areas, where they are often manifested in pronounced physical, social and economic segregation.

**Below:** Navajo women perform a *jingle dress* dance during a powwow at Nakai Hall, Window Rock, Arizona, USA. *Donovan Shortey*

In Canada, though the proportion is lower than the national average, the majority of the country's indigenous population are based in towns or cities and now comprise the fastest growing segment of the urban population. Their experience of urbanization is characterized by widespread exclusion in access to housing, employment and a range of other areas, a reality that has not only contributed to the recruitment of some indigenous youth into criminal gangs but also the disproportionate rate of sexual violence suffered by indigenous girls and women in urban areas. This issue drew national attention during the year following the murder of 15-year-old Tina Fontaine in August and the subsequent attempted murder of 16-year-old Rinelle Harper in the city of Winnipeg. In Mexico, indigenous women in Ciudad Juárez, many of whom have migrated to the city in search of employment, continued to face similar levels of sexual violence during the year.

## Canada

According to the most recent census data from 2011, Canada's indigenous population now exceeds 1.4 million, comprised of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, all of whom have distinct ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds and traditions. Yet these communities also share





similarities, including a troubled history of land rights and jurisdictional violations by corporations and the Canadian government, as well as impediments to realizing self-determination and political representation. However, a landmark ruling in 2014 set a new precedent for indigenous land claims and demonstrated the ability of indigenous communities to successfully defend their traditional land titles against state and private interests. On 26 June, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled on the case, recognizing the title of the Tsilhqot'in Nation over approximately 1,700 square km of land south-west of Williams Lake, British Columbia. Aboriginal title as defined by *Delgamuukw vs. British Columbia* (1997) requires an indigenous people to prove that land was occupied by them solely prior to sovereignty, something no group had successfully done until this most recent case. In doing so, the Tsilhqot'in Nation proved that the British Columbia provincial government breached their duties to consult them 20 years ago prior to issuing logging licences on Tsilhqot'in Nation traditional lands.

The ruling therefore has wide implications for future development projects planned by the Canadian government over the next decade, amounting to C\$650 billion of investment in mining, forestry, gas and oil projects, many of them to be undertaken on traditional indigenous lands. In particular, the creation or extensions of pipelines from the oil sands of Alberta to other areas within Canada or onwards into the United States have been strongly opposed by indigenous communities. While the extension of the Keystone XL pipeline was hotly debated and protested against in the United States, other pipelines such as Enbridge's proposed C\$7 billion Northern Gateway pipeline, which would carry oil from Alberta to the coast of British Columbia, has been publicly opposed by First Nations since 2010. In the summer of 2014 several First Nations from British Columbia launched as many as nine legal challenges trying to block the pipeline and by September the legal case lodged by Gitxaala Nation became the first approved for hearing by the Federal Court of Appeal. As of January 2015, a total of 19 court challenges had been filed against the pipeline by various First Nations.

Despite these successes, significant political divisions led to the sudden resignation of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief, Shawn Atleo, on 2 May. His resignation came during a period of discord within the AFN over the federal government's proposed First Nation Education Bill, C-33, which Atleo supported. The bill was announced by the government in February 2014 with a promised C\$1.9 billion in new funding for indigenous education to support reforms aimed at raising the 40 per cent high school graduation rate among First Nations on reserves. However, there was significant opposition to the bill for a number of reasons, including a lack of control of curriculum development by First Nations themselves, as well as hostility among many First Nation chiefs towards the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. In May the federal government dropped the proposed bill, citing a lack of support among AFN leadership. In the months that followed three chiefs, Ghislain Picard, Leon Jourdain and Perry Bellegarde, vied to be elected the next AFN National Chief.

While Perry Bellegarde was elected on 9 December, concerns were raised over the absence of women candidates for the leadership role, as well as the organization's ineffectual lobbying of the federal government to address many ongoing issues, including legal investigations into the disappearance and murder of indigenous women. Though in February 2014 Amnesty International released a statement outlining the critical need not only for a government inquiry, but also a National Action Plan to address the severe violence faced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls in Canada, no steps were taken by the government during the year to do so.

For Canada's Afro-descendant population, 2014 was also distinguished by attempts at education reform. The first Africentric programme at a public Canadian high school was inaugurated during the 2013/14 academic year, with a class of 19 first-year high school students at east Toronto's Winston Churchill Collegiate. The programme was initiated amid controversy, with the initially proposed pilot school, Oakwood Collegiate, rejecting it due to an outcry from teachers, students and parents



over concerns about segregation and creating divisions among pupils. Despite this, by February 2014 the Africentric programme at Winston Churchill Collegiate was proving successful. The programme seeks to lower the 40 per cent high school drop-out rate among Toronto's Afro-descendant youth by providing core subjects that draw on African and Caribbean culture and history, and is strongly attuned to the skill levels of individual students.

Among Canada's religious minorities, and specifically the country's Muslim population, 2014 saw some positive developments in terms of political recognition and freedom of religious expression. Naheed Nenshi became the first Muslim mayor of a major city not only in Canada but throughout North America when elected as mayor of Calgary in 2010; he was awarded the prestigious World Mayor prize by the City Mayors Foundation in February 2015. In addition, the proposed Quebec Charter of Secular Values, bill 60, introduced by the Conservative Parti Québécois (PQ) in November 2013, was dropped by the Liberals following the August 2014 elections when they won control of the Quebec parliamentary government from the PQ. The bill had proposed banning government employees from wearing religious symbols at work. While it would have had implications for individuals of all religions, concerns were raised that it was specifically discriminatory against Muslim women who wear various forms of hijab. Yet despite this victory in defeating a bill that progressives denounced as racist and xenophobic, in January 2015, following the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris, an SOM survey found that 59 per cent of Quebecers were in favour of reviving the Charter of Secular Values and efforts to pass the bill were reignited among the PQ.

While Canada boasts a land mass totalling nearly 10 million square kilometres, making it the largest country in the Americas by territory, and the second-largest in the world after Russia, a significant majority of that land is uninhabitable due to extreme climates. As a result, the majority of the population resides in a small proportion of the country and is overwhelmingly urban, with 81 per cent of the population living in metropolitan areas. The proportion is lower

**Right:** Imam Syed Soharwardy pauses while talking to his fellow Muslims during a service against extremism in Calgary, Alberta, 2014. *REUTERS/Todd Korol*

among indigenous peoples – as of 2011, 56 per cent of indigenous peoples were living in urban areas in Canada, a 7 per cent increase from 1996. For Canada's First Nations, Inuit, Métis and other indigenous peoples these factors not only affect the rates of violence among women and girls from these groups, but also the increasingly urban indigenous population's ability to access social services as well as quality education, employment and housing. Furthermore, urban indigenous peoples now make up the fastest growing section of Canadian society, predominantly residing in the cities of Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, Ottawa-Gatineau, Montreal, Saskatoon and Regina.

In Winnipeg, which is home to the largest number of urban indigenous peoples in Canada, the first Métis mayor, Brian Bowman, was elected in November 2014. His election was seen as an important advance in bridging the growing sense of separation between the indigenous and non-indigenous population. This rift was made clear by a Probe Research survey released in October 2014 that revealed that 75 per cent of Winnipeggers surveyed believed ethnic division was a serious issue within the city. The view was consistently held by people of different backgrounds, with 74 per cent of indigenous peoples and 75 per cent of non-indigenous peoples in agreement.

One exacerbating factor in this division is the disproportionate impact of violent crime on some urban indigenous communities, particularly in relation to gang membership in Winnipeg. However, this is precipitated by a number of factors which influence gang and violent crime involvement. For the First Nations, Inuit and Métis of Winnipeg and other urban centres, discrimination, poverty, cultural alienation, spatial segregation, sub-standard housing and decreased access to labour markets have helped push many indigenous youth towards gang affiliation. Yet it is critical to also recognize the gains that have been made by the indigenous



population: in Winnipeg, the indigenous middle class is growing rapidly, thanks in part to increased access to better education.

Nevertheless, the urban exclusion that drives many into violent gangs has also contributed to increased rates of violence inflicted against indigenous women, which is also strongly associated with their secondary status based on gender and their belonging to a marginalized community. During the year, indigenous community groups were instrumental in increasing awareness about the high numbers of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, as part of the Idle No More movement. This was thanks in part to the efforts of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NAWC) as well as the release of a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) report in May 2014 which cited 1,017 homicides and 164 missing persons cases of indigenous women and girls between 1980 and 2012. Rights groups such as Amnesty International have also questioned the accuracy of available police statistics and believe the true figures may be much higher. What is certain is that indigenous women are disproportionately targeted. According to some estimates, for example, indigenous women aged

between 25 and 44 are five times more likely to die from violence than Canadian women of other ethnicities in the same age group.

In March 2014, prior to the release of the RCMP report, the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women presented their own report, *Invisible Women: A Call to Action*, during the 41st Parliament, Second Session. The report uncovered a number of significant yet varied factors contributing to the epidemic of disappearances and murders of indigenous women and girls, with one of the most defining being the deprivation, poor living conditions and discrimination experienced by many indigenous people on a routine basis. The report also revealed that 70 per cent of disappearances and 60 per cent of murders, according to available police statistics, occurred in urban areas.

While the prevalence of disappearances and murders of indigenous women and girls over the past 30 years was a focal point of public dialogue and local-level action in 2014, for most of the years prior there had been widespread public indifference. Indigenous peoples and women's rights groups, including the NAWC, have advocated for years with little success for

improved prevention initiatives. However, public apathy has begun to shift and over the last few years a number of individuals, women's groups and indigenous rights organizations have worked tirelessly to reduce violence against indigenous women and girls.

It was their efforts that helped ensure the murder of 15-year-old Tina Fontaine in August, as well as the sexual assault and attempted murder of 16-year-old Rinelle Harper in November, both in Winnipeg, did not go unnoticed. Multi-ethnic vigils were held and groups urged local officials to take action. As a result, the Police Service's Community Relations Unit met with leaders of five of the seven First Nations that fall under Treaty 1 to discuss the role indigenous men play in violence against women, while also identifying indigenous leaders who will stand up against gangs. On a broader level, Leah Gazan, the president of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, started the 'We Care' movement to raise awareness of violence against indigenous women among all Winnipeggers. Nevertheless, although local-level initiatives assisted in initiating dialogues and plans of action to address the root causes of the violence in Winnipeg and throughout Canada, the national-level response from the Harper government was dismissive of the social factors at play. Instead, the prime minister negated the findings of several federal, provincial and community studies by stating that this issue was not a 'sociological phenomenon' and needed to be addressed through crime-prevention tactics. In early 2015, however, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women released a report, supported by a statement from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), that found Canada's lack of action constituted a 'grave rights violation' against indigenous women and girls.

## United States

In the first half of the year the early effects of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which seeks to expand access to affordable and quality health insurance, began to be felt across the United States. Previously uninsured and poor populations – disproportionately represented by minorities of various ethnic backgrounds – were

**Right:** Demonstrators protest the shooting of unarmed teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Brown was shot by a police officer in August 2014, sparking sometimes violent protests. *Panos/Hossein Fatemi*

especially targeted for enrolment. In California and Connecticut new methods were employed during the second open enrolment period for health insurance coverage under the ACA at the end of 2014 to reach out to Latinos and African Americans, particularly young men in urban areas. In light of this a new strategy was initiated, using community newspapers and local media to advertise the benefits of signing up for coverage through the ACA that would more readily access Latino and African American men in urban centres. By the end of the year, the proportion of the country's uninsured population had fallen from 18 per cent in 2010, when the ACA was signed into law, to 13.4 per cent.

But while a majority of states expanded health care coverage to this demographic through Medicaid as part of their implementation of the Act, 16 states refused to do so, impeding access to health insurance for those most in need of coverage. Among them was Texas, where a highly restrictive anti-abortion law that took effect on 1 September has forced many of the state's abortion clinics to close. By the end of the year, only one continued to operate south of San Antonio. This specifically hinders Latina women, who represent a large percentage of those living along the Texas–Mexico border, from accessing sexual and reproductive health care.

Indigenous land rights continued to be threatened by major development projects, specifically linked to the extractive and fossil fuel industries. Throughout 2014 indigenous groups in the United States, including the Ponca Nation and Oglala Lakota, led land rights movements in opposition to a bill that would allow the expansion of the Keystone XL pipeline connecting the oil sands in Alberta, Canada to Steele City, Nebraska. The bill was subsequently vetoed by President Barack Obama in February 2015.

A surge of unaccompanied minors from Mexico and Central America arriving in the US in spring 2014 set off heated debates surrounding



the country's immigration policy, including the detention of children. One positive milestone for many of the country's immigrants was Obama's announcement at the end of the year of an executive action which would potentially provide amnesty for nearly 4.9 million undocumented migrants. The Board of Immigration Appeals also made a watershed ruling that 'married women in Guatemala who are unable to leave their relationships' constitute a unique social group who may apply for asylum. Both measures attracted strong resistance, and at the beginning of 2015 the Amnesty Bill was put in jeopardy as Republicans in the House of Representatives sought out means by which to cut the required funding to the Department of Homeland Security.

Yet the event that arguably had the greatest implications for minority rights during the year, sparking protests and allegations of institutionalized racism in the country's police force, was the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old African American, by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri on 9 August. Although witness testimony is conflicting, Brown was described by some as holding his hands up while he was shot

repeatedly. In the ensuing weeks, the streets of Ferguson were filled with demonstrators who believed that Brown's death reflected widespread racial prejudice among law enforcement personnel. Though there were incidents of looting and arson of local businesses, the response by police was also criticized as excessive. Within a week a state of emergency was declared in the suburb and a midnight curfew was enforced.

The demonstrations and violence in Ferguson led to ongoing discussions about ethnic profiling and the incidence of homicide by police while on duty in the United States. This is a particular problem in its cities, where ethnic minorities are often concentrated – in 22 of the country's 100 largest urban areas, they now make up a majority of the population – as evidenced by statistics on police stops and street interrogations in New York City. Data collected by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) since 2002 on the use of 'stop-and-frisk' by the New York Police Department (NYPD) shows that, of those individuals engaged by the NYPD officers, 54 per cent were African American despite them making up just 25.5 per cent of the city's population. Nearly 9 out of 10 of those targeted were completely innocent, a fact corroborated by the

NYPD's own reports.

Research published during the year, drawing on data between 2010 and 2012, revealed that African American men and boys are 21 times more likely to be killed by on-duty police officers than their non-Latino white counterparts. In 2014 some of these individuals included Akai Gurley, Ezell Ford and Rumain Brisbon, though one of the most high-profile incidents was the killing of 43-year-old Eric Garner by an NYPD officer on 17 July in Staten Island, New York. The arrest and fatal choking of Garner, who was unarmed, were captured on video and quickly spread across the internet. In the video Garner can be heard pleading, 'I can't breathe' 11 times. This plea, along with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, soon became rallying cries of the anti-police brutality and racial equality movements in the United States. Popular outrage was further inflamed by grand jury rulings towards the end of the year that closed criminal proceedings against both officers involved in the Brown and Garner killings, triggering further protests in cities across the country.

However, though protests during the year focused almost exclusively on incidents of police brutality against the African American population, in recent years indigenous people have been killed by law enforcement at nearly the same rate as African Americans. While garnering little to no media attention, indigenous groups utilized the hashtag #NativeLivesMatter to galvanize support within their community and to highlight the disproportionate levels of police brutality experienced by some of the 5.2 million indigenous people in the country. As is the case with African Americans, these incidents occur against a broader backdrop of social disenfranchisement: 27 per cent of indigenous people live below the poverty line nationwide, compared to a national average of 14.3 per cent, and with more than 70 per cent of indigenous people now residing in urban areas these high poverty rates are now experienced significantly within metropolitan settings. Furthermore, indigenous people living in urban areas also encounter increased impediments to accessing education, employment and health care: for instance, only about 1 per cent of spending by the Indian Health Service is allotted to urban

programmes. While these issues intersect with some of the inequalities experienced by other ethnic minorities in urban areas, indigenous peoples have experienced discrimination where other ethnic minorities have found opportunities, particularly in relation to accessing urban labour markets.

One contributing factor to the tensions that arise in urban areas between minority or indigenous communities and law enforcement agencies is the involvement of some members in violent crime, including gang membership. However, this occurs among the complexities of social, political and economic exclusion that fuel criminal behaviour – factors that are often overlooked in public discussions of urban violence within minority communities. The simplistic and discriminatory representation of these issues was reflected in comments by former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who stated in an interview in the wake of Ferguson that '93 per cent of blacks are killed by other blacks' and argued that attention should be focused on reducing crime within African American communities rather than the killing of Brown by a white police officer, which Giuliani regarded as 'the significant exception'.

While Giuliani's comments were criticized by many commentators as harmfully reductive and misleading, evidence suggests that crime within African American communities is disproportionately high, with African Americans being four times more likely to die from homicide compared to the national average. However, in addressing urban violence it is not useful or effective to reinforce the inaccurate notion that members of minority communities form the overwhelming majority of perpetrators. New research on gang membership is evidence of this. A joint report from the US Department of Justice (DoJ) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reveals that the use of law enforcement data creates incorrect perceptions about the ethnic make-up of gangs. The National Gang Center relies heavily on this data set and in doing so reports that 84 per cent of gang members belong to ethnic minorities. However, when these statistics are combined with self-reporting studies, the demographic of gang membership changes considerably. This is

the case in the evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education Training (GREAT) programme, which indicates that nationally about 25 per cent of gang members are non-Latino whites. The report further notes that the factors driving gang membership should not be simplified in these terms: 'most risk factors cut across racial and ethnic lines, including the negative consequences associated with poverty, immigration, discrimination and social isolation'.

The protests against the killings of Brown and Garner were also demonstrations against segregation in the cities of the United States. Demonstrators filled the country's metropolitan freeways as a means to draw attention to the historical role they have played in dividing urban populations, dating back to 1956 when Congress passed the Interstate Highway Act. This facilitated the expansion of suburban, mostly white and middle-class neighbourhoods and assisted in the overall economic growth of the United States. However, the ramifications within urban areas are still felt today, as freeways frequently divided them along ethnic lines, isolating majority from minority communities. Urban infrastructure, along with other development projects and subsequent housing schemes, helped establish spatial segregation. Other factors include the movement of non-Latino white households out of integrated neighbourhoods, self-segregation by minority communities and, more recently, discriminatory gentrification projects in minority neighbourhoods.

Decades of research has tried to determine to what extent spatial segregation impacts on minorities in urban areas and issues such as educational attainment, social isolation, housing, poverty and health. In Chicago, a 2012 joint report from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and the Center on Human Needs at Virginia Commonwealth University found that ethnic segregation in the city's neighbourhoods caused as much as a 33-year difference in life expectancy between non-Latino white residents and certain minorities. However, other recent studies based in Chicago and elsewhere have suggested that African American and other non-Latino minorities were more likely to report poorer health while living in

predominantly non-Latino white neighbourhoods compared to those living in segregated minority neighbourhoods. One rationale given for this, substantiated by past studies, is that social isolation of minorities living within non-Latino white neighbourhoods leads to higher incidence of poor health.

Another issue that is especially acute within urban areas is educational inequality, with new evidence demonstrating continued school segregation, particularly within the country's inner cities. A report from the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights from March 2014 identifies that African American and Latino students on average have less access to rigorous educational programmes and are more frequently taught by lower-paid teachers with less experience. Furthermore, African American students are four times as likely and Latino students are twice as likely as non-Latino white students to attend schools where one out five teachers do not meet all state teaching requirements. The same Department of Education report found that ethnic minorities are more likely to be suspended or expelled overall, and that African American students are three times as likely to be suspended or expelled compared to their white peers. Though the reasons for the increasing segregation within the schooling system are diverse, there are clear indications that school zoning policies favour affluent neighbourhoods, leaving minority students from poor inner-city areas disadvantaged and forced to attend under-resourced schools. The movement towards privately funded charter schools is also exacerbating unequal access to quality education among the country's youth.

Sub-standard education for poor students attending schools in less affluent neighbourhoods, as is the case for many minority children, has a lifetime effect on their future economic well-being. Furthermore, limited educational opportunities for minority students have been associated with a phenomenon known as the 'school-to-prison pipeline', particularly as the expansion of police officers inside schools has led to increased contact with the criminal justice system. Infractions which were previously dealt with by teachers and school administrators now lead to fines and even incarceration in juvenile facilities. This experience has long-term



ramifications, as children and adolescents sent to juvenile facilities are 37 times more likely to be arrested again as adults. Students with criminal records are further marginalized in some school districts through the use of alternative schools, which segregate them from the general student population. The discrimination faced by African American and other ethnic minorities within the school system is borne out in their disproportionate incarceration rates in the country's prisons, with African Americans accounting for 41 per cent of those imprisoned despite making up just 13 per cent of the national population.

Housing in urban areas of the United States has played a long-standing and important role in establishing and maintaining segregation. The 1937 United States Housing Act (USHA) led to large-scale public housing projects nationwide, which accelerated in the country's urban centres in the 1950s and 1960s. Ethnic minorities have historically been over-represented among those in public housing within city centres. The USHA housing scheme has also been associated with high crime rates and perpetuating cycles of poverty. By the 1990s a number of major cities, including Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia and New Orleans, began tearing down public housing units, replacing them with mixed-income housing. The full impact of this shift in urban housing is not yet known, and controversy remains over whether it is helping to alleviate segregation or simply pricing low-income and working-class families out of their neighbourhoods.

In the years prior to the recent housing crisis in the United States, a shift in the urban demographic took place as African Americans started moving to the suburbs – a product of the demolition of public housing but also a developing African American middle class. During this period, owning a home became a reality for more and more minorities, with home ownership among African Americans and Latinos peaking in 2006 at the beginning of the recession. However, home ownership throughout the country began to stall in 2007 and dropped off steadily in 2008 when the housing market crashed. Since then, an increasing amount of evidence has shown that minorities were

exceptionally hard hit. This was due to a number of factors, including predatory lending tactics by banks that saw African Americans and Latinos taking out a disproportionate number of risky subprime mortgages and high-cost loans. This led to massive foreclosures on homes owned by minorities, with certain urban areas, such as Detroit and Atlanta, particularly devastated.

However, throughout 2014 the effects of the recession continued to subside. In December unemployment declined to its lowest rate since mid-2008, the housing market was bouncing back and more people in the United States were once again buying homes. Yet the economic recovery did not benefit everyone equally, as African Americans and Latinos continued to face high rates of unemployment and under-employment, as well as foreclosures and discrimination in accessing home loans. One factor in this unequal recovery is that minorities experienced significantly greater losses as a result of the recession: Federal Reserve Data shows that from 2010 to 2013 the median income of minority households fell 9 per cent, compared to 1 per cent for non-Latino whites. Home ownership among minorities during that same period fell from 50.6 per cent to 47.4 per cent, but among non-Latino whites the period saw a reduction from 75.3 per cent to 73.9 per cent. The decline in home ownership also disproportionately harmed minorities, particularly African Americans. One reason is that financial assets, such as stocks and bonds, have recovered in value quicker than housing, which non-Latino white households are more likely to own through retirement accounts compared to minority households. Therefore, during the foreclosure crisis when African Americans and Latinos lost their homes they were also frequently losing their main asset and source of savings.

Furthermore, in 2014 a new trend in the housing market emerged that is unequally harming certain minority groups, particularly in urban areas most affected by the recession. Home equity firms are buying up large numbers of foreclosed houses in these areas and then renting them back out, frequently to African Americans and Latinos who lost their homes during the crisis. This has, in part, led to what was described by Housing Secretary Shaun

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**Case study** by *Mariah Grant*  
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# Detroit – rebuilding the city from the bottom up

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Throughout the recent recession in the United States, the city of Detroit, Michigan was seen as a cautionary tale of economic boom and bust within the country's urban centres. Nicknamed Motor City, USA, Detroit was the thriving epicentre of the automobile industry from its early days in the 1900s to the 1950s, when the city boasted 296,000 manufacturing jobs. However, by the end of the 1950s the automobile industry began a slow decline, culminating in the 2009 bankruptcy of auto-giants Chrysler and General Motors. With the fall of the industry, among other factors, came the economic decline of the city itself. On 18 July 2013, a bankruptcy petition was formally filed on behalf of Detroit.

During this period of industrial and economic decline, the population also drastically decreased, dropping 25 per cent between 2000 and 2010 alone. Yet mass migration from the city did not happen equally among Detroit's residents. The make-up of the city is unlike that found in the country as a whole as ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans, make up the overwhelming majority of Detroit's population. This has become even more evident in the wake of the recession as a disproportionate number of the city's white residents have left: in the meantime, the share of ethnic minorities, particularly Latinos, has continued to increase.

The most visible effects of Detroit's decline have been pored over repeatedly in media reports across the world, including the dereliction of its housing stock, the shutting off of water supplies to certain areas and the

bulldozing of entire neighbourhoods. What attracts less attention is the array of community-led initiatives under way to revitalize the economy and rebuild local areas. However, this process has been slow and far from easy as old barriers, particularly racial discrimination, persist.

For Lauren Hood, a life-long resident of Detroit and Community Engagement Manager at Loveland Technology, a company working on mapping blight in the city and making such data widely accessible, moving forward starts with looking back. 'When people get to Detroit and they want to work on revitalization efforts', she says:

*'they don't take into account the prior racial history – Detroit has always been one of the most segregated cities. People need to be talking about racism and inequity before they can start to take different ideas back to the places where they work and start to do things differently.'*

To help facilitate these dialogues, Hood runs a racial equity training programme to encourage 'some critical thinking', as she puts it.

*'There's so much out there about Detroit that people just read it and accept it on face value, but people need to be asking questions and thinking about things and not just accepting it because they heard it five different times. People need to do more research, and what I'm always hoping for is people leave [the trainings] with more questions.'*

Kirk Mayes, another life-long Detroiter and the CEO of Forgotten Harvest, a non-profit formed in 1990 to relieve hunger and prevent nutritious food waste in the Detroit metropolitan area, emphasizes the role that community programmes can also play in reducing divisions. In his years working on various economic and social development projects, including Forgotten Harvest, he has learned that:

*'no matter what color we are, no matter what we believe, love looks a lot the same, fear looks a lot the same, who you care about as far as parents and kids, it looks a lot the same. We focus so much on our differences because our differences are what we basically get thrown in front of our face every day for whatever reason and not enough about our very basic similarities as human beings.'*

According to Mayes, Forgotten Harvest plays an important role in breaking down barriers and connecting people of different backgrounds through their community volunteer opportunities within their food processing warehouse and community farm. Mayes felt that the organization, 'is

contributing to helping our region heal and providing a platform for people around us to contribute to people who are in the most need'. And he emphasizes the positive energy that communities are now creating themselves.

*'Truly, in order to understand what's happening in Detroit and to get a feel for the vibe of the revitalization, that is very palpable and tangible here – there is a part of the experience that you just have to feel and witness for yourself.'*

This is not to say that Detroit does not have its problems, including the painful physical realities of a city shrinking rapidly from its former size. 'We have a lot of vacant houses,' says Rico Razo, District 6 manager at the office of Mayor Mike Duggan. This can create serious issues for neighbours as abandoned houses, besides their demoralizing effects, can have health and crime implications. To address the issue, a volunteer group called 'Operation Detroit Blight Fight' was set up. Razo highlighted that within his district, which has the highest Hispanic population, the team would spend every Sunday helping seniors with clean-up and boarding up unoccupied houses. At present the group has 100 members and an official kick-off was launched on 31 March 2015 in commemoration of César Chávez Day.

Razo recognizes that Detroit's divisions have not gone away. 'Some of the areas that may not have demolition dollars, they don't see houses coming down in their neighbourhoods, they don't see revitalization happening, they're still saying we have two cities.' Nevertheless, though aware of the challenges ahead, he remains cautiously optimistic about the future. ■



**Left: Derelict buildings currently being redeveloped by a non-profit organization called Face the Station, who are working to renew the area opposite Michigan Central Station, Detroit, 2014. S. J. Carey**

Donovan as ‘the worst rental affordability crisis that this country has ever known’. In Los Angeles, for example, where Latinos make up 48.3 per cent of the city’s population, residents are now experiencing the highest rent to income ratio of any city in the country. Yet within certain neighbourhoods in Los Angeles, community-led initiatives are working to provide affordable housing as well as social services. The Esperanza Community Housing Corporation (Esperanza) is one such initiative. Established in 1989 to respond to development projects that threatened destruction of homes within the Figueroa Corridor neighbourhood, where 70 per cent of residents are Latino with the rest a mix of African Americans, Asians and non-Latino whites, the organization began providing affordable housing, health, arts, education and economic development programmes. By the end of 2014 Esperanza had completed nine affordable housing developments totalling 165 units, and had begun the Mercado La Paloma community revitalization and entrepreneurship project, and initiated the Semillas de Esperanza (‘Seeds of Hope’) community garden, all the while continuing to provide a number of services to the local community.

# Central America

Janet Oropeza Eng

Throughout 2014, the situation for Central America’s minorities and indigenous peoples continued to be characterized by dispossession of land, targeted violence and other rights violations by criminal gangs, paramilitary groups and security forces. In many cases, these incidents are associated with state-sponsored development projects, agri-business and natural resource exploitation, enabled by limited land rights and widespread impunity for the perpetrators of these abuses. As a result, thousands of people belonging to indigenous and Afro-descendant communities were displaced during the year across the region.

Insecurity, poverty and dispossession of communal land have all contributed to migration, often forced, to urban areas among these groups. While cities potentially offer the possibility of employment, basic services and other benefits, in practice discrimination and violence are frequently recreated in urban areas – meaning that indigenous and minority residents continue to struggle with similar issues of poverty and marginalization.

## Guatemala

Guatemala had nearly 16 million inhabitants in 2014. According to official statistics, approximately 40 per cent are indigenous; however, according to indigenous peoples’ representatives, the true figure is closer to 60 per cent. The indigenous community in Guatemala comprises 22 different peoples, including K’iche’, Kaqchikel, Mam, Q’eqchi’ and Matan, while the country also has a small community of Garifuna people, amounting to less than 1 per cent of the population. This makes Guatemala a rich and culturally diverse country.

During 2014, ongoing aggression against human rights defenders by security forces or paramilitary groups persisted. From January to September 2014, 60 attacks against indigenous and environmental activists defending indigenous lands were reported. The deployment of 20,000 military throughout the country to oversee public security in 2014 is expected to exacerbate this volatile situation. The extractive industry model promoted by the Guatemalan government and the construction of large-scale development projects on indigenous lands without community consent has been a source of ongoing disputes with resistance movements. These conflicts are exacerbated by the fact that the existing legal mechanisms available for indigenous communities seeking to defend their rights to land and to free, prior, and informed consent are not effective tools for this purpose.

For example, two large-scale development projects involving a hydroelectric scheme in Margaritas Copón and a dam in Santa Rita were carried out by the government in 2014, despite the opposition of Q’eqchi’ Mayan people. In the first case, 15,000 Q’eqchi’ Mayans were forcibly evicted, even though they voted against



**Above:** Mayan children in San Lucas Tolimán, Guatemala, 2014. *Gary Fikes*

the construction of it in a binding referendum. In the second case, indigenous protests against the project were violently repressed in August resulting in three Q'eqchi' Mayan casualties, in addition to a previous fatality and many people injured during an earlier attack in April.

Indigenous farmers have also been involved in increasing conflict over the possession of their lands. In 2013, the Ministry for Agrarian Issues reported that nearly 60 per cent of the land conflicts' plaintiffs were indigenous farmers.

The justice system and the rule of law also encountered important setbacks during 2014. Former president Efraín Ríos Mont's May 2013 conviction for the genocide committed during the civil war, including the deaths of more than 1,700 Ixil Mayans, the displacement of another 29,000 and numerous other rights abuses, did not make any progress. A congressional resolution passed in May denying that acts of genocide had occurred during the civil war decreased victims' chances of achieving the justice

process which they have long demanded.

The removal by the Constitutional Court of Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz the same month, based on the argument that her term was legally already over, was interpreted by many as a deliberate effort to undermine ongoing reforms to the justice system as she had prosecuted a number of perpetrators and tried to end impunity in Guatemala.

The systematic marginalization of indigenous communities from the country's political, social and economic life, despite representing a large proportion of the population, continues with no meaningful efforts by the government to overcome it. The two government agencies in charge of preventing and addressing ethnic discrimination, namely the Indigenous Women's Public Defender Office and the Presidential Commission against Racism and Discrimination, lack the financial and human resources to perform their duties. In July, indigenous community groups protested throughout the country to raise awareness about the discrimination that indigenous peoples face.

During 2014, women in Guatemala continued



to experience disproportionate levels of violence and marginalization, despite serious reforms to improve laws on equality and violence prevention. Sexual violence, maternal mortality and femicide – Guatemala has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world – remain ongoing issues, along with political representation: as of 2012, less than 10 per cent of elected legislators –15 in all – were indigenous and, of these, only four were indigenous women.

During 2014 there were also some positive developments for minority and indigenous communities. These included the investigation and prosecution of a number of perpetrators, resulting from a collaborative effort on the part of the United Nations International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and the Attorney General's Office. In June, two former soldiers were arrested in a case concerning the sexual assaults of 15 Q'eqchi' Mayan women in 1982 in Zarco, followed by the arrest shortly afterwards of three former policemen in relation to the 1990 murder of Myrna Mack, an anthropologist working on and defending indigenous peoples' rights.

There was also progress regarding the redress of thousands of Maya Achi indigenous people and their family members who were either displaced or massacred over the construction of the Chixoy dam in the 1980s. Following an Act passed in 2014 by the US Congress that denied financial aid to Guatemala unless it implemented reparations for the people affected by the dam, President Otto Pérez Molina publicly apologized to the victims and signed an agreement to execute a reparations plan for the affected indigenous communities. The plan has a budget of US\$154 million and includes the construction of housing, infrastructure and other amenities for the affected communities, as well as land restitution. This case sets a historic precedent for redressing violations of indigenous peoples' rights over the past decades as well as ongoing land conflicts. Furthermore, in August a local court in Sipicapa ruled that mining permits and activities are illegal if local communities have not been given information and are not consulted. This ruling set legal precedents for indigenous movements upholding their land rights. The case involved a prospecting permit that was issued without

prior consultation to Entre Mares de Guatemala S.A., a subsidiary of Canadian mining company Goldcorp Inc.

Guatemala's long civil war, ongoing conflicts related to large-scale development or extractive projects and extreme rural poverty have all contributed to the migration of indigenous people from rural to urban areas, mostly to Guatemala City. This migration has added pressure to a metropolitan area that has historically lacked proper planning policies, with a large proportion – over 40 per cent – of the city's population living in slums or shanty towns. Following this pattern, indigenous people migrating to Guatemala City and other urban areas have established or settled in informal and unplanned urban spaces or shanty towns that lack proper basic public services, such as water and health care, and are often located in dangerous or inaccessible areas.

Indigenous people in Guatemala's urban areas experience high levels of discrimination and exclusion based on their ethnic background, dress and language. Since many do not speak Spanish and wear their traditional clothes, they are marginalized from the formal labour market, limiting their opportunities to access social security and a better income. For example, according to one estimate, 80 per cent of maids working in private homes are indigenous. Because of their concentration in such low-paid jobs, indigenous families in Guatemala's urban areas mobilize all their members, including children, to work.

Though indigenous peoples are under-represented and excluded from political life and decision making across the country, despite representing at least 40 per cent of the population, they do typically have more representation in local government. Nevertheless, the major political parties and local authorities continue to exclude indigenous peoples from their structures and do not uphold their demands and rights. The only existing indigenous political party, Winaq, usually wins only around 3.5 per cent of the vote and has limited financial resources.

Guatemala's urban areas continue to experience high levels of urban violence, which particularly affects indigenous peoples, especially indigenous



women. Urban violence has been shaped by a long-established pattern of gender violence against indigenous women that goes back to the Guatemalan civil war, when they were seen as ‘trophies’. Currently, indigenous women are the most targeted victims of human rights violations.

Nonetheless, urban spaces can also provide greater opportunities for indigenous development. In this regard, a study found that human development among indigenous peoples is higher in Guatemala’s urban areas than in rural areas. Since it is likely that many indigenous people who are forcibly displaced to urban areas become permanently settled in their new locations, as the government is not helping them secure their property nor resettle, inclusive urban planning policies that consider and consult indigenous communities are urgently required. This demand has come from indigenous people themselves. This was illustrated in 2014 when local Mayan communities in Guatemala City opposed the construction of a US\$60 million Maya Museum of America, arguing that they had not been consulted about the plan and could be adversely affected as the proposed development would demolish a long-established Mayan arts and crafts market, hosting 55 small businesses.

## Honduras

Honduras has reportedly had the highest murder rates in the world for the past several years, sustained by a widespread culture of impunity and human rights violations. Against a backdrop of violence and insecurity related to gangs, drug cartels and land grabs, many communities have been forcibly displaced. For example, in Mosquitia in north-eastern Honduras, according to reports during the year, five indigenous communities have been forced to abandon some or all of their territories after they were appropriated by drug traffickers. Clandestine landing strips – surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed men – have been a particular problem as they block community access to traditional lands and bring gang violence to previously remote areas.

The state’s response to this upsurge in violence has focused on increasing militarization, an approach that has contributed to the deteriorating situation in the country. In this

context, human rights organizations and the Ombudsman Office have expressed concern about a military police force deployed in 2014 to perform security duties. The judiciary is a largely ineffective channel for accessing justice and recent legislative reforms have further undermined its independence. In 2014, a case involving the killing of murdered four unarmed indigenous Miskito people, two of them pregnant women, during an operation against drug traffickers, was dismissed. The families of the victims appealed the ruling. Violence against women is also widespread, with an estimated 453 women reported to have been killed between January and November 2014.

Journalists and human rights defenders continue to be intimidated or murdered without adequate investigations by police and judiciary. Honduras was recently described in a report by the NGO Global Witness as the most dangerous country in the world to be an environmental activist, with 101 deaths between 2010 and 2014. Most of these victims were indigenous and minority representatives defending their lands against the construction of large-scale development projects, extractive industries or agri-businesses. Examples include opposition to the Agua Zarca hydro-dam on the Gualcarque River; anti-mining resistance in northern Honduras by Tolupán leaders; and the Bajo Aguán movement conflict over palm oil industries. In all these cases, activists have been terrorized or murdered, often with the complicity of security forces.

Nevertheless, there were some positive developments during the year. In August, José Arnulfo Jiménez, a former member of the military who committed abuses against the press and civilians during the coup d’état in 2009, was sentenced to five years in prison. Congress also discussed draft legislation to protect human rights defenders, environmentalists, journalists and other groups from intimidation and violence.

Around 40 per cent of indigenous peoples and Afro-Hondurans are based in urban areas, significantly lower than the proportion (60 per cent) of Latinos and *mestizos* (mixed ethnicity). Indigenous peoples are spread across different regions of the country, while Afro-Hondurans are located, for the most part, along the Atlantic

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**Case study** by *Kara Chiuchiarelli*  
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# The Garifuna's battle to protect their land from urban development in Honduras' 'Banana Coast'

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Land rights are an ongoing struggle for Honduras' Garifuna community, who for decades have faced forced eviction and the sale of titled communal lands as their territory has been appropriated for mining, oil extraction and palm oil cultivation. But communities are now being displaced to secure access to another resource – their pristine coastline. 'There is now a process of expulsion of our people from Honduras,' according to one local Garifuna community member. 'From tourism to extraction megaprojects, the initiatives have been imposed without making the necessary consultations. "Model cities" are the latest forms of dispossession that affect us.'

In the early 2000s, the national Honduran government declared a plan to develop a resort in Trujillo, along the lines of Cancún in Mexico, despite the fact that those beaches had been granted as title lands to the Garifuna a century before. This plan has led Canadian developers to buy up land – including land titled to the Garifuna people – in Trujillo for vacation homes and a cruise ship port called 'Banana Coast', themed around what the developer has described as the 'glory days' of the region's banana trade in the first half of the twentieth century. This was a period when foreign industries appropriated vast tracts of Honduras land and established considerable control over the area, with little regard for the wishes, traditions and cultures of the local people.

Now the community is having to defend its

land against development plans by the Honduran government.

Today, tourism development seems likely to have similar effects. Efforts to urbanize Trujillo and its surrounding coastal communities threaten the Garifuna's traditional lifestyle, cultural heritage and identity as a people. Though the unique value of Garifuna culture is widely recognized – in 2001, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared Garifuna culture one of nineteen Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity – the community is already struggling to preserve its rich heritage in the face of entrenched poverty and discrimination.

The community now faces a range of other challenges, including climate change, environmental vulnerability and HIV/AIDS. While Garifuna community members need greater access to employment and other opportunities, these are unlikely to be realized if development is simply imposed on their territory without their consultation or consent. In this context, empowering local Garifuna is an essential step in their fight to protect their ancestral territory from a form of urbanization that largely excludes them. ■

coast. Both groups, besides facing entrenched discrimination and limited access to essential services, have struggled to defend their lands in a context where land tenure ownership has not been fully resolved: only about 10 per cent of indigenous peoples, for example, have a government-accredited land title. Violence, land grabbing and deep poverty in rural areas has forced indigenous peoples to migrate from the countryside to cities in search of security and employment.

Migration has posed considerable challenges to Honduran cities, which lack adequate planning policies or infrastructure to serve this growing population. As a result, many minority and indigenous migrants have settled in shanty towns or urban belts that lack transportation, public security or basic services. For example, there are more than 400 informal settlements located around the capital, Tegucigalpa, in earthquake-prone areas of the city. Minority and indigenous communities in Honduran cities continue to face ethnic discrimination, poverty and marginalization. In major centres such as Tegucigalpa or San Pedro Sula, a culture of national unity has long been promoted based on *mestizo* values – another factor promoting discrimination, as it leaves little room for minority and indigenous expression. Indigenous and Afro-Honduran migrants also struggle to access urban labour markets due to discrimination, with many ending up in low-paid or informal employment. An added difficulty is that Honduran cities have among the highest rates of urban violence in the world, exacerbated by rapid urban growth: San Pedro Sula was recently ranked as the most violent city worldwide outside a conflict zone. Due to their marginalization, minority and indigenous urban residents, particularly women, are highly vulnerable.

Nonetheless, living in urban areas can offer opportunities for marginalized groups to access services and other benefits. For example, in terms of education, a 2011 National Survey of the Perception on Human Development revealed that indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants had higher literacy levels in cities: 94 per cent of those in urban areas are able to read and write, with an average of 8.5 years of schooling, compared to 79 per cent and 4.3 years in rural areas.

# South America

Alfredo Gutierrez Carrizo and  
Carolyn Stephens

Ahead of the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in New York in September 2014, the Indigenous Forum of Aba Yala – a collection of indigenous organizations from different countries across South America and neighbouring areas – issued a declaration highlighting the continued discrimination faced by indigenous communities and, in particular, the destructive impacts of mining, forestry and other industries on their development. Among other demands, the Aba Yala Declaration called for ‘the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the evaluation of the post-2015 agenda, based on self-determination, autonomy and territoriality, free, prior and informed consent, spirituality, interculturality, women and youth, reciprocity and solidarity’. The outcome document of the WCIP, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly, included a reaffirmation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as the principle of free, prior and informed consent. The outcome document went on to list a series of commitments to strengthen the position of indigenous peoples, including the development of disaggregated and holistic data on indigenous well-being ‘to address the situation and needs of indigenous peoples and individuals, in particular older persons, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities’. These texts represent increased recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples internationally as well as in the region. While 1 January 2015 also marked the launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent, many Afro-Latin communities still struggle to achieve the same level of acknowledgement, particularly as they have often been invisible in official data sources. In Chile, for example, Afro-Chileans were not included as a separate ethnicity on national censuses and

other surveys until 2014, when the government launched the first ever study on their community – an important milestone, given that their efforts to be included in the 2012 census had been unsuccessful.

Both indigenous and Afro-descendant groups, however, share similar challenges of targeted violence, dispossession from communal lands and limited access to health, education and livelihood opportunities. To varying degrees these factors are driving displacement and migration across the region, particularly in Colombia, where ongoing conflict and insecurity have forcibly uprooted tens of thousands in 2014 alone. This mass displacement and migration in turn is driving increased urbanization, even from more remote communities.

In other cases, while they have not always received much coverage, indigenous and Afro-Latin communities have been based in urban areas for generations. Though many are resident in the region's megacities, capitals and other major centres, including many migrants in search of education and employment, a large proportion of the urban population is also based in smaller towns that act as a hub for isolated communities. These settlements may be predominantly inhabited by indigenous or Afro-Latin communities, often in relatively inaccessible locations such as Brazil's Amazonia region, with strong links to the surrounding rural hinterlands as inhabitants travel back and forth to access provisions and services.

Urbanization can improve the lives of indigenous and minority populations by providing them with better access to essential services such as education. Urban areas have even supported the strengthening of identity among these groups as their concentration in cities can provide opportunities for activism and political mobilization. Nevertheless, in practice their experience in cities is often characterized by poverty, violence and poor living conditions in low-income settlements. While gaining in terms of access to urban services, they also struggle to maintain their traditional cultures and languages in urban contexts. Sustainable and inclusive urban development, then, though often overlooked in general discussions about the region's indigenous peoples and minorities, could

play a major role in improving the situation of these communities even in rural areas as the impacts of urbanization are increasingly felt even in remote parts of the region.

## Argentina

Historically, Argentina had an extensive and diverse indigenous civilization. According to the 2010 census – though it was criticized at the time by some communities who believed that the minority and indigenous populations were under-represented in the final count – Argentina has a population of over 40 million people. The 2010 census counted a total of 955,032 people self-defining themselves as indigenous – forming 2.4 per cent of the national population. This was 355,000 more than the estimated number of self-identified indigenous produced in a special 2004 indigenous survey. This increase in self-identification reflects a change in attitudes towards indigeneity, particularly among urban young people, who are now more willing to self-identify as indigenous. There is also better understanding within Argentina of the country's strong indigenous roots. Despite the still low proportion of people self-defining themselves as indigenous, a 2014 DNA study of the Argentine population for the WCIP found that 56 per cent of Argentines have at least a measure of indigenous DNA.

A further 150,000 people in the 2010 census – the first to measure ethnic minorities as distinct groups – self-identified as Afro-Argentines, less than 1 per cent of the national population. This group has long been invisible in the country, but there is now an increasing willingness to self-identify and a renewed awareness of the community's rich heritage. Argentina's Afro-descendant community originated in the slave trade, a fact that has a bearing on their continued discrimination today. However, a UNESCO-sponsored programme, *Sitios de Memoria*, has been developing a series of sites linked to the slave route running through Argentina to Paraguay and Uruguay. This continues to play an important role in raising awareness about the legacy of slavery for the Afro-Argentine community among other Argentines and among an international audience. A *New York Times* article, published in September 2014, highlighted



**Above:** Qom man protests in Buenos Aires against alleged repression from the government, 2013. *Demotix/Lucas Simonazzi*

the vivid cultural life and commemorative value of sites like Capilla de los Negros, a chapel built by freed slaves in 1861.

Despite enjoying unique cultures and facing distinct challenges, both indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Argentina continue to struggle against deep-rooted discrimination. Yet there is also an increasing capacity to mobilize against injustices and rights abuses. In January 2015, for instance, the widely publicized death of a Qom child from malnutrition in a small town in Chaco prompted widespread outrage among indigenous communities across Argentina and a potential case against three ministers of the national government for failure of duty to the Qom community. Indigenous communities have also struggled to defend their land rights against increasing agro-industrial and extractive industries. The Mapuche people, for example, have repeatedly seen their territory encroached upon by oil and gas prospectors.

However, throughout the year communities began fencing off their communal territories in response to the national government's auctioning of large tracts of land to foreign companies for oil fracking. Though exploration continued, this resistance successfully disrupted local operations in the short term and brought attention to the ongoing discrimination experienced by Mapuche and other indigenous peoples.

Though a large proportion of the country's wealth and resources is concentrated in urban areas such as the capital Buenos Aires, the deep levels of disadvantage experienced by urban-dwelling indigenous peoples have persisted. Yet Buenos Aires and other cities in Argentina have also served as centres for self-expression. In April 2014, ahead of Argentina's participation at the WCIP in September, a historical act took place in Buenos Aires: the President of Argentina inaugurated the exhibition *Salón de los Pueblos Originarios* in the national Government House. In April 2015, too, a crowd of indigenous women marched through the city centre to demand improved rights, participation and a bill of 'good living' for women in Argentina.

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**Case study** by *Vanessa Mazzei*  
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# Promoting indigenous participation in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra

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Bolivia has some of the highest levels of poverty in South America, and it also stands out as one of the most culturally diverse countries in the region with the highest percentage of indigenous people in Latin America – an estimated 62 per cent of the population. Yet indigenous communities have nevertheless struggled historically to secure equality. In this regard, constitutional reforms in 2004 acknowledging the ‘multi-ethnic and multicultural’ nature of the republic therefore represented a milestone for the community, particularly its recognition of their right to full and effective political participation.

Helping with the implementation of these reforms has been the primary focus of organizations such as Apoyo Para el Campesino-Indígena del Oriente Boliviano (APCOB). In recent years the government, while encouraging indigenous participation in civil society in rural areas, has to some extent overlooked the phenomenon of rising migration to cities. The department where this shortcoming has been most evident is that of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, which has the highest concentration of urban indigenous inhabitants in the country. This is the main reason why the city was chosen for the UN Democracy Fund-sponsored project ‘Nunca Nos Fuimos: We Never Left’, with the aim of promoting greater visibility, political participation and representation of

indigenous people in the city.

Despite their increasing presence in Bolivia’s cities, indigenous communities are not always considered part of the urban fabric. One issue that has contributed to this situation is the lack of reliable data, creating significant barriers to developing effective programmes that could make a difference. Consequently, the first phase of the project focused on the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, culminating in the launch of a book in October 2014. The subsequent distribution of this data among indigenous leaders, government representatives and academic institutions has had a very positive impact on the community’s advocacy and coordination.

A key aspect of indigenous urban communities is their sheer variety, with each group having their own distinct organizational structures, skills, social connections and ways of occupying urban space. Learning about these is key to developing appropriate responses. Nevertheless, one common factor is that the pursuit of better living conditions drives much migration to urban areas, as well as the desire to give more visibility to the indigenous movement. In urban centres there are more possibilities of appealing to public opinion and institutions, of forming alliances and filing lawsuits.

It is also very important that indigenous communities are able to maintain their culture and identity in an urban context, including their organizational forms, specific customs, original languages and traditional crafts, as well as their rights to collectively owned lands. The project therefore also focused on strengthening associations and networks among these communities, creating a forum for shared dialogue and decision making. This was one of the most significant milestones of the project, with the launch of two major events that were attended by hundreds of people. This helped raise awareness of indigenous peoples’ issues among a wide range of stakeholders, including local authorities, government



officials, NGOs, journalists and the general public.

The project also focused on strengthening capacity in other areas, with training for indigenous leaders on national law, citizenship and governance. In addition, a proposal summarizing the aspirations of the different urban indigenous communities was developed to be included in the Municipal Charter of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. After a consultation between the population and their representatives took place, lawyers completed a constitutional review and finalized the document. Other activities include awareness-raising initiatives among the general population about the challenges these communities experience, including the distribution of a documentary and a touring photographic exhibition, 'Being Indigenous in the City', that has received around 15,000 visitors. Forums, websites and active social networking have also been implemented to engage younger generations.

An important date for APCOB and the urban indigenous people of Santa Cruz de la Sierra will be August 2015, when the Autonomy Commission of the City Council will submit the Municipal Charter, a document which will include the indigenous peoples' proposal. This document will then undergo constitutional review and, if approved, will be submitted to referendum. APCOB's work played an important role in influencing political representatives to include these provisions – an important step forward for indigenous peoples' rights in Bolivia's cities. ■

## Brazil

The ongoing challenges experienced by Brazil's indigenous peoples were highlighted at the beginning of 2014 with the publication online of images of one of the country's few 'uncontacted' communities. The photographs, taken illegally on a reconnaissance flight monitoring the intrusion of criminal groups in the area, provoked widespread debate over the protection of these communities from outside interference. The pictures, taken in March, showed indigenous inhabitants in a state of fear as the low-lying plane passed by.

Though a significant portion of the country's indigenous population are now urban, the majority still reside in rural areas and are often vulnerable to the effects of urbanization, particularly when Brazil's cities develop against a backdrop of unregulated or illegal land encroachment and resource exploitation. Their location in often remote and undeveloped areas rich in forestry and minerals has placed them at particular risk of logging, mining and other activities. The Awá people have been especially affected by displacement from their ancestral land by illegal loggers settling forcibly in the area. While the government has been slow to respond to address their predicament, growing national and international pressure led to the government's announcement in January that illegal settlers would have to leave the area by 9 March. This is one of the few documented instances of the government stepping in with security forces to prevent resource extraction on indigenous lands. In early 2015, reports again emerged, however, of renewed rights abuse and violence against Awá associated with illicit logging. Meanwhile, in December, a group of uncontacted Awá were brought out of the forest after having been surrounded by loggers; at the time of going to press one woman had contracted a severe respiratory illness – highlighting the extreme vulnerability of uncontacted communities.

Yet often it is government-sponsored megaprojects themselves that are displacing or otherwise affecting local communities, such as the controversial hydroelectric Belo Monte Dam currently being built on the edge of indigenous territory. This development, besides



**Above:** Indigenous Guarani Mbyá children in a village in the Vale do Rio Branco, Brazil, 2014. *Gregory John Smith/Children At Risk Foundation*

undermining the lives of local inhabitants long dependent on the Xingu River, is also encouraging mass migration of labourers into the region. This rapid urban development and the indirect effects of sudden, unregulated investment have reportedly devastated some indigenous communities, whose traditional livelihoods and organizational structures have been threatened by these changes.

The year 2014 was also an important one for Brazil as it hosted the FIFA World Cup. This event, amid high-profile construction in cities across the country, shone a spotlight on the struggle of indigenous peoples to protect their lands from unsustainable uncontrolled development. In particular, attention focused on the stadium in Manaus, built in the Amazon rainforest. The stadium drew heavy criticism from all sides because its construction cost

millions of reais, put a heavy strain on local riverways and is unlikely to be much used in the near future. To make matters worse, the stadium's interwoven design draws on indigenous patterns, with little sign of any other more meaningful inclusion. Indigenous peoples in the area took the opportunity to highlight their struggle with a government more focused on tourism than indigenous peoples' rights.

Indigenous peoples live in every state of Brazil and represent 305 different ethnic groups and 274 indigenous languages. The north and north-east of Brazil have the largest populations of indigenous peoples, and some towns and small cities in Amazonas, Roraima and Rio Negro are largely populated by indigenous displaced people or migrants, who live in basic conditions and experience urban poverty in all its aspects of poor access to water and sanitation, violence, and women being forced into the sex trade.

In this context, displaced indigenous communities may end up struggling to integrate while maintaining their traditional cultures,

particularly in larger cities such as Rio de Janeiro, where a large proportion of the thousands of indigenous residents are concentrated in the *favelas*. In some cases, residents may also find themselves increasingly alienated from their home towns as well. Yet much of the urban indigenous population is situated in smaller urban areas, including towns in remote regions where strong links remain with the rural hinterlands, with indigenous people travelling back and forth from remote areas, and using the towns for provisions and communication. Large numbers of indigenous people travel by boat or canoe to the Amazonian town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, for example, for products they cannot access in their villages and for services such as health care. The town is also largely populated by indigenous people, often displaced from their land by illegal and violent loggers.

Numerically, Brazil's Afro-Brazilian population is no longer a minority: for the first time, in the 2010 census peoples self-identifying as black or '*pardo*' ('brown' – to denote mixed ancestry) exceeded the population of Brazilians self-identifying as white. Yet despite their sizeable demographic, Afro-Brazilians still face major disadvantages and institutionalized discrimination. There is massive inequality in their access to education and other services, with many forced to reside in the most dangerous urban areas. With little opportunity to improve their lives, young Afro-Brazilian men in particular have been drawn into drug gangs and violence – an acute issue in a country where, according to the Mexico-based organization Seguridad, Justicia y Paz, 19 of the 50 most violent cities in the world are located.

Afro-descendant youth have been disproportionately exposed to these threats. In March 2015, petitioners from Associação Nacional dos Centros de Defesa da Criança e do Adolescente (ANCDCA) brought a case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), to bring further attention to the extraordinary rates of homicide, harassment and murder experienced by young Brazilians of African descent. Homicide remains the main cause of death among Brazilian youth, particularly affecting young black males living in *favelas* and urban areas. Faced with situations

of extreme violence, police and state security forces frequently resort to the use of lethal force in an effort to curb the violence. The ANCDCA accused police of disproportionately targeting young Afro-Brazilian men, stating that of the 56,000 homicides in 2012, around 30,000 of those killed were children, 77 per cent of whom were Afro-Brazilian.

Cities can also provide the space and freedom for minority and indigenous communities to engage in cultural expression and activism. One well-known example of this is the annual Carnival in Rio, offering a vivid glimpse of the city's vibrant Afro-Brazilian heritage. The February 2015 celebrations, besides showcasing the country's rich traditions of samba and tribal art, included floats that addressed issues relating to ethnic discrimination and the fight for equality.

## Chile

Afro-Chileans achieved a significant step forward during the year when, for the first time in the country's history, Chile's National Institute of Statistics (INE) launched its first ever study of the Afro-descendant population in the Arica region. This will provide a valuable opportunity to gather information on a community that has never been recognized in Chilean society: previously, Chile's Afro-descendant population did not have the right to self-identify as Afro-Chileans in the national census as the government had not recognized their ethnicity. Currently estimated by community members to number around 8,000 people, Afro-Chileans are concentrated in urban areas of northern Chile.

Previously, community representatives had complained about the barriers that the lack of properly disaggregated data created in addressing their marginalization and discrimination. In 2011, John Salgado, representative of the NGO Oro Negro and the Chilean Alliance for Afro-descendant Organizations, described to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) the 'invisibilization' of their ethnicity, which meant that 'it is impossible to acknowledge problems ... [as] you don't see the people who are suffering them'. As the Afro-Chilean Alliance's previous efforts to include questions on their ethnicity

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**Case study** by *Umamah Basit*  
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# Preserving indigenous heritage in Rio de Janeiro

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Rio de Janeiro has a significant indigenous population, many of whom have been driven out of their ancestral lands in the Amazon due to poverty, deforestation and persecution. Due to unaffordable housing and lack of state support, these groups have settled in the poorest of urban slums, commonly known as ‘*favelas*’, where they face rampant violence, among other threats and challenges. Despite increasing marginalization, however, indigenous communities continue to resist urban influences and display a strong reluctance to assimilate completely into mainstream society.

The Aldeia Maracanã movement, which came to public prominence in 2013, is a perfect illustration of the ongoing indigenous struggle to preserve their culture and way of life in the urban jungle. Aldeia Maracanã itself is a multi-ethnic indigenous village that stands right next to the iconic Maracanã football stadium, in the heart of Rio de Janeiro. This village was created in 2006 when people from 17 indigenous communities reoccupied a long-abandoned building that had housed the *Museu do Índio* (‘Museum of the Indian’) in the latter half of the twentieth century. Since reoccupation, the historical landmark has been associated with the celebration of indigenous culture and ideas, serving as a meeting point for people from various ethnic groups and walks of life. The compound has also provided accommodation to indigenous people visiting the city for medical care, education and business activities.

Ahead of the football World Cup in 2014, the city government announced plans to demolish the building in order to make way for a US\$350 million renovation programme of the stadium. It is pertinent to note that the federal, state and city governments had evaluated the site beforehand and acknowledged that it holds historical, architectural and cultural value. Members of the Maracanã community had even hoped that the event would give them the opportunity to showcase their culture and experiences to sports fans visiting from around the world. However, despite numerous protests staged in the early months of 2013, all the families who had been squatting on the site since 2006 were forcibly evicted by Brazilian police firing tear gas and rubber bullets. Though occupants of the Maracanã were subsequently granted homes under the city’s social housing scheme, none have been able to return to the ‘sacred ground’.

The protests did, however, force the government to halt demolition plans and in January 2014, Rio’s governor, Sérgio Cabral Filho, declared that the building may be transformed into an indigenous cultural centre in partnership with the State Secretariat of Culture.

Although the building remains barricaded today, members of the Maracanã community are hoping to convert the complex into Brazil’s first indigenous university, which would teach indigenous languages and traditions to people from all parts of the country. More recently, community members formed the Aldeia Maracanã Indigenous Association and an Indigenous Regional Council: both bodies are aimed at developing and promoting policies for the social and economic empowerment of indigenous peoples living in Rio de Janeiro.

In light of ongoing urban renewal projects in preparation for the Olympic Games 2016, it is difficult to determine the fate of the Maracanã community. Few would deny, however, that at present the historical building stands as a symbol of hope and the





continued resilience of indigenous peoples. In other parts of the city too, there are visible signs of indigenous peoples seeking to preserve their traditions and sense of community. In one urban *favela*, Mare, indigenous groups organize get-togethers on a frequent basis, participating in traditional rituals and storytelling events. While many indigenous people in Brazil's cities feel they need to hide their identity, especially to obtain employment, an increasing number can be spotted on the streets of Rio wearing traditional attire. For some, this is a way of showing solidarity with the indigenous movement; for others, it is a means of connecting them back to their ancestral homes.

Of course, state public policies hugely impact the extent to which indigenous and minority groups are able to maintain their visibility in society. Furthermore, as noted by the Popular Committee for the World Cup and Olympics, Rio de Janeiro, it is fundamental to give marginalized groups the opportunity to participate in discussions and decisions that directly affect them. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see that members of these indigenous communities are affirming their roots. While it is important to help indigenous migrants adapt to modern urban life, it is equally important to support their efforts to protect their traditions and cultures in their new surroundings. Moreover, it is the strength and scale of the indigenous movement that will ultimately determine the fate of urban indigenous people. Had the indigenous community not shown solidarity during the Maracanã incident, perhaps the building would have been demolished already. ■

**Left: Maracanã Aldeia, an urban indigenous village located in the building of the former *Museu do Índio* in Maracanã, Rio de Janeiro, 2014. Ingrid Cristina Pereira**

in the national census of 2012 had failed, their recognition this time is a significant milestone for the community.

Unlike elsewhere in the region, Chile's indigenous population is made up largely of a single people. According to the 2012 census, more than 1.7 million self-identified as indigenous: of these, 88 per cent were Mapuche, followed by Aymara (7 per cent) and other smaller groups (5 per cent). As with the Afro-Chilean community, there have been positive steps to improve indigenous data. Beginning in 2013 and continuing until 2018, Chile Indígena, an initiative of the government's national indigenous body, the *Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena* (CONADI), aims to improve the quality of life of indigenous peoples in Chile, respecting 'development with identity' and promoting 'horizontal dialogue' between indigenous communities and the government. The project began in 2013 and will continue until 2018.

While they have historically received greater recognition than Afro-Chileans, Chile's indigenous population nevertheless continues to experience discrimination in access to education and employment. In March 2015, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Philip Alston visited Chile and in his end-of-mission statement reported that the government's response to the ongoing marginalization of the indigenous population 'has been piecemeal and especially reluctant to address the major issues of concern'. Among other measures, he highlighted the importance of adequate consultation with communities around the government's proposed plan to establish a Ministry for Indigenous Affairs, as well as the need to expand their political representation in a country where, despite comprising around 10 per cent of the population, there is currently not a single indigenous representative in the Congress. Finally, he drew attention to the domination of Chile's agriculture, forestry and mining industries by certain corporations, calling for these companies to adopt 'a set of human rights policies that conform, as a minimum, to the requirements of the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.'

Land rights and access to ancestral territory

remain major issues for indigenous peoples in Chile, particularly in the south of the country, with protests continuing during the year. Indigenous activists continued to advocate for the protection of their ancestral lands from unsustainable development projects. In October, Chile's Supreme Court halted the development of the El Morro gold and copper mine owned by the Canadian conglomerate, Goldcorp, until indigenous communities are consulted. And on 17 March 2015, representatives from the Mapuche indigenous people appeared before the IACHR to bring attention to the extractive activities taking place on their ancestral lands, and the negative effects they have on their way of life and culture.

In a July 2014 ruling, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found the state guilty of violating the human rights of members of the Mapuche people. The decision in the case of *Norin Catriman et al. vs. the State of Chile* related to the government's use of anti-terrorist legislation in 2002 and 2003 against indigenous protesters, some of whom received prison sentences at the time. As Jimina Reyes of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and one of the counsels in the case noted, the Court had concluded that 'it is illegal to criminalize the Mapuche quests for their ancestral land'.

Earlier in 2014, in response to concerns raised by a UN working group, the government committed to the restitution of indigenous lands within two years. Francisco Huenchumilla, a part-Mapuche politician, was appointed as Governor of the Araucanía region; he subsequently apologized on behalf of the government of President Michelle Bachelet to the Mapuche people for the dispossession of land that took place as part of the country's 'pacification' programmes in the nineteenth century. Indigenous commentators at the time noted, however, that the government's proposal only specified the Mapuche and land registered with CONADI; which left them wondering about what would happen to other communities and other lands.

Chile is a highly urbanized South American country, with 90 per cent of Chileans now living in towns and cities. This includes a



significant proportion of Chile's indigenous peoples. According to the 2012 census, more than 585,000 indigenous people – over a third of the country's total indigenous population – now live in the greater Santiago metropolitan area, where they have formed indigenous associations, clubs, educational groups and political organizations. Yet many reportedly face continued discrimination and sub-standard living conditions in this context.

## Colombia

Conflict continues to affect Colombia's indigenous and minority communities disproportionately. Colombia has a long history of armed conflict, involving the military, opposition forces and paramilitary groups, which over decades has caused the deaths or displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians belonging to minorities or indigenous peoples. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 137,200 people were newly displaced in Colombia during 2014 alone, although that figure is expected to rise considerably as more people are registered.

The IDMC, looking back at trends over the previous year, highlighted that the representation of indigenous communities, who comprise around 3.4 per cent of the total population, account for more than double that proportion among the displaced. Afro-Colombians are also over-represented; IDMC noted that Afro-Colombians from four Pacific coast departments alone accounted for 30 per cent of the total number of displaced in 2014. When combined, the indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations make up the large majority of displaced persons: according to an August 2014 estimate by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), close to three-quarters of those displaced earlier that year were Afro-Colombian or indigenous. In both cases land grabbing, conflict and resource exploitation such as mining are factors driving this displacement.

Indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable to violence. In their 2014 report on indigenous peoples' rights in Colombia, the national organization of indigenous peoples of Colombia (ONIC) recorded 3,193 human rights abuses carried out against indigenous communities

between January and September 2014, including 2,819 incidents of forced displacement, 10 known homicides and numerous threats, kidnappings and illegal imprisonment. ONIC report that in these multiple violations of human rights of indigenous peoples in Colombia the victims have often been traditional authorities, indigenous leaders and community members, threatened by different armed groups, criminal gangs and security forces. These attacks and threats occur principally in the zones of internal conflict between the armed groups and the government soldiers, as well as the government soldiers and police abusing indigenous peoples during peaceful demonstrations.

In June, reports emerged of the forcible displacement of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in Chocó by criminal groups seizing control of land, natural resources and drug trafficking routes. It was subsequently estimated that more than 2,800 people had been forced to flee their homes between May and June.

Indigenous activists continued to protest against rights abuses and targeted attacks against their community. On 20 May, indigenous peoples across Colombia published a joint manifesto highlighting the threat posed to their survival, the central importance of their territories to their cultural traditions, their respect for the environment and the need for sustainable peace in the country. Later in the year, in an attempt to halt the mass displacement of indigenous peoples from their lands, President Juan Manuel Santos signed Decree 1953 in October to implement a special interim system to enable indigenous communities to administer their territories until Congress can issue the Organic Law on Territorial Regulation.

Yet both indigenous and Afro-descendant communities continue to experience severe social prejudice. In November, the country's 2011 anti-discrimination law was used for the first time to convict a local councillor who had described Afro-Colombians, indigenous peoples and displaced persons as a 'cancer'.

The Afro-Colombian community numbers around 4.3 million people, most of whom are based in urban areas. They are the majority population in towns in the north-west, and also live in low-income settlements in the major



**Above:** A man in Guarjia, Colombia belonging to the Wayuu community, an indigenous population which is among the most marginalized in Colombia. *USAID*

cities, including the capital Bogotá. Widespread displacement from communal lands has contributed to this process. According to one estimate, more than 70 per cent of Bogotá's sizeable Afro-Colombian community were born outside the city, a proportion that suggests the significant role that displacement has played in the urbanization of Afro-Colombians.

In this context, reinforced by existing discrimination, many urban Afro-Colombians have been exposed to poverty, exclusion and physical insecurity. Violence is a common problem in other urban areas, too, epitomized by Buenaventura, a coastal settlement of 400,000 people, of whom an estimated 84 per cent are Afro-Colombians. It was widely reported in the media during the year that this was the most violent city in the country; an HRW report published in March described how the local population were constantly terrorized by criminal gangs and extortion rings. Against a

backdrop of social exclusion and poverty, with an unemployment rate of 40 per cent – around four times the average for the country as a whole – perpetrators have been able to operate with total impunity. Of over 2,000 investigations opened on disappearances in the city over the last two decades, reportedly not a single one has led to a conviction.

As in other South American contexts, the urban experience has often not been positive for the displaced minority indigenous or Afro-Colombians, but initiatives exist and have succeeded in turning lives around. Since 2011, USAID's Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Program (ACIP) has supported public-private partnerships between Afro-Colombian community organizations, local municipalities, and companies that train ethnic minorities and generate economic opportunities for them. As a result, by 2014 over 5,000 internally displaced people from marginalized urban areas of Bogotá, Cartagena, Cali and Barranquilla had achieved a measure of stability. ■



RUSSIA

KAZAKHSTAN

UZBEKISTAN

TURKMENISTAN

KYRGYZSTAN

TAJIKISTAN

AFGHANIS-TAN

Jammu and Kashmir

PAKISTAN

TIBET

NEPAL

BHUTAN

BANGLADESH

BURMA

LAOS

THAILAND

VIETNAM

CAMBODIA

BRUNEI

MALAYSIA

SINGAPORE

Borneo

Sumatra

INDONESIA

Java

TIMOR-LESTE

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

SRI LANKA

MALDIVES

CHINA

TAIWAN

Hong Kong

PHILIPPINES

Sulawesi

PAPUA-NEW GUINEA

Bougainville

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Wallis and Futuna (FR.)

FIJI ISLANDS

New Caledonia (FR.)

French Polynesia (FR.)

NEW ZEALAND

AUSTRALIA

PACIFIC OCEAN

INDIAN OCEAN

# Asia and Oceania

Michael Caster, Shikha Dilawri,  
Nicole Girard, Hanna Hindstrom,  
Matthew Naumann and Jacqui Zalcborg

# Central Asia

Matthew Naumann

The year 2014 in Central Asia was overshadowed by the conflict in Ukraine, as well as the economic downturn caused to the regional economy by international sanctions on Russia and the sharp falls in the price of oil. Besides contributing to a slowdown in the region's economies, the conflict also had a significant geopolitical impact across the region as the implications of the Russian Federation's support for ethnic Russians and Russian speakers were absorbed. An April 2014 offer by President Vladimir Putin for any fluent Russian speaker in the former Soviet Union to become a Russian citizen if they renounced their current citizenship reportedly led to a surge in interest among minority ethnic groups.

The effect of urbanization on minorities in

Central Asia has been mixed. In the main, rural-urban migration has occurred in recent decades among majority ethnic populations. This was partly a result of previous Soviet policies that had made it difficult for rural residents to move to cities, while encouraging or in some cases forcing migration of specialists to Central Asia from more industrialized parts of the Soviet Union. This ensured that in many cities residents who were ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews – locally known as 'European ethnicities' – were the majority, working as administrators, technical specialists and factory workers, while rural areas were predominantly inhabited by the titular ethnicity.

Many of these 'Europeans' emigrated from Central Asia in the last years of the Soviet Union and in the decades since independence. Urbanization has subsequently been shaped by incomers replacing those who had left the urban workforce, driven also by the chronic

**Below:** A group of Uyghur youth pick mulberries near the Baraholka bazaar in Kazakhstan. *Panos/Carolyn Drake*





and endemic poverty that affected many rural areas, particularly in the 1990s. However, some cities had large ethnic minority populations who were historical residents of the area and did not emigrate at the end of Soviet rule. These included Osh, Jalalabad and Uzgen in Kyrgyzstan (with large ethnic Uzbek populations), as well as Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan (with large numbers of ethnic Tajiks).

Resentment against minorities is sometimes fuelled by registration requirements that are often still in place in urban areas. These can exclude many city residents from essential public services and social security, creating a new group of socially marginalized people who face discrimination and are vulnerable to harassment by the authorities. In some cases, internal migrants from majority groups may resent the fact that minorities in urban areas, particularly those well established in larger towns and cities, have better access to resources such as land or housing – a major source of ethnic tension in certain countries, such as Kyrgyzstan.

## **Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan has a variety of ethnic minorities, including Uzbeks (2.9 per cent), Ukrainians (2.1 per cent), Uyghurs (1.4 per cent) and Tatars (1.3 per cent). The largest of these is the ethnic Russian minority, who make up almost a quarter (23.7 per cent) of the population. Under Kazakhstan's Constitution, while Kazakh is the state language, Russian has equal official status for all levels of administrative and institutional purposes. However, nationalist groups are now pushing for a more aggressive promotion of the Kazakh language. Several municipalities have even taken down Russian-language public signs or refused to provide Russian translations for official communications, such as court proceedings. This concern was raised with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's High Commissioner for National Minorities in June 2014. However, in August 2014 President Nursultan Nazarbaev told state broadcaster Khabar Television that he wanted to ensure that any policies promoting the Kazakh language remained moderate to avoid encouraging the divisions evident in Ukraine.

There have been reports of Russians feeling

sidelined from political decision making. Their representation at a senior level in politics reportedly remains limited, though Vladimir Shkolnik, an ethnic Russian, was reappointed as energy minister in August 2014 and their share of seats in Kazakhstan's lower legislative chamber, the Mazhilis, is roughly proportional to their demographic. This is not necessarily the case for many of Kazakhstan's non-Russian minorities, who together make up more than 13 per cent of the population. The UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) had expressed concern earlier in the year about the under-representation of non-Kazakh ethnic groups in general in political life and the civil service. One notable exception is Karim Massimov, an ethnic Uyghur, who was reappointed as prime minister in April 2014. However, some analysts have suggested that his appointment is due in part due to the fact that, as a member of an ethnic minority, he is not seen as a potential successor to the president and therefore does not threaten the balance of power among Kazakhstan's elite.

Kazakhstan has not suffered the large-scale ethnic violence that affected its neighbour Kyrgyzstan, most notably in 2010. Nevertheless, two people were hospitalized and four detained by police after clashes on 27 August in Qaramurat, a southern village where the majority of residents are ethnic Uzbeks. A group of ethnic Kazakhs from a nearby village reportedly stormed the community, attacking residents and breaking into shops. The interior minister stated that the incident was not ethnicity-related, but a news blackout in the area, including the blocking of mobile phone connections, indicated that the authorities feared a possible escalation. A second incident occurred in another village in southern Kazakhstan on 5 February 2015, between Kazakh and Tajik communities, after the alleged murder of a Kazakh man by a Tajik man in a dispute over a greenhouse. Severe security and internet restrictions were also imposed following this incident.

Kazakhstan is continuing its attempts to bring all publicly accessible mosques under the control of the state-backed Muslim Board, thereby limiting worshippers' right to exist as a religious community and exercise their freedom of religion



or belief. All other Muslim communities and organizations – including Ahmadi Muslim congregations as well as mosques catering to specific ethnic communities such as Azerbaijanis, Chechens or Uyghurs – are banned. Permission to exist is gained via state registration. However, reportedly even religious communities who try to register or have registered are in some cases prevented by officials from exercising their freedom of religion or belief. According to the NGO Forum 18, by July 12 people had been jailed and 45 fined in relation to state restrictions on freedom of worship. These have been used repeatedly against individuals who have refused to fall in line with the government's policies. In January 2015, Forum 18 reported the case of one Baptist man in his thirties who, having already received three fines and a five-day sentence over the previous two years, now faced the prospect of his garage being seized.

Kazakhstan is an increasingly urbanized society, with more than half (55 per cent) of residents now based in urban areas. It has large minority urban populations, particularly ethnic Russians, and Russian is still commonly used as a lingua franca in most cities outside the south and west, including among many ethnic Kazakhs. All road infrastructure, public transport facilities, streets, avenues and other facilities in urban areas are legally required to be marked in both Russian and Kazakh.

Kazakhstan's policy of attracting Oralman, or ethnic Kazakhs, to immigrate from outside the country has in part been intended to replace the outflow of non-Kazakhs from the country's cities since independence. By 2012, 860,000 Oralman were registered in Kazakhstan, making up more than 5 per cent of the population. Many, having initially settled in remote rural areas with poorly paid jobs, have since migrated again to urban centres such as Almaty or Astana in search of better opportunities. Oralman from countries such as China and Mongolia, who previously had no need to speak Russian, can find it difficult to integrate in the country's Russian-speaking cities. Reportedly some Kazakh-speaking immigrants consider that Russified urban Kazakhs are not genuine Kazakhs, while some of the urban population resent the privileges enjoyed by Oralman that they do not enjoy themselves.

**Below:** Uzbek woman and child in a village in Kyrgyzstan, 2014. *Jonny Duncan*

However, there has been limited political opposition to the Oralman project as it has been seen as a part of the nation-building process for independent Kazakhstan.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

About a quarter of Kyrgyzstan's 5.6 million inhabitants are members of minority ethnic groups. Ethnic Uzbeks make up the most sizeable minority, at roughly 14 per cent of the population, and primarily live in the southern regions of Osh and Jalalabad. The second largest ethnic minority is Russians at 8 per cent of the population, primarily in the capital Bishkek, and the surrounding area in the north. Dungans (Han Muslims known as Hui in China), Meskhetian Turks, Tajiks and Uyghurs each make up around



1 per cent, with dozens of other ethnic groups also making up smaller proportions. All the groups remain politically marginalized, though the country has an ethnic German vice-prime minister and an ethnic Russian minister of finance.

There is acknowledgement at the national level of the need to invest in building inter-ethnic harmony, particularly in light of the violence that occurred between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in June 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan that left several hundred people dead, primarily ethnic Uzbeks. The *Concept of Development of National Unity and Inter-Ethnic Relations*, published by the government in 2013, has the stated aim of promoting a common civic identity, developing multilingual education to increase knowledge of the official Kyrgyz language among all citizens while at the same time fostering language diversity by ensuring that citizens can preserve and study their native languages without facing language-based discrimination. The *Concept* has been characterized as a rare achievement by the ‘moderates’ allied to the president against nationalist politicians, who since 2010 have used ethnic politics as a convenient and effective tool to gain support among ethnic Kyrgyz. Meanwhile, the Department of Ethnic, Religious Policies and Interaction with Civil Society in the President’s Office and the Agency for Inter-ethnic Relations are attempting to establish an early warning and conflict-prevention system at a local level.

However, progress at a policy level is not matched on the ground. Minorities are still excluded from policy discussions relating to inter-ethnic relations, and are inadequately represented in state structures and law-enforcement bodies. This is particularly true of ethnic minorities living in the south, such as Uzbeks and Tajiks. In the face of the ethnic discrimination that was aggravated by the violence in 2010, many members of the ethnic Uzbek community are reportedly adopting documents stating they are ethnically Kyrgyz in an attempt to keep career and social opportunities open. In addition, Uzbek-owned small businesses in southern Kyrgyzstan continue to face disproportionate checks by the authorities, sometimes leading to business closure or disruption. This reportedly

intensified in the summer of 2014, and was seen by some Osh residents to be in retaliation for the shutting off of gas supplies to southern Kyrgyzstan by Uzbekistan – an example of how international tensions can have a negative effect on minority communities.

The judicial response to the 2010 violence has largely targeted members of the ethnic Uzbek community, even though they comprised the majority of victims. Courts continue to sentence ethnic Uzbek community leaders *in absentia* for inciting inter-ethnic hatred and organizing clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in 2010. In November 2014, Kadyrjan Batyrov and Inom Abdurasulov, two of these leaders, were given life sentences, while a third, Karamat Abdullaeva, received a 16-year jail term. This followed the Kyrgyzstan’s Supreme Court rejection in September of an appeal by Azimjan Askarov against his conviction for creating mass disturbances, inciting ethnic hatred and complicity in murder. The detention of the ethnic Uzbek political activist, who prior to his arrest had worked for years documenting police abuses, has been condemned by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International and other rights organizations.

The government also continued to crack down on minority activists and human rights organizations during the year. In September, a criminal case was opened against an NGO researching minority rights in southern Kyrgyzstan. The complaint, from the Kyrgyz National Security Service, alleged that the research ‘could again ignite inter-ethnic conflict’ and that it was acting in its capacity ‘to prevent intelligence and subversive activities by foreign special services and organizations’. Though charges were rejected by the prosecutor in early December, the case highlighted the dangers faced by human rights activists working on minority issues. Mahamatjan Abdujaparov, another activist working on police torture and extortion of ethnic Uzbeks, was attacked in his office in Jalalabad on 4 September.

Under Article 10 of the Constitution, Kyrgyz is the state language and Russian is an official language. Russian-language education continues to be relatively popular among all ethnic groups, including many Kyrgyz. There is a common

perception that Russian-medium schools are stronger, and that the language will be useful to users at home and potentially as labour migrants. However, in much of the country the number of Russian-speaking teachers is declining. This has particular implications in ethnically mixed areas such as the border province of Batken, where tensions over disputed territory between the Kyrgyz government and neighbouring Tajikistan are ongoing. While residents in this area have in the past been able to communicate by using Russian as a lingua franca, many ethnic Kyrgyz and Tajik children now only speak mutually unintelligible languages in adjacent villages, increasing the potential for future disagreements between the two communities.

The challenges faced by the country's Uzbek speakers are particularly acute, however. While Uzbek had been used relatively widely in education and local government in areas with high proportions of ethnic Uzbeks, since 2010 the space for Uzbek language in official life has been shrinking. From 2014–15, university entrance examinations will only be available in Kyrgyz or Russian. This is part of a broader context in which the educational aspirations of ethnic Uzbeks appear to be reducing. A January 2014 report highlighted sharp declines in the number of Uzbek students moving on to high school and completing school in Osh city.

The reasons for dropping out include financial pressures on families, the need for extra income and favouritism in the allocation of the limited state funds available. Another factor may be the increasing prevalence of child marriage among girls from families affected by the 2010 violence. Local experts interviewed by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) suggested that the increase was linked to rapes committed during the violence. Meanwhile, the total number of Uzbek-medium schools has halved in recent years, from 133 in 2009/10 to 65 in 2013/14. The reduction has been particularly prominent among urban Uzbeks in the city of Osh, which lost two-thirds of its Uzbek-language schools between 2010 and 2013. Most have been converted into mixed-medium, Kyrgyz or Russian-language schools.

There has also been a rise in prominence of Kyrgyz nationalist youth groups. In January

2015 one of these groups, Kyrk Choro, issued a manifesto calling for foreigners to be allowed to stay only in hotels, and for ethnic Uyghur traders to be barred from the Madina, Bishkek's largest clothing market. They also conducted a high-profile vigilante raid in which they filmed local women who had allegedly been engaged by Chinese migrant workers in commercial sex work. Kyrk Choro appears to have at least tacit support for its actions from government bodies, including security forces. It is unclear where these groups draw most of their supporters from, but most of their activities have taken place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital and major urban centre.

A Uyghur community organization held a congress in October 2014, after several meetings had reportedly been prohibited in recent years. HRW has expressed concern that Kyrgyz authorities too often target Uyghurs with trumped-up terrorism charges, allegedly as a result of pressure from China as bilateral ties have strengthened between the countries. Uyghur community leaders in Kyrgyzstan do not express support for Uyghur separatism, but some have reportedly raised concerns that the lack of a Uyghur-language school in the country violates their language rights.

The government took a number of steps during the year to increase its control over religious expression, particularly in the case of Ahmadi Muslims, Bahá'í, Hare Krishna, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants and other 'non-traditional' groups. In January, the government also announced that it would be revising its Religion Law. Though details of the changes were not confirmed, remarks by the head of the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) have suggested that part of the focus would be on state registration of religious organizations. Yet registration for many religious organizations has been met with official obstruction or denial. For example, the arrest of two Jehovah's Witnesses in 2013 in Osh (the accused were finally acquitted in October 2014, though they remained under house arrest for a number of months afterwards while the prosecutor appealed the verdict) was seen by members as a reprisal for the group having recently renewed its application for official registration. The Ahmadi community, who, since being stripped of their registration in 2011 have

been unable to meet for worship, launched an appeal at the Supreme Court to appeal against two previous court refusals of registration. In July, however, the Supreme Court upheld the previous rulings against them.

Another recurring issue of religious discrimination is the difficulty experienced by some non-Muslims in the burial of their dead, particularly in rural areas. A number of incidents were reported during the year of discrimination in funeral and burial arrangements for Protestants, with local imams obstructing burial of the deceased in village cemeteries. Burial denial has reportedly been supported or overlooked by police on many occasions and has also been enabled by Article 16 of the Religion Law, which contains a provision stipulating that certain aspects of cemetery use shall be 'governed by regulations of local municipalities'. An April 2014 draft of the government's *Concept on State Policy in the Religious Sphere 2014–20* acknowledged the problem, but failed to highlight the complicity of authorities in failing to protect the victims. Though manifesting as local prejudice, these incidents reflect the broader context of state discrimination and have not been confined to rural areas, but have also occurred close to the capital, Bishkek. Authorities have themselves continued to target religious minorities in Bishkek. During 2014, for example, repeated inspections were conducted on various places of worship in the city, including the Hope Baptist Church, which was reportedly visited by state agencies several times and threatened with eviction. The State Property Fund also attempted to confiscate the property of the Protestant Church of Jesus Christ by seeking to annul the 1999 contract it had previously signed with the Church. Some community members have speculated that the authorities may be motivated by the high value of the site, situated in a prime area of Bishkek, and that the land may be earmarked for a private developer. Though the Economic Court approved the annulment in January 2014, an appeal by the Church was granted by Bishkek City Court in April. However, the State Property Fund subsequently launched a further action to claim the property in the Supreme Court. The case was still unconcluded at the end of the year.

Urbanization in general, particularly in the country's southern cities, has been one of the primary causes of ethnic tension in Kyrgyzstan. In Soviet times, the vast majority of ethnic Kyrgyz lived in rural areas, with a wide range of minority ethnic groups predominant in the cities: Bishkek (then Frunze) was primarily Russian-speaking, after several waves of settlement mainly from European parts of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union over a 150-year period, while Osh, Jalalabad and Uzgen cities in the south also had long-standing Uzbek-speaking populations. As the Soviet system began to break down in the 1980s, living conditions became increasingly untenable in rural areas, and many ethnic Kyrgyz moved to the cities. Pressure on land in the cities led to a number of violent outbreaks in the south in 1990, resulting in several hundred deaths in Osh and Uzgen. Many ethnic Kyrgyz formerly engaged as farmers or nomads in the countryside were forced by lack of livelihood or poverty to move to the cities, where they often struggled to establish viable livelihoods for themselves in the urban economies, where the largely Uzbek mercantile class were dominant. This rapid and troubled process of urbanization has been identified as one of the factors behind the outbreak of the June 2010 violence.

As many ethnic Kyrgyz rural–urban migrants face overcrowding and sub-standard living conditions, the state's failure to provide land or adequate housing has generated acute resentment. At key flashpoints in recent years this anger has also been directed towards urban minority communities, particularly those such as Osh's Uzbek business owners with property in the city. Similarly, during previous moments of political instability in the country, minorities have been targeted for their assets. For example, after President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was removed from power in April 2010, Meskhetian Turks in the village of Maevka, just outside Bishkek, were targeted and their homes burned to the ground: the clashes resulted in at least five deaths and 28 injured.

Land and housing shortages remain unresolved and continue to affect inter-ethnic relations in many urban areas. In Osh, for instance, a number of incidents have flared between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents due to the continued

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*Case study by Alisher Khamidov*  
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## Life as a migrant in Bishkek – a Tatar women tells her story

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On a cold morning in late February, Alya wakes up early as usual to prepare a simple breakfast of porridge for her and her two-year-old boy, Shurik. Then she takes Shurik to her friend for baby-sitting before heading to work. Originally from Osh, a large city in south Kyrgyzstan, she is now a street vendor selling cheap Chinese shoes in Bishkek, the capital, which has a reputation as a more liberal and ethnically diverse place. An ethnic Tatar by origin, 30-year-old Alya has a full day ahead: she must visit several state-run hospitals where some of the doctors and patients are her customers. She will then have to spend the rest of the afternoon selling shoes at her stand, located in a small bazaar in one of Bishkek's suburbs.

'I really love my job, but it does not provide a steady source of income,' she says. 'I wish I had obtained a good quality education that would allow me to have a steady job to support my family.' Alya has finished secondary school, but her family could not afford to put her through college after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, her business has not been doing well. 'When the business is very slow, I go around neighbourhoods and try to sell shoes on the street to passers-by. This strategy works sometimes, but at times it leads to problems with police.'

Many Tatar, Russian and Uyghur women work as street vendors because they lack connections to the formal business or the public sector, which are mostly dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz men. Like the majority of Bishkek's street vendors, Alya operates her business without the formal

licence for street vendors issued by Bishkek's authorities. 'Police officers usually turn a blind eye to me and other street vendors – they know that we are not a threat to society and that we are poor folks who are trying to make ends meet.' She earns about US\$200 a month.

'I meet a lot of different people, and they always complain and ask for help. There are so many unhappy people, especially women, out there,' Alya says of the people she meets on her rounds. 'Someone's in big debt, another's person's husband left her, a third suffers from domestic abuse.'

Alya says she gets tired of listening to such sad stories, because they remind her of her own. At the age of 18 she married Sunil, an Indian medical student at Osh State University, and soon had a daughter who became the centre of their lives. But three years into the marriage, her husband left the country and he stopped communicating with her. In the wake of his departure, on top of her depression, Alya had to endure the cultural pressure that comes along with being a single parent from the Tatar minority deserted by a foreign husband. Kyrgyz and Uzbek society in Osh frown upon divorcees, widows, single mothers and women who marry foreign men: the common assumption is that a single woman, living on her own, would lead an immoral life.

With no steady income, Alya was forced to move in with her mother in a small conservative town near Osh populated mainly by ethnic Uzbeks. 'It was one of the toughest periods of my life,' Alya says. 'My family members were often treated like outcasts.' Ethnic prejudice was a major hurdle as ethnic Tatars, who make up a small minority in the town, have long suffered discrimination by local government and residents. So when an opportunity arose to move to Bishkek and work for a company that operated a casino, Alya gladly accepted the offer. However, her life only got harder in Bishkek. She had to work long hours at

**Right: Inside a busy market bazaar in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Neil James Spicer**



the casino while regularly fending off foreign customers who wanted sexual services from her. When a customer attempted to rape her in a drunken stupor, 'I knew that I had enough. I quit that job.'

But Alya refused to return to her mother's town. 'I didn't want to be treated like an outcast any more,' she says. Instead, she began to work as a street vendor selling shoes. Alya now has two dreams: to give her children a good education, and to move to Russia to escape the stigma that she previously experienced in her mother's town. But she acknowledges the chances of realizing these goals are slim. 'I struggle to make ends meet. The only solution for me is to leave for Russia and work there because the pay is better there.'

But though this is not an unusual route in Kyrgyzstan – as many as 500,000 Kyrgyz citizens are already working in Russia as labour migrants – Alya recognizes that it is not the ultimate solution to her troubles. Some of her Russian-speaking friends who have moved there in recent years had to struggle for years until they managed to find stable jobs and housing. Besides, they also confronted deep racial prejudice and increasing hostility among Russian citizens towards Central Asians, reflected in a rise in the levels of hate crime. Like many other minority members in the region, Alya is caught in a limbo between a home country that discriminates against her and a new life in a country where her welcome is uncertain at best. ■





failure of authorities to provide sufficient housing to accommodate the growing population of rural migrants, many of whom live in the city as squatters. In turn, many ethnic Uzbek businessmen have been forced to emigrate from the country due to financial difficulties in the wake of the 2010 conflict.

## Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan's minority groups include the Kazakh, Russian and Uzbek minorities, as well as the ethnic Baluch community, which CERD has drawn particular attention to as being at risk of forced assimilation. Human rights organizations have also reported children from ethnic minorities being denied the opportunity to study in their own languages due to the steady closure of schools and reduced resources. Some minorities also struggle to secure formal legal recognition despite being based long-term in the country, creating further difficulties for them when accessing public services and other rights.

In September 2014, a local human rights organization reported on the plight of several thousand ethnic Uzbeks, mainly in the eastern provinces, who for over 20 years had failed to obtain passports and become full citizens of their own country. Almost 10,000 people from Dashoguz and Lebap provinces have reportedly requested citizenship without success. Many had studied in Uzbekistan and graduated there after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, during the period when national passports were being issued in Turkmenistan. When they returned, their Soviet passports were no longer considered valid. The organization reported that their children and grandchildren had also not been able to obtain Turkmen passports. Meanwhile, several women from Uzbekistan who had married men from Turkmenistan and moved to the country had reportedly been deported, thus breaking up families. Those without internal passports have reportedly been deprived of opportunities to find official employment, leave the country or move to the capital to earn money.

Human rights activists have estimated that about 100,000 Turkmenistan nationals of both Russian and Turkmen ethnicity also hold Russian passports, under a 1993 bilateral Agreement on Dual Citizenship. However, in autumn 2013 the

State Migration Service of Turkmenistan stopped issuing new passports to dual nationals. As a result it has become impossible for them to leave the country. In May 2014, Turkmenistan officially informed the Russian Foreign Ministry that it would terminate the Agreement on 18 May 2015.

In June 2014, Amnesty International published an appeal urging the Turkmen authorities to grant a retrial to Mansur Mingelov, a Baluchi human rights activist who began a hunger strike on 19 May to protest a sentence widely condemned as unfair. Mingelov had been arrested in 2012 and convicted to 22 years in prison for alleged drug and child pornography offences after documenting evidence of police torture against ethnic Baluch. Being in a critical condition, he reportedly ended his hunger strike on 8 June after a number of Turkmen officials visited him in the Seidi labour camp, and his treatment improved. The day the appeal was published, the president issued a statement highlighting the importance of upholding the rule of law and subjecting each criminal accusation to a thorough review.

Turkmenistan, a largely Sunni Muslim country, has long been intolerant towards its religious minorities, including Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses as well as Shi'a Muslims. In 2014, the US State Department added Turkmenistan to its list of 'worst religious freedom violators'. Ethnic Turkmen converts to Protestantism and other Christian denominations are reportedly even more likely to be exposed to harassment from the state than those from minority ethnic groups. Some have been arrested for their beliefs, though in October eight prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief were released from their incarceration in a labour camp under presidential amnesty. Six were conscientious objectors to military service, while the other two had been falsely convicted as punishment for their beliefs.

While access to information is in many ways strictly controlled in Turkmenistan, Russian-speaking urban residents are able to watch news channels broadcast from Russia via satellite television. The government has reportedly appeared uncomfortable about coverage of the 2014 events in Ukraine, and in April it was reported that access to the broadcasts was affected by more interference, poor signals and

**Below:** A woman from a small Roma community living in a poor district on the outskirts of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. *Panos/Tim Dirven*

in some cases blackouts. Like other Central Asian countries, Turkmenistan had a large influx of Russians and other European ethnicities to its urban areas during the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Most remaining Russians and Ukrainians live in or near the capital, Ashgabat, and other urban centres. While Russians and Ukrainians constituted the largest minority group at the time of independence, their numbers decreased dramatically in the wake of independence and more recently in 2003, when Russians lost their dual citizenship rights.

### **Uzbekistan**

With just under 30 million inhabitants, Uzbekistan is Central Asia's most populous country. According to official figures, ethnic Uzbeks make up approximately 80 per cent of the country's population. Russians, Tajiks and Kazakhs each make up a significant proportion of the population, and other minority groups include Karakalpaks, Kyrgyz and Tatars. However, some claim that the

proportion of ethnic Tajiks, as well as native Tajik speakers who may classify themselves as ethnic Uzbeks, is much larger than the official figures suggest, particularly in and around the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Though the law provides for non-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and national origin, in practice key government and business positions are typically occupied by ethnic Uzbeks. Members of ethnic minority groups, including larger groups such as Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Tatars and Russians, appear under-represented in the judiciary and the public administration.

As in other countries in the region, opportunities for ethnic minorities to study in their native languages have diminished since the fall of the Soviet Union. In February 2014, CERD expressed concern that insufficient support was given to the promotion of minority languages, including the Tajik language, and at a decrease in the number of schools providing education in minority languages. It also expressed concern that the authorities do not adequately support education in minority languages at all levels, including preschool education. At the same time, limited remedial Uzbek-language instruction has meant that many non-native



speakers of Uzbek now face greater academic barriers due to their lower levels of proficiency.

Uzbekistan, officially designated a Country of Particular Concern by the US State Department, continued to persecute and obstruct religious minorities during the year. Besides restrictive registration requirements, prosecution and other forms of harassment, Uzbekistan's state-sponsored print, online and broadcast media regularly attacks named individuals belonging to certain minority faiths, including Protestant Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses. The victims are not given a right of reply and media staff avoid answering questions about the attacks. Allegations made in 2014 include 'making zombies out of children', improperly associating with young girls and drug dealing. Faith communities believe the purpose of these media attacks was to publicly discredit and intimidate them.

Like most of the other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan's cities have a markedly different ethnic composition than rural areas. Tashkent, the capital, has a large Russian and Ukrainian population, though this has shrunk rapidly since the end of the Soviet Union. There has been large-scale migration from primarily Uzbek-speaking rural areas to the country's cities, particularly Tashkent, since independence in 1991. However, rural to urban migration remains problematic. The government has used a carrot and stick approach to encourage the rural population to remain in the countryside and discourage migration to cities, with some experts suggesting this is because of a fear of urban unemployment, and the need for a rural workforce. Although authorities in Tashkent do not officially restrict the number of temporary residents, administrative problems and prohibitive costs discourage most migrants from registering. Consequently, many migrants face poor working conditions and low pay, with little bargaining power to improve their situation. Meanwhile, the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara are largely Tajik-speaking, though as most of the population of the cities is bilingual and no census has been conducted since 1989, the exact proportions are not possible to judge. The status of Tajiks is considered precarious, in part due to tensions between the leaderships of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

# Southeast Asia

**Nicole Girard and Hanna Hindstrom**

The majority of the population in Southeast Asia still resides in rural areas, and this is largely true for its minority and indigenous peoples as well. While underdevelopment, closed economies and war have slowed Southeast Asia's urban growth until recently, it is now one of the fastest urbanizing regions in the world. The economic surge as countries have opened up for investment and trade has driven significant migration among minorities and indigenous communities to urban areas, particularly as many are forced to leave rural areas due to declining agricultural employment or are displaced from their land by armed conflict or development projects such as mining. Prospects of better livelihood options and access to services also lure indigenous and minority communities to cities throughout Southeast Asia, but in many cases the benefits of urban areas have not been equally shared. Many face systemic discrimination, inadequate housing in informal settlements and limited employment opportunities, often in informal industries where their rights are largely unprotected.

Minorities have been the targets of evictions to make way for infrastructure and high-income housing developments, such as in Cambodia and Thailand. Other urban minority populations have been openly discriminated against, such as religious minorities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, or violently targeted like the Rohingya in Sittwe, Burma. None of the states in Southeast Asia have policies or programmes to specifically assist minorities and indigenous peoples in urban areas, but given the increasing trend towards urbanization, their potential contribution to diverse, flourishing cities must not be underestimated.

## **Burma**

Burma's democratic transition appeared to stall in 2014, with deadly consequences for its ethnic

and religious minorities. The Burmese army escalated its offensive in northern Kachin state, rupturing trust in the ongoing peace negotiations and culminating in the deadliest single attack against ethnic minority rebels since the start of the conflict. Meanwhile, a tide of intolerance towards the country's Muslim minority surged as the government pushed for greater legal restrictions on religious freedom.

The Burmese government has struggled to secure a nationwide ceasefire with a myriad of armed ethnic groups fighting for greater autonomy. Unfortunately, 2014 witnessed a return to hostilities in several parts of the country, including eastern and northern Burma. More than 2,000 civilians were forced from their homes in October following clashes near the Salween River between the army, known locally as the Tatmadaw, and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) – ending a two-year period of relative calm in Karen state. A report by Karen Rivers Watch accused the army of conducting a coordinated campaign to gain control of territory near the Salween River, where a controversial hydropower dam is being developed. The following month, the military shelled a rebel cadet training school near the Kachin independence movement headquarters, killing 23 ethnic fighters and casting a heavy shadow over peace talks. The army later claimed it was intended as a 'warning'. In February 2015, fresh conflict flared in northern Shan state between the army and ethnic Chinese rebels known as the Kokang.

Multiple human rights violations were reported in ethnic minority areas, where the Tatmadaw enjoys broad impunity for its crimes. In November, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) reported that it had documented 118 cases of sexual violence and rape carried out by Burmese soldiers since the former military government ostensibly ceded power in the 2010 election. In January 2015, two Kachin teachers were found brutally raped and murdered in northern Burma – shining a fresh spotlight on wartime sexual violence in the country. The army has reportedly since offered money to the families of the victims. WLB has called for more women to be included in the peace process to boost dialogue on sexual violence and other gendered

impacts of conflict.

There is growing concern that Burma's reform process is backsliding as the country prepares for its first general election in over half a century in 2015. A crucial sticking point is the undemocratic 2008 Constitution, which guarantees 25 per cent of parliamentary seats to the military and deprives ethnic nationalities of their right to self-determination. The president may also hand over executive and judicial powers to the military in the event of a national 'emergency' – potentially legitimizing a coup. The government has also been reluctant to discuss political grievances with armed ethnic groups, fuelling scepticism about the future of the peace process.

For decades the Burmese military regime imposed a policy of 'Burmanization' on ethnic minorities, an estimated 40 per cent of the population, which continues to be felt today. For example Muslims and ethnic Chinese and Indian citizens struggle to obtain or renew their national identity cards, which are needed to travel freely, attend government schools and obtain jobs. Some report being overlooked for scholarships or professional opportunities in urban centres such as Yangon, because they are not Buddhist. Ethnic minorities are still prevented from studying in their own languages, although extracurricular classes have been made available in some areas. In general, the lack of instruction in their native language has meant that a disproportionate number of minority children drop out of school due to language barriers. However, the government appeared to have relaxed these restrictions during the year with the announcement that instruction of minority languages would be reintroduced to the classroom. In April, the Mon state parliament authorized the teaching of Mon language among primary school students – the first time a minority language has been taught in government schools for decades.

Since the end of formal military rule, Burma has witnessed the rise of a Buddhist nationalist movement, resulting in intermittent bouts of communal violence since 2012 – mostly targeting the beleaguered Rohingya Muslim minority in Arakan state. This violence has spread to a number of Burma's cities, resulting in religious



**Below:** Women at Thin Taw Li refugee camp, where more than 3,000 Rohingya refugees live in a Muslim enclave. *Panos/Nic Dunlop*

segregation and increased marginalization of non-Buddhists around the country. Over 140,000 Muslims have been expelled from cities in Arakan state, while thousands more are in isolated ghetto-like camps outside Sittwe, Rakhine's capital. A fraction of Sittwe's Muslims – who until the violence comprised almost half of its population – remain in Aung Mingalar, now the city's only Muslim neighbourhood, which they are not allowed to leave. Many shops and businesses belonging to Rohingya Muslims in Sittwe have reportedly been destroyed or taken over by Buddhists.

Burma's Muslim population has also been targeted in Mandalay, Burma's second largest city, where an estimated 200,000 Muslims reside. In July, violence erupted following allegations that a Buddhist woman had been raped by two Muslim teashop owners, leading to the deaths of two men and many more injured in apparent riots by Buddhist gangs. However, unlike previous riots that have escalated into

large-scale communal violence, most Mandalay residents refused to participate and locals tried to defuse the situation. Nonetheless, the riots had a crippling impact on the economic lives of the city's Muslims, many of whom run family shops and businesses.

Mandalay is home to the most prominent leader of Burma's anti-Muslim movement, a monk named Wirathu, who continues to call on Buddhists to boycott Muslim businesses. Unfortunately the government has lent political support to his activities by tabling a set of divisive 'race protection' laws to parliament, which seek to restrict inter-faith marriages and conversions to minority faiths. In January 2015, 180 women's and minority rights organizations signed a statement urging the government to withdraw the legislation. However, by March 2015 the bills on religious conversions and population control were pushed through both houses of parliament.

Other government policies have also been a cause for concern. In April, the government reneged on a promise to allow minorities the right to self-identify in the country's first census in over 30 years. Instead, some 1 million Rohingya were told to register as 'Bengalis',





indicating that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, or be excluded. A government scheme to grant citizenship to Rohingya Muslims has similarly demanded that they accept the government's designated ethnic term. In early 2015, some half a million Rohingya Muslims were stripped of their temporary identification cards and remaining voting rights, spelling disaster for the largely stateless community.

Many analysts suspect the government wants to capitalize on religious tensions ahead of the 2015 poll – a tactic commonly used by the former military regime. This view gained support in November when the US government slapped fresh sanctions on former regime hardliner and ruling party MP Aung Thaung for undermining recent economic and political reforms in the country. He is widely suspected of supporting Burma's anti-Muslim movement. Wirathu has publicly backed the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party in the upcoming elections and cautioned against amending the Constitution to allow opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to run. Indeed, Buddhist nationalists appear to have growing influence over public policy. In December, opposition member Htin Lin Oo was charged with 'insulting' religion for delivering a speech condemning the misuse of Buddhism. Even his party, the National League for Democracy, subsequently removed him from his position as information officer for the party. In another worrying case, New Zealander Philip Blackwood was sentenced to two and half years in prison for defamation of religion after using an image of the Buddha in headphones to promote an event at his bar in Rangoon.

Burma is one of the least urbanized countries in Southeast Asia, with just over a third of the population based in cities. This is largely due to the fact that Burma's economy was crippled by decades of military misrule and international sanctions. However, the rate of urbanization is expected to increase substantially over the next few years, spurred on by the country's reform process and an influx of foreign investment. In particular, Rangoon's population of over 7 million is expected to double by 2040, with many migrants from Burma's rural and ethnic minority populations likely to relocate.

In this context of rapid growth, the city's property development is being driven by wealthy land-owners who have links to the former Burman-dominated military regime and is likely to involve unsustainable development plans. Urban slums are already sprouting at a disturbing pace as Rangoon's impoverished workers are squeezed further from the city centre. The Rangoon authorities have come under fire for pushing through a large-scale development plan that will consume thousands of acres of farmlands west of the city. At least 40 per cent of Rangoon's residents are either 'poor or very poor', according to the UN, while a revised analysis by the World Bank suggests that urban poverty is much higher than previously thought – only four percentage points lower than in rural areas. If left unchecked, Burma's current urbanization trends could exacerbate existing inequalities, including between majority Burmans and ethnic minorities, unless broader issues of discrimination are addressed.

## Cambodia

The year 2014 saw the continuation of long drawn-out trials against top Khmer Rouge leaders at the UN-backed Extraordinary Chamber in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Marred by reports of corruption and politicized proceedings, the rulings have come slowly. On 31 July, the second trial that is part of Case 002 began against Nuon Chea, known as 'Brother Number Two', and former head of state Khieu Samphan, charged with genocide and crimes against humanity for the mass execution of 20,000 ethnic Vietnamese and between 100,000 and 500,000 Cham Muslims, who were systematically targeted for murder, forced marriages and rape during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–9). As the trial proceeded, defence lawyers boycotted it and demanded that the judges be disqualified, a motion that was overruled: Nuon Chea's defence team returned to court, but Khieu Samphan instructed his lawyers to continue their boycott. By the end of the year the judges claimed they had no choice but to adjourn the case until 2015. In regard to the first case that formed part of this second trial, a ruling was handed down in August sentencing both men to life in prison for their role in the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh and

other urban areas.

Deeply entrenched discrimination against Vietnamese in Cambodia, both Vietnamese nationals and ethnic Vietnamese long resident in the country, continued in 2014. In Phnom Penh, opposition party and garment factory protests early in the year helped ignite anti-Vietnamese sentiment, a traditional tactic of opposition groups and political parties in Cambodia. One Vietnamese-owned coffee shop was destroyed in the protests. In February, a Vietnamese man was beaten to death in February by a mob in Phnom Penh after he crashed his motorcycle into the back of a car. Racist slurs were reportedly shouted at the victim before he was killed. Anti-Vietnamese protests continued, reignited in June and July when a spokesperson from the Vietnamese embassy refuted that parts of southern Vietnam, also known as Kampuchea Krom, was under Cambodian control until it was acceded to Vietnam by the French in 1949. The spokesperson was replaced in September, but in October monks led protests and threatened to burn the Vietnamese embassy.

Amid this atmosphere, the Interior Ministry announced that it will conduct a census of foreigners living in the country. Since then, reports of arrests and raids on businesses with suspected Vietnamese workers have increased, and by the end of October 399 Vietnamese nationals had been arrested and over 160 deported. The census was distressing for ethnic Vietnamese, as many lack identification papers, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to a host of human rights abuses.

Indigenous people continued their struggle for ancestral land rights, as large swathes of their territory continue to be seized and exploited for commercial agriculture and energy projects. The UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Flavia Pansieri, who arrived in Cambodia on an official visit at the end of April, noted that more effort must be made to issue communal land titles to protect these communities from eviction. For example, a group of around 5,000 mostly indigenous people face resettlement to accommodate the development of the north-eastern Lower Sesan dam project. Construction on the Chinese and Vietnamese-backed dam was set to begin in January 2015. In October, 18 civil

society organizations released a statement noting that the current impact assessment underestimates the 'extensive and severe' potential damage, including to fish stocks and livelihoods, with no consultation or offer of compensation yet made to affected communities.

An indigenous Chong community of about 600 families continued to resist the efforts of Chinese Sino-hydro to build a dam on their ancestral territory in Aveng Valley, one of the last remaining tracts of primeval forest in Southeast Asia, situated in the Cardamoms Protected Forest. While the project has been passed between financial backers, with reports that the proposed dam is not even feasible, the community claims it has not been consulted throughout the process. Villagers worry about the real intentions for the land as in February the Cambodian minister for mines approved a six-month exploration licence in the area. The following month, over 150 villagers blocked company staff from attempting to conduct assessments of the area.

In July, local human rights organization Adhoc reported that over 100 'ethnic minority activists' protecting community forests had been detained, jailed, intimidated and attacked in the first half of the year. In January, protests by Kuoy indigenous villagers in Preah Vihear province against Chinese plantation firms resulted in several arrests, including staff from the NGO Community Legal Education Centre, and forced others into hiding. On 9 August, a march for the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples by 700 Bunong was blocked by police.

In May the Cambodian government issued a new directive on economic land concessions (ELCs), calling for improved protections of community forests and burial sites. While the directive was met with scepticism by indigenous rights activists, measures such as these led the World Bank to reinstate loans to the country later in the year, which it had officially frozen in 2011 due to the Boeung Kak Lake evictions. In November, the *Phnom Penh Post* reported that two preliminary proposals had been approved by the World Bank in Kampong Thom, despite the potential threat of indigenous communities being evicted. Complaints against projects funded by the World Bank had continued throughout 2014: in February, the World Bank

had agreed to investigate a complaint filed by 17 indigenous groups regarding its being implicated in deforestation and land grabs. By May, the Vietnamese rubber company Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL), implicated in the case, had suspended parts of its operations amid investigations by the Bank.

While many evictions in Cambodia relate to areas with large amounts of natural resources, often in isolated rural locations, land rights violations are also commonplace in Cambodia's urban areas. Though only a fifth of the population currently reside in towns and cities, urban growth is rapid and continues to be shaped by the legacy of the Khmer Rouge era. Though major centres such as Phnom Penh were largely emptied under communist rule, they were gradually repopulated in the chaotic years following the fall of the regime. Lost land records and vacant makeshift housing shaped Phnom Penh's expansion, allowing residents to set up where they chose but also laying the foundation, in recent years, for land grabbing and displacement. In this context, minorities, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups have been especially vulnerable to displacement due to existing patterns of discrimination against them.

While most of Cambodia's Cham Muslims and indigenous peoples still reside in rural areas, they also comprise significant urban communities and face a regular threat of eviction. For instance, Phnom Penh's most publicized case of land grabbing involved eviction of residents around Boeung Kak Lake, following the government's reclassification and leasing of the area on a 99-year commercial contract to private developers. Among the thousands of people evicted were entire Muslim Cham neighbourhoods, with families either offered minimal cash compensation or given homes in a relocation zone far outside the city, with little access to services or ability to make a living. As they were relocated away from Al-Serkal mosque, which had served as the community's anchor for gatherings and religious services, their collective sense of community was also undermined. Following its demolition, the mosque was replaced with the help of a large donation from the United Arab Emirates, yet the community itself no longer resides in the area.

The ethnic Vietnamese population, whose

ancestors have lived in the country for generations, are largely urban and occupy low-income settlements in the capital. Their lives are insecure as a result of being barred from formal citizenship, leaving them with limited access to education, health care and other benefits normally associated with cities. Their lack of identity papers also prevents them from purchasing land or housing, and as a result many live in waterways and other marginal areas where they face fewer restrictions on residency, including Svay Pak district on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. Without viable alternatives, the sex industry helps support these families, as ethnic Vietnamese women are over-represented in it. In one study of urban slums in Phnom Penh from 2006, nearly half of Vietnamese families surveyed reportedly sold a girl child for sex, often a one-time sale of an underaged girl's virginity. The study also noted that being a minority Vietnamese in Cambodia is itself a contributing factor to entry into the sex trade, given the structural discrimination that shapes their lives.

## Indonesia

The year 2014 was punctuated by the election of President Joko Widodo, a youthful reformist popularly known as Jokowi, after a tense and divisive poll in July. Jokowi's win has been celebrated as a victory for democratic reform and religious pluralism in Indonesia after years of rising intolerance, raising hopes among the country's diverse indigenous populations and other minority groups. Jokowi campaigned under the national slogan 'Unity in Diversity', promising to curb escalating religious and ethnic tensions in the Muslim-majority country.

Indonesia has experienced a surge in religious intolerance under the 10-year rule of former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, resulting in frequent violence against its Ahmadi, Christian and Shi'a minorities. According to the Setara Institute, attacks on religious minorities have skyrocketed since the government authorized two decrees restricting the right to worship freely in 2006 and 2008. This trend continued in 2014, with hardliners congregating in April in Bandung, West Java, to form the first ever 'Anti-Shi'a Alliance' calling for jihad against the minority, viewed as 'heretical' by

**Below:** Indonesian Christians hold candles during a Christmas mass prayer session at Gelora Bung Karno stadium in Jakarta, December 2014  
*REUTERS/Beawiharta.*

extremists. A Shi'a journalist covering the event was reportedly detained, interrogated and assaulted by participants. Youdhoyono has been blamed for forging a political alliance with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which has relentlessly promoted a narrow and xenophobic interpretation of Islam. In January, the MUI urged police in Yogyakarta, Java, to monitor, freeze and disband organizations run by Shi'a Muslims. Ahmadis, who were branded 'deviant' by Indonesia's top clerical body in 2008, also face persistent social ostracism, harassment and arbitrary closures of their places of worship.

Activists have called on President Jokowi, who was sworn into office in October, to take a tough stance against extremist groups and their political allies. To his credit, Jokowi has already defended a number of minority politicians, including Christian Susan Jasmine Zulkifli and Shi'a Jalaluddin Rakhmat, against public outrage over their religious affiliations. The government has announced that it

is drafting a new law to protect religious freedom, which will allow all religions to publicly practise their faiths and construct houses of worship. The new law is expected to replace previous discriminatory legislation, including Indonesia's controversial blasphemy law. Over 100 individuals have been jailed over the past decade for perceived religious offences under this draconian legislation.

Another crucial test for the new president is the bitter conflict in resource-rich West Papua province, where ethnic Papuan rebels have fought for independence from Indonesia for decades. Unfortunately, there has been little apparent progress in achieving a sustainable peace in the region since Jokowi took power, and security forces continue to perpetrate abuses against the indigenous population. In August, a prominent separatist activist went missing a day before a scheduled visit by then President Yudhoyono. His dismembered, bullet-ridden body was discovered floating in a sack off the Papuan coast six days later. Foreign media remain largely shut out from West Papua, which requires a special permit to enter. In August, two French journalists were arrested for reporting on the Papuan separatist movement on tourist visas.



They were sentenced to two months in prison and later deported.

Dozens of peaceful activists were arrested in West Papua in 2014 amid regular reports of arbitrary killings, rapes and violence perpetrated by the Indonesian army. West Papua's independence movement is increasingly urban and educated, applying non-violent means to further their cause, with a growing number of youths using social media to campaign against the Indonesian occupation. In December, four high school students were killed when the military and police opened fire on a crowd of protesters in the eastern province. Jokowi was roundly criticized for his inefficient response to the incident. This follows anger over his decision to appoint former military strongman Ryamizard Ryacudu – notorious for his derisive attitude towards human rights defenders in West Papua and Aceh provinces – as the new Minister of Defence.

Indonesia's controversial transmigration programme – an initiative moving people from densely populated to less populated parts of the archipelago to counter rapid urbanization in Java – has fuelled anger and ethnic friction in West Papua. Six decades after this programme was first introduced by the Dutch colonial administration, ethnic Papuans now number less than 50 per cent of the population. The programme has led to increased marginalization of the indigenous population. According to the Institute for Policy Studies, indigenous urban youth in West Papua are twice as likely as migrants to have little or no formal schooling. Disparities in human development between the migrant-dominated urban areas and indigenous-majority interior are even more pronounced.

In May 2014, Indonesia's Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) launched its first national inquiry into land rights abuses committed against Indonesia's indigenous population. Over 2,000 communities have asked for investigations, according to the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN). Activists have called on Jokowi to publicly apologize to the country's indigenous peoples. This comes one year after a Constitutional Court ruling that invalidated the state's claim to millions of hectares of customary indigenous

lands. Jokowi has pledged to improve conditions for Indonesia's 70 million indigenous people, although his government has yet to implement the Court's recommendations. A draft law on the rights of indigenous peoples has stalled in parliament, facing obstruction from Indonesia's controversial Forestry Ministry, which is currently being investigated by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). Jokowi has since merged the Environment and Forestry ministries in an effort to improve sustainable practices, although environmental campaigners worry that this will dilute conservation policies.

Indonesia has one of the highest deforestation rates in the entire world, with a new study suggesting that 840,000 hectares of primary forest were felled in 2012 – twice as much as the historic global leader Brazil. This process has been accelerated by endemic corruption at the Forestry Ministry. In March, the former governor of Indonesia's Riau province was sentenced to 14 years in prison for issuing illegal logging permits in central Sumatra, which has already been devastated by the spread of palm oil and paper plantations. The former minister of forestry was questioned in a separate investigation.

Rapid deforestation and land confiscations have hastened the speed of urbanization among indigenous communities in Indonesia. For example, Dayaks – a constellation of non-Muslim peoples in Borneo – are increasingly migrating to bigger cities in search of better employment opportunities. Though the Indonesian government signed an agreement with UN-Habitat during the year committing to the promotion of sustainable urbanization, the government has not made specific plans on how Indonesia's myriad minorities and indigenous peoples will be incorporated into this process.

In Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, rapid urban growth has disproportionately affected certain ethnic groups. In particular, indigenous Betawi have been historically marginalized by the government's urban development projects. As Jakarta rapidly expanded into a sprawling megacity, it engulfed Betawi farming villages on its periphery, turning them into isolated urban settlements. Thousands of Betawis have since been dislocated from their homes to make way for large-scale private or commercial enterprises,



often forced into slum dwellings as land prices soar. Their culture and identity has come further under threat because of an influx of economic migrants to the booming capital. Many Betawis have had to abandon their traditional livelihoods, such as dairy cows, agriculture or batik production, and minority youths have struggled to find work, giving rise to ethnic-based urban gangs and criminal networks. In recent years the government has employed various strategies to promote Betawi culture in Jakarta. For example, when Jokowi was governor of Jakarta, he toyed with the idea of using Betawi architecture to boost tourism to the city. Another marginalized minority in Jakarta is Indonesia's ethnic Chinese, who faced acute persecution under military rule and continue to be segregated from other ethnic groups by the legacy of racism and violence since an outburst of anti-Chinese riots in 1998. However, this year saw the election of an ethnic Chinese Christian to the role of governor of Jakarta.

The Acehnese ethnic minority are known for their devout adherence to Islam and their long resistance to external rule. However, the strict interpretation of Sunni Islam in Aceh province has led to at least 20 churches having been closed in the province and 14 minority Islamic sects having been formally banned, fuelling insecurity among religious minorities. Women in particular have become increasingly marginalized in Aceh, since it was devastated by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Men have largely determined the recovery efforts, as well as the terms of the peace deal that ended Aceh's long-running struggle for self-determination and was reached as a direct consequence of the tsunami. The peace deal included the application of Sharia law, which has led to an erosion of women's rights and freedoms in urban spaces. Research suggests that these religious gender constraints are more harshly felt in urban areas than rural areas, with women's dress and behaviour more closely monitored – strictures that are felt especially by non-Muslim women.

Aceh's cities also received a disproportionate amount of humanitarian aid in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, aggravating an urban–rural divide in socio-economic development. This policy had a significant impact on thousands of

survivors who had fled from coastal regions and urban centres to Aceh's conflict-torn interior and missed out on disaster relief. Banda Aceh had already been shielded from the worst of the fighting, even briefly emerging as a democratic space for the educated urban elite to resist the Indonesian occupation after the fall of Suharto. Five years after the tsunami, all traces of the disaster had been removed from Banda Aceh, while many rural areas lay neglected and abandoned.

## Malaysia

Malaysia continued to restrict religious freedoms in 2014, further marginalizing and alienating its non-Sunni Muslim population. Prime Minister Najib Razak has been accused of exploiting religious tensions and pandering to Islamist hardliners after suffering major electoral losses in the 2013 election. In November, he formally abandoned a pledge to revoke a draconian colonial-era Sedition Law that has frequently been used to silence his political opponents, instead vowing to strengthen its provisions.

The Muslim-majority country has witnessed a surge in blasphemy allegations targeting the country's sizeable Christian minority. Malaysian law imposes a maximum three-year jail sentence for individuals found to have 'insulted' religion or published text or imagery deemed offensive to public 'morality'. This legislation is disproportionately used to clamp down on religious minorities. In January, religious authorities seized hundreds of bibles from a Christian group because they used the Arabic word '*Allab*' to refer to God – a practice that was formally banned in 2013. In May, the country was placed on the US government's Tier-2 'watch list' of countries where religious freedoms are under threat.

Malaysia's restrictive laws have entrenched discrimination against certain Muslim sects, such as Shi'a, Ahmadis and Al-Arqam, who are banned from spreading their faiths. The Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), under the Prime Minister's Office, has broad authority to determine what constitutes 'un-Islamic' or 'immoral' behaviour and to penalize individuals deemed to be in breach. The body regularly monitors, harasses and prosecutes members of

minority Muslim sects for alleged crimes against Islam. In March, over a hundred Shi'a, including a four-month-old child, were detained by authorities for attending a religious ceremony.

At the start of the year, the government unveiled plans to establish a Sharia police unit within JAKIM to help enforce Islamic law. It comes amid growing concern that Sharia courts in Malaysia are seen to favour the Sunni population, especially men. In one notable case, a Hindu woman whose Muslim husband abducted their daughter is facing an uphill battle to regain custody of her child because a Sharia court ruled against her on the basis of her faith. Followers of the outlawed Ahmadi faith are fighting back against a crackdown on their activities, arguing that they should not be subjected to interference by religious authorities since they have been classified as 'non-Muslims' by the government. In August, a group of 39 Ahmadis were granted leave by the High Court to pursue a judicial review application of their arrests. According to the human rights monitoring group SUARAM, dozens of indigenous Christians were also tricked into converting to Islam in January, after being promised money in exchange for signing cards and reading 'foreign words'. According to SUARAM, responsibility for the case was handed by the police to the Sabah State Islamic Affairs Department, which reportedly had presided over the ceremony.

In this context, Malaysia's burgeoning intolerance has fuelled the proliferation of hate speech and religious extremism across the country, where radical clerics are permitted to preach freely in mosques and through social media. Indeed the government has a track record of tolerating religious extremism among its political support base, while cracking down on dissidents using the controversial Sedition Law. In response to this increasingly oppressive environment, in December a group of civil servants wrote an open letter urging the government to take swift steps to promote religious harmony and understanding in Malaysia.

Issues affecting indigenous communities continue to be sidelined by the Malaysian government. Prime Minister Najib Razak has yet to implement the recommendations made

by the National Human Rights Commission following a historic inquiry into land rights abuses against indigenous peoples in 2013. Instead, he established a separate task force to consider steps moving forward, which has been criticized as an effort to dilute the inquiry's provisions. In March, Malaysia rejected a suggestion made by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, to evaluate its treatment of Orang Ulu, comprising 27 indigenous groups on the island of Sarawak. Orang Ulu, also known as Dayaks, face growing threats to their traditional lands from the rapid spread of logging, palm oil companies and large-scale hydropower dams. Many thousands of Orang Ulu have been forcibly displaced over the past few years to make way for a series of controversial mega-dams in Borneo, forming the Sarawak Corridor for Renewable Energy (SCORE).

Controversy has centred on Sarawak's former Chief Minister, Taib Mahmud, who is the subject of an ongoing investigation by Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission. Taib stepped down in February after 33 years in office, although indigenous activists fear he is still involved behind the scenes. His replacement, Adenan Satem – Taib's former brother-in-law and close political ally – has pledged to push ahead with the SCORE project, despite local opposition. In August, a new report by SAVE Rivers accused the government of threatening and coercing the indigenous populations in Baram, Sarawak, where resistance has flared against the next proposed dam site. The report raises fresh concerns about the role of money politics in Sarawak.

Malaysia has one of the highest levels of urbanization in Southeast Asia, with around three-quarters of its population now residing in cities. In Sarawak, a growing number of indigenous youths are migrating to urban centres in search of work and educational opportunities. This process has largely been driven by Malaysia's rapid rate of deforestation, which has eroded the traditional livelihoods and lands of indigenous forest dwellers. Nearly 70 per cent of the highland Kelabit tribe in Sarawak has migrated to urban areas and, according to a 2013 survey, the population of Baram dropped from 80,000

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Case study by Hanna Hindstrom  
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## Supporting indigenous livelihoods in Baguio city

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Four years ago, a typhoon struck the northern Filipino city of Baguio. The storm ruptured the walls of the city's mounting garbage dump, sending hundreds of tonnes of urban waste cascading into the streets. The landslide flattened several houses and killed two young children. The tragedy was a wake-up call for Geraldine Cacho, an Igorot woman and rural farmer who first migrated to Baguio to pursue university studies. 'Why would garbage become a killer? Why would it become an issue?' she asked herself at the time.

Many Igorot migrants are accustomed to the practice of *ayyew* – known as *sayang* in Filipino – an indigenous concept of recycling and reusing all forms of waste. For example, biodegradable waste would be transformed into fertilizers using vermiculture, while plastic bottles and old clothes may be recycled into household containers or rugs.

As residents dump some 300 tonnes of garbage every day, recycling not only offers a source of livelihood to Baguio's indigenous population but also provides the city with an effective form of waste management. 'Using *ayyew* as a culture of managing waste would lessen garbage and help solve the city's huge garbage problem,' she says. 'As an activist organizer, I knew there has to be a way. A mass movement is needed to help solve the problem, if not eliminate it.'

After attending a training programme organized by the NGO Tebtebba, Cacho set up a vermibed in her kitchen. At first she faced resistance from her landlady, who described the compost worms as 'unsanitary'. She confiscated Cacho's worms and discarded them in a smelly

open-pit garbage dump in her backyard. 'It was however a blessing because after some weeks, we noticed that the open pit was not smelly anymore, and the neighbours stopped complaining of its stench,' she says. She then explained to the landlady how vermiculture works and helped her plant onions, eggplants and cabbage in her back garden using compost.

Cacho is now working with the Cordillera Women's Education and Research Centre (CWEARC) to promote vermiculture practices in Baguio. CWEARC is supporting over 100 indigenous women to establish urban vegetable gardens with the help of recycled waste. The idea is to simultaneously boost the socio-economic status of indigenous women while combatting Baguio's burgeoning waste problem. The women are all migrants from rural areas who often struggle to earn their living as street vendors or backyard hog raisers. By working as a collective, the women harness another indigenous concept, known as *ubbo* or mutually beneficial labour.

According to the UN, indigenous migrants make up 60 per cent of the city's population and more than half of them live in poverty. Indigenous women are particularly marginalized and are usually excluded from discussions about urban planning in Baguio. But now they have a stronger voice in the community. 'The project increased the capacity of indigenous women on project management, leadership, economic empowerment, and strengthened their organization,' says Lucille Lumas-i from CWEARC.

Even the government has responded positively to the project. 'In communities where practitioners were located, there is a decrease in the volume of waste being hauled by the city government,' added Lumas-i. 'At the community level, Barangay [ward] officials are very supportive of the project and some have adopted the concept in their community waste management programme.' Cacho now has a blooming urban garden, studded with ginger, corn, squash and sweet potatoes. It reminds her of her family's farm in the countryside. 'The growth was very visible,' she says, 'like magic.' ■

to 20,000 in a decade. Activists have warned that the proliferation of new dams will exacerbate this trend. Hunter-gatherer tribes such as the Penan are particularly vulnerable during resettlement as they often lack the occupational skills suited to life outside the forest. This has contributed to the urbanization of poverty among Sarawak's indigenous population, who already form a significant percentage of squatters in cities such as Miri. However, the Sarawak government maintains that new hydropower dams will boost rural development and discourage Orang Ulu from migrating to cities.

A large proportion of indigenous peoples from Peninsular Malaysia, known collectively as the Orang Asli, live below the poverty line. Despite being protected by Malaysia's controversial Bumiputera laws – which favour the ethnic Malay and indigenous populations for government jobs and university opportunities, while entrenching discrimination against Malaysia's Chinese and Indian minorities – Orang Asli still face discrimination in most aspects of their lives and consistently rank lowest on health and education indicators. According to a recent study, demographic changes and urbanization has worsened the risk of diabetes, hypertension and obesity among the Orang Asli. This may be caused by the rising cost of food in urban areas. Indigenous activists blamed the government for failing to help indigenous communities adapt to city life. Some Orang Asli report feeling out of place in urban areas due to educational and socio-economic disparities and language barriers.

## Philippines

During 2014 the Philippines made significant progress towards concluding a 45-year Muslim minority struggle for self-determination that has claimed over 120,000 lives. In March, the Philippine government finalized a historic peace deal with the largest Muslim armed group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), paving the way for the creation of an autonomous Mindanao region – also known as Bangsamoro – by 2016. Notably, it was the first time anywhere that such a document was signed by a woman as chief negotiator. The Muslim minority, making up roughly 5 per cent of the population, is one of the poorest and most marginalized groups in the

overwhelmingly Catholic country. The resource-rich Mindanao province has been engulfed by conflict since the 1970s, amid religious tensions and grievances over perceived exploitation by the central government.

The Philippine Congress is currently considering a new law, known as the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which would formalize the terms of the peace agreement, including mechanisms for natural resource revenue-sharing and political devolution. However, indigenous peoples in Mindanao, known collectively as Lumads, have expressed concerns about the future of their ancestral domains. Some fear the new legislation could aggravate land conflicts and erode the rights of indigenous peoples in the southern Philippines. There are some 100,000 Lumads in the proposed Bangsamoro region, and they consider almost 300,000 hectares of land to be their ancestral domains. Although two Lumads are included in the commission drafting the Basic Law, it is unclear how these concerns will be addressed. Other non-Muslim communities have resisted inclusion in the new Bangsamoro region, including the Christian-majority city of Zamboanga, which came under siege by armed groups in 2013.

A patchwork of other separatist groups, such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, opposed the peace deal and continued to launch deadly attacks on the civilian population throughout the year, targeting the region's Christian minority in a number of towns and cities. The peace talks have similarly excluded the MNLF's founder, Nur Misuari, an influential figure who led the siege on Zamboanga in 2013. Mindanao is also haunted by a continuing communist insurgency against the government, and Lumads often get caught in the middle.

The Philippines also remains one of the world's deadliest places for human rights activists and indigenous community leaders. Many killings have been linked to the military or pro-government militias operating near resource development projects. In March alone, nine people were murdered, including William Bugatti, a prominent Tawali activist who was gunned down by unknown assailants on his way home from work. The Philippine

**Below:** A child mesmerized by people dancing and playing the Igorot ‘ganza’ (music and dance with gongs) at the Igorot Park in Baguio City, Philippines during the protest against violence against women headed by the One Billion Rising women’s group.

*Richard Balonglong*

army had reportedly identified him as a ‘target person’ and communist sympathizer in a leaked military document from 2012. In August, three indigenous rights activists were murdered within one week, two of whom were involved in disputes with a local palm oil and mining company. The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact described the ongoing violence against indigenous communities as a ‘systematic attack’ intended to ‘stifle their opposition and struggle to defend their ancestral lands’.

Militarization and clan-based violence are key factors driving rural–urban migration in the southern Philippines, where the influx of displaced households has placed a heavy burden on the host communities. According to UN-Habitat, it has led to increased competition for jobs as well as shortages in housing, health and sanitation in urban areas. Young Muslim women, who tend to have lower

levels of education than the men, are especially vulnerable to trafficking or exploitative domestic labour schemes.

Natural disasters are another major source of displacement in the typhoon-prone Philippines. Indigenous communities were left isolated after Typhoon Haiyan hit the southern Philippines in November 2013. According to the NGO Tebtebba, some 1,600 indigenous families are struggling to survive after losing their homes, infrastructure and boats used to gather vital supplies for the community. Indigenous groups have been made more vulnerable due to their geographical isolation, far away from major urban centres where support services are typically located. Research suggests that the rapid rate of urbanization in the Philippines has also made poor and marginalized groups, such as minority and indigenous communities, more susceptible to natural disasters and flooding as they cannot afford to buy or rent housing in safer places.

However, indigenous customs and knowledge have also been recognized as a tool to tackle the effects of climate change in the Philippines. For example, a regional UNESCO-led project has studied indigenous cultural practices to help policy makers devise better disaster preparedness strategies in coastal areas. The study identified a





number of traditions that were used to accurately predict disasters, such as typhoons or tsunamis, and later integrated with scientific approaches. The study found that indigenous communities have developed various ways to strengthen their houses and store food ahead of disasters, offering useful lessons in strengthening local resilience.

Around 35,000 people, mostly from the country's Muslim minority, remain uprooted following the siege of Zamboanga in 2013. Thousands have since been subjected to arbitrary relocation, with others reportedly receiving inadequate aid and food supplies. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), most of the people who remain displaced are urban poor who lack formal land-ownership or tenancy rights in their area of origin. The repatriation process has been further hindered by concerns about certain areas deemed unsuitable for returns due to risks of flooding or renewed violence. The IDMC has called on the government to prioritize housing rights for displaced communities as part of the resettlement process. Congress is currently reviewing new legislation on the rights of IDPs, seen as a crucial step towards protecting vulnerable minorities and indigenous people in the Philippines. The law is a revised version of a historic 2013 bill that was controversially vetoed by the president.

The Philippines is a rapidly urbanizing country, with around half of the population now living in cities. Although most indigenous communities, which make up roughly 15 per cent of the population, live in isolated rural areas, a growing number are migrating to cities in search of better livelihoods and social services. Many are driven from their traditional lands by the expansion of large-scale development projects, militarization and tribal conflicts. They often face poverty and exclusion as a result of their limited formal education and the fact that their skills may not be suited to an urban context. In the northern city of Baguio – where indigenous people make up over 60 per cent of the population – it is estimated that some 65 per cent of indigenous migrants suffer from extreme poverty. Many of them are migrant women working as vendors in the city streets, where they are regularly pestered by police as part of the government's anti-peddling drive.

## Thailand

Thailand's fragile democracy suffered a serious blow during 2014 when its military seized power from the democratically elected Pheu Thai government on 22 May. The military swiftly established its ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), led by coup leader General Prayuth Chan-ocha, stifling all dissent by imposing martial law, taking control of the media and repealing the 2007 Constitution. By late July, the NCPO had pushed its own interim Constitution into force. As the year drew to a close, Prayuth's regime had overseen the widespread suppression of dissent and a crackdown on journalists, political opponents and activists – with a number of policies directly affecting Thailand's minorities and indigenous peoples.

Shortly after seizing power the NCPO set about instituting a series of reforms, including a 'Return Forest Policy' in June and a reforestation 'Master Plan' two months later, with the goal of increasing forest cover throughout the country. Since many of Thailand's indigenous territories are in protected forests, these policies carried the threat of judicial action for the communities living there. In July, three indigenous Pakayaw Karen families had their lands reclaimed by the Royal Forest Department in Thung Pa Ka village, northern Mae Hong Song province. The move followed the arrest of 39 Pakayaw Karen in May for cutting down trees in the surrounding forest as timber to build their homes: they now face imprisonment or fines after they were sentenced for encroachment and illegal logging in October. More land confiscation and evictions continued, many in Isan, the north-eastern Lao-speaking region that has faced discrimination from the Thai administration in Bangkok since its incorporation into the modern state of Thailand. Indeed, by December *Prachatai* news had reported that nearly 1,800 families had been affected by the order, mostly in the north and north-east, home to large minority and indigenous populations. A newly proposed Mining Bill – shot down during the previous government – was also revived and will soon be up for approval by the National Legislative Assembly, causing concern for minority communities in mineral-rich areas as the new bill has weakened impact assessments.

Conflict between officials and local communities over land and natural resources has led to the death or disappearance of numerous activists in recent years. One of the most high-profile cases occurred during 2014 when a leading Karen land rights activist, Porlajee Rakchongcharoen, also known as Billy, was reportedly last seen with the chief of Kaengkrachan National Park and three park officials when he was detained for carrying ‘illegal honey’ on 17 April. Kaengkrachan Park is the largest of Thailand’s national parks and home to Billy’s indigenous S’gaw Karen community. Billy was one of the key witnesses in a lawsuit against park officials for burning and looting the homes of more than 20 families. The park chief, Chaiwat Limlikhitakorn, had already been under investigation for the killing of another Karen activist in 2011. He claimed to have released Billy after his arrest. In July, the provincial court cleared Chaiwat of involvement in Billy’s disappearance, but by December a representative from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) publicly stated that their investigation into the case has found that Billy was never released by the officers.

A community of indigenous Moken ‘sea gypsies’ have also been struggling to resist eviction from their ancestral territory, occupying highly prized lands in Phuket whose title deeds are owned by several businessmen. A lower court ordered the eviction of over 100 people, but the Department of Special Investigations has found that these lands have been occupied by the community for at least 100 years through DNA analysis of burial grounds, though they lacked any formal title deeds. In November it was reported that the Justice Ministry had asked the Department of Lands to revoke the title deeds.

The year 2014 marked the ten-year anniversary of both the Tak Bai massacre, where at least 78 Muslim protesters were killed after being pushed into overcrowded police trucks, and the disappearance of Muslim human rights lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit. Both were key events in the timeline of the Thai state’s conflict with the separatist movement in the ethnic Malay dominated provinces in the south of the country: in neither case has justice been served. Nevertheless, in December, Prayuth travelled to

Malaysia to restart peace talks with the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani (BRN) after negotiations stalled in 2013, amid promises that the south would be free of violence by the end of 2015. Nevertheless, conflict continued in the region throughout the year, bringing the death toll to more than 6,000 people since 2004, with regular killings and bombings, including increasing attacks against ‘soft’ targets like hospitals. Both the Thai military and separatists have been responsible for serious human rights violations; no members of the security forces have been successfully prosecuted, which has led to a climate of impunity. The separatists have particularly targeted teachers and schools; after the killing of three teachers since the beginning of 2014, HRW noted in March that at least 171 teachers had been killed and 300 schools had been attacked. In response to ongoing violence, in November the military bolstered its programme of arming civilian ‘volunteers’ with military weapons, despite reports emerging two months earlier of one such volunteer killing an unarmed 14-year-old Muslim boy in August, then planting a gun in his hand to frame him as an insurgent. Security forces in general have been responsible for numerous human rights abuses in the region: three-quarters of the 134 torture allegations reported to the NHRC between 2007 and 2013 occurred in the south.

The NCPO announced that it had made a deal with neighbouring Burma to repatriate over 130,000 refugees who have settled along the border over decades of fighting. Most are minority communities who have reason to doubt guarantees of their safe return. The same applies to the 1,300 Rohingya asylum seekers – an ethno-religious community that is among the most persecuted on earth – deported back to Burma in February, having fled the country due to targeted violence and mass displacement. This followed shortly after a raid by Thai security forces on illegal ‘human smuggling camps’ located over 500 Rohingya who had reportedly been held hostage en route to other countries. Other migrant groups are also vulnerable to deportation, with rumours of a planned crackdown by the military government on Cambodian migrants triggering an exodus of more than 120,000 Cambodians in June.

Many migrants and ethnic minorities in search

of employment have relocated to urban areas, particularly Bangkok, where Thailand's economic and political activity is mostly concentrated. This has contributed to enduring underdevelopment and a lack of economic opportunity in cities elsewhere in the country, including the Muslim south and the north-east Isan region, despite periodic attempts to encourage more investment in smaller urban areas, such as the Isan cities of Khon Kaen and Korat. While the capital has been a beacon of opportunity for people all over the country, the largest numbers of incomers are Isan, spurred by poor crop fertility, flooding, drought and population pressures. Thailand's economic boom in the 1970s was largely sustained by the Isan labour force, who still comprise a significant proportion of the urban working poor today, transiting between Bangkok and their homes. Remittances form a significant part of Isan family incomes. It has been suggested that this experience of urban life in Bangkok has not only helped create a sense of distinct Isan ethno-regional identity but also bolstered their political engagement; they form a significant cohort of the modern Red Shirt movement.

Because of evictions, drought and resettlement out of natural parks into villages with little land to farm, many of Thailand's indigenous peoples are driven to migrate to cities such as Mae Sot, Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Many Karen youth engage in daily agricultural labour or factory work in smaller cities like Ratchaburi, with some migrating to Bangkok more permanently. However, for the more than 100,000 indigenous people who lack formal Thai citizenship – the result of complicated and discriminatory registration procedures – movement outside their areas of residency is illegal. Without legal status, they are denied access to education and end up concentrated in informal and low-wage labour in urban or peri-urban areas. A significant proportion of Thailand's northern indigenous women, for example, enter domestic labour or the sex trade, mostly in urban areas. Many migrant workers from surrounding countries, many of whom are minorities in their home countries, similarly lack legal status, despite ongoing government efforts to implement migrant worker registration. This makes migration to and residency in cities extremely precarious, and leaves

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**Case study** by *Nicole Girard*  
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## Promoting a more inclusive tourism industry for Chiang Mai's hill tribes

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'I'm studying Chinese so that I can be a guide for Chinese tourists,' explains Nahnenuhn, a 20-year-old indigenous Karen from Thailand, 'I think it's a good future for me to help support my family.' Nahnenuhn comes from a small village near Mae Saring and moved to Chiang Mai to study. Like everyone else in the city, she has seen a dramatic rise in the number of Chinese tourists to Chiang Mai, and the potential economic opportunities this has presented for its residents, including the indigenous hill tribes from remote villages.

Chiang Mai is the largest city in northern Thailand, nestled in the mountain ranges of the Thai highlands, a long-time tourist destination for both domestic and international tourism. Since the 1960s, Thais have ventured to the so-called 'Rose of the North' to experience its cooler climate and indigenous cultures. Trekking and visits to hill tribe villages have been cornerstones of Thailand's tourist promotion in the north, displaying posters of colourfully dressed Akha women in the airports of Bangkok and featuring them in its 2015 'Discover Thailand' marketing campaign. Visitors to the north are increasing among both Thais and foreigners, with the number of tourists from China alone exceeding 4 million in 2014. So what does this mean for Thailand's indigenous peoples?

When Chiang Mai's tourism boom first began, the self-sufficiency of Thailand's northern indigenous peoples had already been eroded through a series of government

policies, including the creation of national protected parks, a ban on traditional swidden agriculture and the prohibition of opium production. Supplementary income, through work in the city or village homestays for tourists, was therefore a necessity. Though the government had started to issue some national identity cards to indigenous residents, many communities were and still are essentially stateless, with little access to health and education opportunities. Consequently, the opportunities presented through tourism, including construction work in the city on tourism infrastructure, were one of few viable livelihoods options. Many indigenous men and women also entered the sex trade, a form of exploitation fuelled by tourism.

Trekking and homestay tours began to pick up in the 1980s. At this time, indigenous communities such as Hmong, Lisu, Akha and Lahu began to sell their handicrafts and cultural wares in the Chiang Mai night bazaar or perform traditional dances at the Chiang Mai Old Cultural Centre. A select number of people from these groups were moving to the city for these opportunities due to economic insecurity in their villages, a need that – together with their lack of Thai language skills – left them vulnerable to exploitation by Thai tourist guides. Homestays in villages were initiated by Thai guides, who

would receive the majority of the fees, split with guesthouses and tourist agents in the city that sold the tour packages.

By the early 1990s though, villages were starting to tire of this situation. ‘Fees given for accommodation, food and to guides were much lower than ours’, says Thellie, an eco-tour coordinator from the Mirror Foundation, an NGO based in the neighbouring city of Chiang Rai.

*‘There was little interaction with villagers by guests, and little or no explanation of culture and traditions. This manifested in ignorance and insensitive practices by guests, because they were uninformed, and the feeling of a zoo-like experience for both guests and villagers.’*

The Mirror Foundation was formed in 1991 and is run by Thais, including indigenous staff, with the aim of running a variety of projects to support indigenous communities across northern Thailand, including anti-trafficking campaigns, citizenship initiatives, scholarship programmes and handicraft livelihoods, among others. Only later did they include ecotourism as one of their projects, however. Thellie explains:

*‘Once our other projects were established, there was a realization that the villagers were being exploited*



*by unscrupulous tour agents, so the [ecotourism] project developed as a response to this, but also to give employment opportunities to villagers, as guides, and homestay families’.*

Unlike many outfits, the Mirror Foundation places an emphasis on participation. ‘The project was done in coordination with villagers, and a training programme set up for those interested in becoming tour guides.’ By allowing indigenous peoples to play a major role in staffing and decision making, the organization aims to build their capacity and achieve a broader transformation of the local tourism industry:

*‘All our guides are from local indigenous groups and licensed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and encouraged to work for themselves or other agents, as well as the Mirror Foundation – this helps to spread the ethos of our work out into the tour agency community, which hopefully realizes that it is more beneficial to them long term if the villagers are treated fairly, and not exploited.’*

The revenue they receive from their ecotours goes back into the Mirror Foundation projects, with the goal of being self-sustaining.

When asked how tourism has affected the villagers, Thellie replies:

*‘I think that it is safe to say that tourism has altered the lives of villagers. Not just for those communities where tourists visit, but for the communities where the youth leave to find work, or spouses, within the wide range of areas in the tourism industry. Tourism, along with exposure to the wider society, has the power to improve lives, motivate individuals, and give opportunities which were not previously available; but each also brings with it the ability to destroy, de-motivate and deny opportunities, if not handled properly.’ ■*

**Left: A woman from a local hill tribe prepares food for an ecotourist home stay. Mirror Foundation**

them vulnerable to traffickers and exploitative working conditions.

However, some minorities have fared well in urban areas and successfully resisted attempts to evict or displace their communities. The settlement of the Cham Muslim community in the canalside area of Ban Krua, for instance, dates back at least 200 years and is an exceptional example of old Bangkok, with wooden stilt houses and fruit trees in the midst of malls and highway overpasses. Its continuing strength is no accident, however. Starting in the 1980s, Bangkok’s transport division was keen to build an expressway through their neighbourhood, with the intention of demolishing houses, evicting residents and destroying their mosque and cemetery. Residents successfully defied the project with a cohesive campaign of resistance and advocacy that has been attributed to the community’s relative autonomy and the strong Islamic identity tied to the land, empowering the community to oppose aggressive city planning. While plans for an expressway on-ramp were abandoned in 2001, successive attempts continued in 2012, with Ban Krua again uniting against the urban administration’s plans.

## Vietnam

Vietnam made international news headlines in May 2014 after rare large-scale protests broke out across the country against China, sparked by the movement of an oil rig into disputed territory in the South China Sea. Initially the Communist government did not attempt to quash the protests, but it appealed for calm after mobs began to attack perceived Chinese nationals and Chinese-owned factories. Hundreds of factories were attacked in the central provinces and there were reports that more than 20 people had been killed. Over 600 Chinese nationals reportedly fled the country fearing further violence.

In February, Vietnam underwent its second Universal Periodic Review, accepting 182 out of 227 recommendations, including those concerning freedom of religion or belief as well as non-discrimination for minorities, but rejected key recommendations that would overhaul the state of human rights in the country. In addition, after a delay of 21 years, Vietnam submitted its State Report for the UN Committee on



Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The exile Vietnam Committee for Human Rights condemned the State Report as 'empty rhetoric' and highlighted the country's continuing human rights violations against much of its population, particularly religious and ethnic minorities. This point was reiterated in July when the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, made an official visit to the country. Concluding his visit, he expressed concern about serious restrictions on religious groups and made note of how the government's process of official registration, ostensibly to enable people to practise their beliefs freely, 'is no guarantee that freedom of religion or belief is fully respected'.

A number of incidents during the year also underlined the ongoing challenges religious minorities face in practising their faith. On 1 January, the head of the Buddhist Youth Movement (BYM), Le Cong Cau, was placed under house arrest in the north central province of Hue as he attempted to visit the leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) in Ho Chi Minh City. The UBCV is a banned religious organization in Vietnam, but authorities tolerate the related BYM organization for their social support activities. However, his arrest triggered a series of raids against BYM members, with 23 people reportedly arrested in Hue in subsequent weeks. A Memorial Day service on 10 January in Hue was stopped by authorities and over 300 UBCV invitees were intercepted or threatened. After being expelled from Hue, a prominent UBCV monk Thich Chon Tam was also assaulted by plainclothes police in Ho Chi Minh on 14 January. The crackdown is thought to have come on the heels of UBCV's announcement of a new executive committee.

In March, three Hmong Christians were sentenced to prison terms in the north-eastern province of Tuyen Quang under Article 258 of Vietnam's penal code, a broad provision used to prosecute those who 'infringe upon the interests of the State'. Hoang Van Sang, Ly Van Dinh and Duang Van Tu are part of a group of Hmong Christians who advocate for reformed burial and wedding practices, said to be less costly and less burdensome on families. The government is reportedly forcing the reformists to return to their

traditional practices. The lawyer of Hoang Van Sang said that he had been charged for building a funeral home to accommodate the new practices, but also mentioned that the community's refusal to accept grain seed and other state development initiatives has angered the government.

Arbitrary sentencing and imprisonment on bogus charges is a common tactic to repress those defending the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, with imprisoned religious freedom defenders often subjected to serious mistreatment, including beatings and harassment, while in jail. In August, three human rights defenders were sentenced to prison in August for 'causing public disorder' for traffic violations in Dong Thap province. Bui Thi Minh Hang, Nguyen Thi Thuy Quynh and Nguyen Van Minh, an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist, were arrested in February after 21 bloggers and Hoa Hao Buddhist activists rode motorbikes to the home of a former political prisoner, Nguyen Bac Truyen, and his fiancée, Bui Thi Kim Phuong, also an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist practitioner.

A new land law passed in late 2013 came into effect during the year. It will put more conditions and restrictions on how the government reclaims land for development purposes, in contrast to the previous provisions that facilitated indigenous and minority land alienation. The law still allows for land acquisition for development projects that are in the interest of 'the public and the nation', but they must be approved by the prime minister and the National Assembly.

Land rights remained a serious source of insecurity during the year, particularly for minorities. In the village of Con Dau, near Da Nang city in central Vietnam, the government expropriated land from Catholic community members to give to a resort investor. The UN Special Rapporteur on housing Raquel Rolnik called it 'a clear case of land grabbing for the benefit of private entrepreneurs and at the expense of local communities'. In October, the Thai Ha Redemptorist Church in Dong Da district, Hanoi, protested the filling of a lake that the church insists belongs to the parish, citing their increasing membership as the motivation for authorities to confiscate their land.

The majority of Vietnam's indigenous peoples still reside in rural areas, where poverty levels are

higher than for their majority Kinh counterparts. According to 2009 government census data, only 13 per cent of 'ethnic minorities' live in cities, as compared to 32 per cent of ethnic Kinh. One contributing factor to the significant developmental gaps between minority and majority communities in Vietnam is the broader inequality between cities and the countryside, with poverty rates two and a half times higher in rural areas. Ethnic minorities are therefore more likely to be adversely affected by the limited development and lack of opportunities outside urban areas. However, Vietnam's ethnic disparities far exceed these differences. Over extended periods, ethnic minorities have fared much more poorly than their majority counterparts. In fact, urban poverty levels among ethnic minorities remain higher than rural poverty levels among majority Kinh. The only positive trend is that poverty levels among minorities in cities are markedly lower and have continued to fall over time, suggesting that further urbanization could improve outcomes if the process is well managed.

However, migration among ethnic minorities is less common than among majority Kinh and tends to be from rural to rural areas, many as part of government relocation or sedentarization programmes from previous decades. Nevertheless, an increasing number of younger minority community members are now migrating to the city, mostly in search of work as labour scouts have recently advertised heavily in rural areas with large minority populations to engage factory workers, domestic maids and other areas. Lack of opportunity in rural areas is driving urbanization, and minorities are disproportionately vulnerable to food insecurity, price fluctuations, drought and other natural disasters.

# South Asia

**Shikha Dilawri and Nicole Girard**

Minorities and indigenous peoples continued to face persecution across South Asia during 2014.

Armed conflicts in India and Pakistan in regions with large minority and indigenous populations led to mass displacement, while also exacerbating the vulnerability of some communities to targeted attacks. In Sri Lanka, five years after the official end of the conflict, ethnic and religious tensions remain due to the government's continued failure to provide justice to the families of victims killed or disappeared during the decades-long conflict. Similarly, Nepal's post-conflict transition has been slow amid concerns that security forces responsible for the deaths or disappearance of thousands of Dalits and Madhesis during the civil war will escape punishment. Land grabbing by other communities and state-sponsored development programmes in customary territories also continue to affect minority and indigenous populations across the region.

Though largely rural, South Asian countries have been undergoing a profound transformation in recent years due to urbanization, with cities across the region expanding at an extraordinary pace. This has created significant problems as lack of infrastructure and limited land has led to the growth of slums and informal settlements, often on the periphery of cities. In this context, minority and indigenous urban populations are especially vulnerable to communal violence, evictions and exploitative or unsanitary employment, such as manual scavenging. In addition, many communities, such as Pakistan's Shi'a, are increasingly being targeted in urban areas. Ensuring the rights and security of these groups is an essential element for the long-term sustainability and development of the region's urban areas.

## Afghanistan

In 2014, Afghanistan's presidential election consumed the country. Marred by allegations of fraud, the months-long electoral process eventually resulted in a power-sharing agreement between the two leading candidates, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani, who became president. Amid this political uncertainty, civilian casualties reached record levels in 2014. Nevertheless, at the end of 2014 NATO formally declared an end to its 13-year combat mission in Afghanistan. This has provoked uncertainty over what the end of this phase of foreign intervention

will mean for Afghans, not least for the country's minority populations such as the Hazara, who – as both a sectarian and visible ethnic minority – have been targeted by the Taliban.

Tensions surrounding issues of 'identity' in Afghanistan came to the fore during the election, which saw the politicization of identity along predominantly ethnic lines. Although Ghani has avoided using his tribal name for official purposes since his election, during the campaign his identity was mobilized in efforts to appeal to Afghanistan's majority Pashtun voters. Meanwhile, Ghani's first vice president, former Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, warned minority Uzbek and Turkmen tribes in Baghlan province they would be considered 'traitors' if they did not vote for Ghani. However, the election also provided an opportunity for minorities to challenge Afghanistan's hierarchical political system, with Hazaras playing a particularly prominent role in the election – a reflection of their improved status over the last decade. Although the Hazara vote was split, the majority of voters lent their support to Abdullah Abdullah – who is of mixed Pashtun and Tajik ethnicity but is identified with the latter – and who represented a vote for change in the eyes of many. Following the parliamentary rejection of a presidential decree proposing a reserved seat for Hindus and Sikhs in December 2013, political representation of these groups remained limited in 2014. However, in a historic appointment, in May 2014 the previous Afghan government selected a representative from the dwindling Hindu community for the diplomatic rank of ambassador for the first time.

Although violence along ethnic lines has greatly reduced since the 2001 toppling of the Taliban government, violent attacks continue to be perpetrated against certain groups, particularly Hazara. In July 2014, for instance, Taliban stopped a bus travelling to Kabul for Eid, separated Hazara passengers and shot them, killing 15, including three women and a child. More recently, in late February 2015, masked gunmen kidnapped 31 Hazara men travelling through Zabul province on a major road from Herat to Kabul. Following this kidnapping, the country has seen a rise in similar attacks on travellers on Afghanistan's main highways,

including the reported abduction of eight Hazara in March 2015 on a road between Jaghori District and Ghazni City. Also in March 2015, a rare attack was perpetrated on a minority Sufi mosque, viewed as heretical by hardline Sunni groups, killing at least six people. Allegations that these recent sectarian attacks may be connected to ISIS have stoked fear among many Afghans, and in particular members of the country's minority groups.

Persistent discrimination against Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs also compelled hundreds of members of these dwindling religious groups to leave Afghanistan during the year, including 35 Sikhs who arrived in the UK in a shipping container in August 2014. While no longer forced to wear yellow arm-bands to identify themselves, as was required under Taliban control, members of the Sikh community have reported worsening conditions since 2001. For example, Sikhs continue to suffer verbal and physical abuse during funeral cremations – a practice forbidden in Islam – and, while the Ministry of Education has opened two primary schools exclusively for Hindu and Sikh students in Kabul and Jalalabad, those not separated into designated schools continue to suffer discrimination in the country's public schools.

Local women's rights organizations have aptly pointed out that – to differing extents – all sides of conflict in Afghanistan have had a role in undermining women's rights. Nevertheless, as Oxfam highlighted in a 2014 report, any future peace talks with the Taliban must not undermine those important, if limited, gains that have been made with respect to women's rights in recent years. As reported by Amnesty International in early 2015, women human rights defenders continue to suffer threats, harassment and intimidation on a daily basis. Although Ghani nominated three women to join his cabinet – one more than his predecessor Karzai, but one less than initially promised – high levels of discrimination persist in the country, which itself puts women appointed in such positions at risk. Gender-based discrimination and growing religious intolerance intersected in what was described by the newly elected president as a heinous attack in March 2015, when a mob killed a young woman after she allegedly burned

a copy of the Qur'an.

In light of persistent insecurity, as well as other factors such as environmental disasters and limited economic and social opportunities, many minorities have been determined to leave their homes for more stable environs. Yet, with countries such as Pakistan and Iran taking an increasingly exclusionary stance towards Afghan refugees in 2014, many relocated within the country itself. From January to September the UNHCR documented an increase of more than 38,340 internally displaced (IDPs) in Afghanistan, bringing the total to over 755,011. The majority of these IDPs, as well as Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries, have chosen urban areas as their destinations, in turn greatly contributing to Afghanistan's rapid urbanization in recent years. This largely unchecked and unplanned growth has meant that the majority of residents in and around Kabul are based in informal settlements or slums. Kabul is now the fifth fastest growing city in the world.

Minorities have been among the many Afghans contributing to this process of urbanization which has, in certain ways, changed the face of the country. Although, broadly speaking, Afghanistan's ethnic groups continue to occupy geographically distinct regions, with Pashtuns in southern and eastern areas, Tajiks occupying the north-west and north-east, Turkmen and Uzbeks in the north, and Hazara living predominantly in the centre, the movement of diverse populations to urban areas has complicated this picture. In slums in and around Kabul, Pashtuns as well as minorities such as Hazara, Tajiks and Uzbeks from across the country live among one another. Yet while this diversity has encouraged cooperation and coexistence in certain locales, structures of exclusion and discrimination have also been reproduced in urban areas.

For Hazara, the journey to Kabul from Hazarajat in the centre of the country has proven dangerous. The main roadway between the two areas – dubbed 'Death Road' – has been the site of kidnappings and other deadly Taliban attacks on Hazara in recent years. As a result, having successfully arrived in Kabul, Hazara have often been unable or afraid to return to their previous homes. This violence on the main roadway has further isolated and thereby stalled

the development of Hazarajat, which requires labour and materials from Kabul to build facilities such as schools and clinics. Both these factors have contributed to the high numbers of Hazara currently residing in Kabul, with many concentrated in one overcrowded area, Dasht-e-Barchi. Although life in Kabul has relatively improved for Hazara since 2001, they have continued to occupy lower-status jobs and have faced harsh discrimination, including in access to facilities and provision of services.

Meanwhile, for Kabul's tiny Sikh population conditions continue to worsen, their small population dwindling to an estimated 300 families. Socially ostracized, Sikhs living in Kabul reportedly face economic hardship, with many refusing to conduct business with them, but also due to land grabs in areas in which Sikhs have historically resided. In addition to daily economic and social discrimination – sometimes manifesting as physical and verbal abuse – freedom to practise their religion has also been curtailed. Kabul was once home to eight Sikh places of worship or *gurdwaras*, but only one remains today.

Members of Afghanistan's Kuchi minority – a diverse nomadic community representing a variety of tribal and ethno-political affiliations – who have more recently adopted a sedentary lifestyle on the periphery of major cities have similarly faced discrimination. Urban Kuchis have typically lacked access to 'serviced' areas of the city and have instead lived on the outskirts, often occupying infertile land or, as has been the case near Kandahar, permanently residing in refugee camps. These shabby living conditions have not only disadvantaged those living in such settlements, but have also fuelled increasingly widespread negative perceptions of Kuchis, further undermining their social status within Afghanistan.

## Bangladesh

The year in Bangladesh began with national elections on 5 January. Tensions in both the build-up to and aftermath of the elections, described by HRW as 'the most violent in the country's history', led to widespread attacks against minorities, particularly Hindus, who have regularly been targeted for their traditional

support of the secular ruling Awami League. These elections were especially tense, as the opposition coalition led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted the vote and attempted to prevent others from voting. Polling stations were attacked and minorities particularly targeted, with hundreds of Hindu homes, shops and temples burned and ransacked, especially in northern and south-western districts. Christians were targeted as well.

Both the Awami League and police blamed the BNP, their coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and their supporters for the violence, though the BNP itself denied any involvement. The Chair of the National Human Rights Commission also accused the government of failing in its responsibility to prevent attacks on Hindus. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said measures would be taken to see justice in these cases, while the prime minister's law affairs officer said that special tribunals would be set up to prosecute offenders under the Terrorism Prevention Act. An independent judicial commission was formed in 2009 to investigate election violence towards minorities in 2001, but none of its recommendations have since been implemented.

The ruling Awami League came to power in 2009 on a platform that included war crimes tribunals for atrocities committed during the 1971 War of Independence, including those connected with violence, mass killings and conversions of Hindus and other minorities. The trials have been highly politicized, further polarizing a society already divided between support for the BNP and Awami League, with many JI leaders convicted for their alleged involvement in the abuses. The trials have been criticized for falling far short of international fair trial standards. In 2014, JI leaders continued to be tried for genocide and crimes against humanity: in December A.T.M. Azharul Islam, assistant secretary general of JI, was sentenced to death on 30 December for the killing of 1,400 Hindus near Jharuarbeel on 17 April 1971. JI organized nationwide protests in response, though these were on a much smaller scale than the demonstrations organized in 2013 against the court rulings, when numerous Hindu temples and homes were attacked.

This unstable climate has also been exploited

by certain groups to seize land from minorities and indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), known collectively as Jumma or Pahari peoples, have seen much of their lands settled by majority Muslim Bengalis, causing continued outbreaks of violence between communities, despite a 1997 Peace Accord securing their land rights. In June, over 250 Chakma and Tripuri people reportedly abandoned their homes and fled to the Indian border at Tripura after clashes with Bengali settlers. In December, around 50 indigenous people in Rangamati district had their homes razed by Bengali settlers in apparent retribution for the destruction of the latter's pineapple and teak saplings. While the Peace Accord called for the demilitarization of the CHT, the area remains highly militarized. State security forces have been accused of conducting attacks against Jumma communities, not intervening in incidents of communal violence and facilitating the influx of Muslim settlers.

Despite implementing legislation such as the Land Commission Act of 2001, no cases of land disputes have yet been solved by the commission and land encroachment continues. Follow-up legislation has been drafted under the CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act (Amendment) but, though approved by the cabinet in June 2013, it had yet to be implemented at the end of 2014. The Peace Accord was further eroded during the year when bills passed on 23 November changed the composition of district councils in three indigenous areas – Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban – from five to eleven members, with three non-indigenous unelected members. The Accord stipulates that the council members must be elected, but the government has instead hand-picked the council members. Indigenous civil society groups demonstrated in Dhaka against the bills, calling for their immediate withdrawal.

Sexual violence against indigenous women in the CHT has been endemic in recent years, perpetrated by state security forces and, increasingly, by Bengali settlers. Rapes and murders of indigenous women and girls have been used to terrorize the whole community, helping to clear the land for more settlers. This trend continued during the year, with 15 cases



of violence against indigenous women in CHT reported between January and April 2014 alone, including eight incidents of rape and two murders after rape. The perpetrators of these abuses are seldom, if ever, prosecuted.

Bangladesh continued its attempts to squeeze out its Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers. Between 200,000 and 500,000 Rohingyas, a persecuted Burmese ethno-religious minority who are considered to be Bangladeshi by Burmese authorities, are currently living in Bangladesh in squalid conditions in camps or informal settlements in urban areas. In February, the Bangladeshi government announced a 'new strategy' to address the situation of Rohingyas, but neglected to make any details public. In March, plans were released to document, temporarily house and then repatriate all Rohingyas. In September, after discussions with Burma over the formation of a joint committee for repatriation, it was announced that over 2,000 Rohingyas would be repatriated. In November, the government revealed plans to move 30,000 officially documented refugees to an undisclosed location, causing further concern among Rohingyas in the country.

Bangladesh's Bihari minority – Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from Bihar and West Bengal during India's partition – have long been discriminated against for their perceived alliance with Pakistan during the independence war. Many lack formal citizenship and are therefore stateless. Today, about 300,000 Biharis live in 70 shanty towns that were initially temporary relief camps. The largest settlement, 'Geneva Camp', has 25,000 residents: it is estimated that only 5 per cent have formal education. As ownership of the settlements is uncertain and land prices have risen sharply, these areas have become increasingly attractive for investors. Many apparent incidents of communal violence against Biharis are intended to displace them from their land. On 14 June, for instance, a Bengali mob attacked a Bihari settlement on the outskirts of Dhaka after an altercation broke out between communities, resulting in 10 deaths and widespread damage from arson. A local leader alleged that the attack was motivated by the desire of local politicians to evict the community.

Dalits, too, comprise many of Bangladesh's

urban slum dwellers. Many live in what are called 'sweeper colonies' as most Dalits here are traditionally employed as manual scavengers or waste collectors. Discriminated against throughout society, it is difficult to find more skilled employment for the educated few, as their housing address on their CVs quickly reveals who they are. Whole colonies have faced multiple evictions over the course of decades, moving between abandoned hospitals and factories after being displaced by 'rehabilitation' or urban beautification. An anti-discrimination law has long been advocated for in Bangladesh, but stalled again in parliament this year. Though there is a paucity of data available on their situation, in May 2014 a seminar organized by Dalit activists highlighted the water and sanitation crisis facing their communities – a huge health risk given the city's vulnerability to flooding, exacerbated by climate change. Dhaka's poorest communities are typically located in the most flood-prone areas of the capital, including Dalit settlements such as the Agargaon Sweeper Colony, where residents live in a series of cramped shelters built on stilts to protect them from the floodwater.

## India

National parliamentary elections in 2014 saw the victory of Narendra Modi and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in May. Modi has been criticized for his role in the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim riots, when he was chief minister of the state, and is accused of complicity in failing to halt the killings. Although an investigation backed by the Supreme Court found no prosecutable evidence against him, his close associates faced charges. His candidacy was supported by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu organization that has continued to support a campaign of forced conversion against the Muslim population. Though Modi has generally avoided discriminatory language himself since taking office, he has been criticized by activists for failing to condemn the group's activities. The election was widely interpreted as a blow for minorities, particularly Muslims, who received the lowest number of seats in India's parliament, the Lok Sabha, in 50 years.

Even before the election, however, the Anti-Communal Violence bill passed by the cabinet in late 2013 – a groundbreaking piece of legislation that would have detailed reparations for victims of communal attacks and held politicians accountable for violent outbreaks – was dropped in parliament following strong opposition from a number of parties, including the BJP, which accused Congress of pandering to Muslim voters ahead of the election. As 2014 marked the thirty-year anniversary of the Golden Temple massacre and the subsequent anti-Sikh riots that killed thousands, with no high-ranking officials prosecuted for their role in the violence, the bill would have been an important step for the families of victims in their search for justice.

Isolated pre-election violence occurred in the north-west state of Jammu and Kashmir, where an armed separatist struggle has been waged for decades by Muslim Kashmiris. In Kashmir, three people, including two village council chiefs, were killed in Pulwana District in mid-April, with separatists warning against voting in the elections and calling for their boycott. State assembly elections for Jammu and Kashmir were also held in November and December, again marking a spike in violence as shoot-outs in border camps killed both soldiers and gunmen. Despite more threats of violence and calls to boycott, the process was relatively peaceful and voter turnout was around 70 per cent.

The Assam state of north-eastern India was also affected by pre-election violence as a result of ongoing tensions between Muslims and indigenous communities – caused by land disputes and Muslim in-migration into indigenous territories. In early May, over 30 Muslims were killed in multiple attacks on villages ahead of the national elections. The government blamed the Songbijit faction of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB-S) for the attacks, an armed separatist organization of the Bodo indigenous people, though the NDFB-S denied responsibility and accused the government of attempting to stoke communal tensions.

Muslims in the area are assumed by many, including Modi, to be illegal migrants from Bangladesh, despite many being descendants of Muslims who moved to the area before partition. The elections resulted in the first ever non-Bodo

parliamentarian winning the seat for Kokrajhar, headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council, an indigenous self-government body.

Similarly, Adivasi villages in Assam were also attacked later in the year, reportedly by Bodo separatists. Adivasis is the term used by the government to denote indigenous groups from central India, in this case largely tea-plantation workers, many of whom are descendants of migrants brought to Assam in the 1850s. In December at least 80 Adivasis were killed and another 250 reported missing in a series of



attacks, again attributed to the NDFB-S faction, resulting in the displacement of tens of thousands of Adivasis escaping the violence. Several Bodos were reportedly killed in retaliatory killings. Within a few days, the government announced 'Operation All-out', with as many as 9,000 troops deployed in the province in an effort to eradicate NDFB-S fighters.

In Manipur, in north-east India, minority and indigenous groups including Kuki, Meitei and Naga face human rights abuses by both government forces and armed groups. The region

**Below:** Dalit girls in Kadi Town in the Mehsana district of Gujarat. *Navsarjan Trust*

is locked in a decades-long conflict rooted in land rights and political self-determination. Violence in Manipur continued in 2014 with the murder of indigenous district councillor Ngalangzar Malue by unidentified assailants on 12 July in Ukhrlul. Following his death, hundreds of military personnel were deployed and limits on freedom of assembly imposed. On 16 July, the new BJP government restarted peace talks with the



Isak-Muivah faction of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), even though the Manipur government blamed NSCN-IM for the assassination of Malue. Public rallies held in August in Ukhrul district, calling for a resolution of negotiations, ended in the deaths of two protesters when police fired on the crowd.

The discrimination experienced by north-easterners in their home regions is also replicated when they move to large Indian cities such as Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore for education or employment. Due to their distinct features and cultural practices, minority and indigenous migrants from the north-east often face verbal abuse and even violence. This was highlighted in January when Nido Tania, an indigenous university student from Arunachal Pradesh, died shortly after being beaten by a group of shopkeepers in Delhi who had reportedly shouted racist slurs and insulted Tania's hairstyle. Four adults were charged with his death, while minors were also detained. The police investigation recommended that charges be filed under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act), a key piece of legislation intended to prevent violence against Dalits and indigenous peoples. In September this recommendation was declined by the trial court after it concluded that the racist element was not proven, though Nido's father, a member of the legislative assembly, is seeking to overturn this ruling. In the wake of this killing, the Bezbaruah Committee was formed to investigate remedial measures, and made a series of recommendations including criminalizing discrimination targeting north-easterners. By the start of 2015, the government had decided to add to its hate speech provision in Section 153 of the penal code to address their concerns.

Violence against Dalits is also widespread and continued throughout 2014, driven by the persistent effects of India's caste system and the lack of justice for victims. One of the most shocking incidents occurred in October in Bihar, when a Dalit boy was beaten and burned to death for letting his goat graze on the grass of an upper-caste landholder. The landholder was subsequently taken into police custody. Though attacks on Dalits are common throughout the country, the situation is particularly difficult in

Bihar, often cited as India's most lawless province, where the population is overwhelmingly rural and often located in remote areas. Some activists believe that the appointment of Jitan Ram Manjhi, a Dalit, as Bihar's chief minister in May sharpened tensions as Manjhi's calls for greater rights for the Dalit community were resented by upper-caste members. Manjhi resigned from his post in February 2015 just before he was to face a vote of confidence in the state assembly, claiming his decision was intended to avert violence after he and his supporters allegedly received death threats.

Though the majority of Dalits still reside in rural areas, with just over 20 per cent based in urban areas, cities are often seen as a positive force in reducing caste divisions. While Dalits still face violence and discrimination in cities, strict social hierarchies are harder to enforce and violence generally is not as pervasive and brutal. Severe inequalities persist, however, with Dalits making up a large proportion of those engaged in the urban informal labour sector as domestic workers, rickshaw-pullers, street vendors and other poorly paid sectors. While many choose to migrate voluntarily for employment, many also end up in urban areas as a result of forcible displacement or evictions – issues which affect marginalized minorities disproportionately and continue to drive migration to urban areas. Of the 60 million or more people displaced by development projects since independence in 1947, 40 per cent are Adivasis and another 40 per cent are Dalits or other rural poor.

The challenges are especially acute for Dalit women, who are further exploited due to caste-gender prescriptions. Manual scavenging, for instance – the practice of removing human waste – is often 'reserved' for Dalit women, particularly in rural areas but frequently in urban centres as well, including by local government and municipal corporations who pay menial wages for this degrading and unsanitary task. This is despite the Supreme Court reaffirming in March 2014 that the practice was prohibited. In some cases, certain Dalit castes are expected to do the job and may be pressured or intimidated if they attempt to access alternative livelihoods. Nevertheless, urban areas can also offer women from excluded castes the opportunity to improve their lives.



The garment manufacturing industry in Tamil Nadu, for example, has attracted Dalit women into cities like Tirupur and Coimbatore through the Sumangali Scheme. Set up in the early 2000s, the scheme targets young women and girls, 60 per cent of whom are Dalits. Girls migrate on the promise of decent wages and a bonus after their contracts are finished, hopeful to escape poverty and discrimination in the villages – though many unfortunately end up in situations of exploitation and bonded labour.

While India is visibly struggling with general urban poverty and the growth of informal settlements, minorities experience these challenges more acutely. One in every five urban slum dwellers is Dalit, compared to only one in ten for urban India generally, and urban Dalits continue to report discrimination in access to housing and employment. Rapid urban expansion and urban beautification programmes for international events or upmarket housing have led to the destruction of many urban slums, including marginalized minority settlements. Expanding urban areas can even swallow former rural settlements, with little regard for their existing residents. In Maharashtra in 2012, for instance, the Malegaon municipality attempted to requisition outlying Dalit and Adivasi villages for a slum relocation project, claiming that their existing land certificates were no longer valid under the city's jurisdiction. 25 houses were demolished without warning, though a sustained campaign managed to save 75 Dalit and Adivasi homes in the adjacent village.

Though lower-caste groups are especially vulnerable to land grabbing, many communities have also successfully resisted attempts by local authorities and companies to forcibly displace them. During 2014 the Dalit Ekta Camp in New Delhi, a slum community of 4,000 Dalits and Muslims, faced the threat of demolition due to claims of encroachment on protected green space, despite residents having lived there for decades. Critics argued that the real motivation was local politics rather than environmental protection, as in May the local member of the legislative assembly had written to local authorities to request demolition of the slum: he stood to profit from evicting 900 voters who supported the opposition Aam Aadmi Party candidate in

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**Case study by Rajiv Shah**  
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## Discrimination against Dalit women in Ahmedabad

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In Ahmedabad, located in the heart of Gujarat state, Dalits have been an important but often invisible presence for generations, working as scavengers and waste-clearers within the strict confines of India's caste system. Concentrated on the periphery of the city, frequently segregated from other communities, many had also migrated to the city in search of work in emerging industries such as Ahmedabad's textile mills. Nevertheless, though strong caste and communal barriers remained in place, Dalit settlements existed alongside upper-caste and Muslim neighbourhoods in the city centre and the nearby industrial townships. However, over the last few decades a number of violent incidents, including anti-Dalit riots in 1981 and communal violence in 2002, have reinforced divisions. This case study, drawing on interviews conducted in December 2014 with a number of activists and community members based in the city, highlights some of the key challenges facing Dalit women today.

According to Madhuben Koradiya, a Dalit women's rights activist with the Ahmedabad-based NGO Navsarjan Trust who was interviewed for this case study, the closure of many of the city's mills in the 1980s and early 1990s also precipitated a crisis for Dalit women. In previous years Dalit women had been making some small gains, with some even managing to secure low-level government employment, but this tentative progress halted with the collapse of the textile industry:



*'[It] led to large-scale joblessness among men, following which Dalit women were forced to do any job they could lay their hands on, even as construction workers, in order to help the family. A huge oversupply of labour in the job market meant less wages.... Women have nowhere to go, except to work as daily wagers or home-based workers.'*

As a result, their livelihood options deteriorated:

*'Things have further worsened over the last 10 to 15 years. Dalit women are doing such jobs which I could not even imagine when I was young. They are ready to work as guinea pigs for pharmaceutical companies, which use them to experiment with the reaction to medicines of the human body. They are ready to become surrogate mothers for money.'*

Following the outbreak of communal violence across Gujarat in 2002, the situation for Dalit women worsened. Though Muslims were exposed to the worst of the violence, the 'next biggest casualty' were Dalits:

*'Out of more than 1,000 killed, more than 100 were Dalits. The young Dalits were misguided by the saffron brigade [right-wing Hindu extremists]. Now no one takes care of the families of many of the Dalits who were arrested for the riots or those who died. The condition of women is particularly in bad shape. Many women have been pushed into such illegal activities like brewing country liquor and prostitution, and there is little anyone is doing.'*

The challenges Dalit women face, though overlapping with general issues of urban poverty and gender discrimination, are in many ways distinct from the issues that face the female population as a whole. Ahmedabad has a number of active women's organizations, but while these often have a large Dalit constituency among their members, their focus generally is not on specific incidents of discrimination. While a trade union may periodically train its members on issues of sexual violence and harassment, for example, it usually avoids taking up human rights issues related to atrocities against Dalit women.

Solidarity was also undermined following

the 2002 communal violence. Preeti Vaghela, another activist based with the Navsarjan Trust, described how prior to the riots Dalit and Muslim families lived side by side in some parts of the city. However, in the aftermath, the interaction between women from different communities came to an abrupt halt:

*'[Until 2002] women interacted with each other. However, following the riots, Dalits have fled many of these areas, and got scattered to different places. The social fabric which women had built around themselves, even among Dalits, has broken apart.'*

Ramilaben Babubhai Parmar, a researcher who was involved with Navsarjan Trust in a survey of the city's sanitary workers, reports that among Valmiki – probably the most marginalized of all the Dalit sub-castes – most women work as sanitary workers, whether it is for the municipality or housing societies.

*'In housing societies, they are paid to work as sweepers. They sometimes are also allowed to work as sweepers inside individual houses and clean up individual toilets. However, they are generally not employed as housemaids to clean up utensils or cook food. The latter work is mostly done by women from other backward classes, who do not have the stigma of being "impure". There are Valmiki women who work in private offices. But they mostly work as sweepers.'*

Their husbands, too, will also typically work in this dangerous occupation and as a result many end up having to head their households alone:

*'The situation is such that there is a higher incidence of widows among the gutter workers. Our survey said about 20 to 25 per cent of young Valmiki women were widows, and I don't think that the situation has changed much even now. Malnutrition is widely prevalent. Most girls are married very young, even before attaining adulthood.'*

In the segregated areas where Valmiki are located, however, sanitary facilities are almost non-existent:

*'A large number of Valmiki localities are devoid*

*of any toilet facilities. There is a pay-and-use toilet in several localities, like Bootbhavani and Chandranagar areas, where they live, yet it is in poor shape, or often locked, and never cleaned up because of lack of water, and women are forced to go out in the open, often sitting next to the railway station nearby, to defecate.'*

One consequence of the systematic humiliation experienced by the community is that Valmiki women also face regular abuse from men of their own caste:

*'Within Valmiki families, their condition has worsened. Our impression is that cases of their suicide have gone up drastically, and so have cases of violence by men. I come across such at least three to four cases of this kind every month. Working in insanitary conditions, dejected and depressed following day-long work, men drink a lot of illicit country-made liquor, which wasn't generally the case earlier. This tells heavily on women.'*

In one slum area in western Ahmedabad, situated within an affluent locality, around 70 Valmiki families live in huts with no access to water, sanitation, electricity or any form of government support. None yet have the luxury of a concrete house, in part because their homes have been destroyed by local authorities as illegal several times already. All face the constant threat of eviction. The settlement is surrounded by expensive flats, whose owners employ some of the women as sweepers. Research interviews with a number of Valmiki women living in this area highlighted the continued discrimination they faced in their employment. While claiming they were not subjected to 'untouchability', as was the case in the past, all of them admitted that at best they were working as sweepers in individual households, with none employed as regular housemaids to clean up utensils or cook. As one of the women interviewed put it:

*'Frankly I don't feel untouchability as our ancestors did, but I do not do any other work inside the houses except sweeping and cleaning the apartments. I am allowed into the kitchen also, but I do not*

*cook food or clean utensils. In fact, nobody has asked me to do these jobs, which others do.'*

Another Valmiki woman, when asked why she did not refuse to work as a manual scavenger as it was prohibited by law, smiled and said, 'Do you want us to lose our job? If we do not do the work, we will be replaced by others.' This seemed to be the case even when they had been lucky enough to access some secondary education. Based on the accounts of the women interviewed, it appeared that even those Valmiki women who had managed some study were still condemned to the same manual labour their ancestors had been forced to perform. Though these issues are not usually as pronounced among non-Valmiki Dalit women, discrimination in Ahmedabad is still widespread even among the less stigmatized Dalit groups, as Koradiya describes:

*'It is rarely visible, but one can feel it does prevail in the dominant caste behaviour. In an interaction, Dalit teachers complained to us that while they would sit together to take an afternoon meal, non-Dalit women as a rule would not like to share food with them, nor would the non-Dalit women ever offer them water. The feeling of distance was always visible.'*

Sexual harassment, too, remains a serious challenge for women in Indian cities in general, but is especially acute for Dalit women, who are vulnerable due to their secondary status. For example, Leena Patel, a Dalit journalist and social worker interviewed for this research, highlighted the experiences of Dalit women working in the city's diamond polishing industry. The 'hypocrisy', as Patel describes it, is that 'untouchability is their motto, but the dominant caste owner doesn't have any problem touching Dalit women'. She heard similar stories from Dalit women recruited to work as cleaners at wedding parties, who felt helpless in the face of harassment. 'In fact, a few of the women considered sexual overtures as a normal behaviour of the contractors who offered them work. They said, if they protested against men touching them, they would not be given the job the next time.' ■

the upcoming assembly elections. At the end of November, once the upcoming elections were set to be announced, Dalit Ekta Camp was informed that their homes would be destroyed in less than 12 hours. They filed a case before the Delhi High Court and managed to get a stay of the demolition. On 4 December the court issued an order that the Delhi Development Authority must produce evidence that the eviction is in accordance with existing policy.

## Pakistan

Violence and political instability persisted in Pakistan throughout 2014. Beginning in August, mass demonstrations led by the opposition leader Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party took place in cities across the country, with participants demanding Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's resignation on account of alleged vote rigging during the 2013 election. The protests were only called off on 16 December, in response to an attack on a military-run school in the northern city of Peshawar that killed 141 people, including 132 children. According to the perpetrators, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), this attack – the deadliest perpetrated by the group so far – was in response to ongoing military operations in North Waziristan. The offensive, launched by the government in June after peace talks previously collapsed and followed later in the year by a similar push into the Khyber region, resulted in the displacement of more than a million people during the year, including many Pashtuns – an ethnic minority in the country who have historically made their homes in the tribal areas.

In this context of insecurity and division, Pakistan's Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in particular have faced high levels of social marginalization, hate speech and the constant threat of violence. While there was a slight decrease in the number of attacks compared to 2013, when sectarian violence in the country reached unprecedented levels, these groups continue to face disproportionate levels of violence, particularly Shi'a, who account for around 15 per cent of the country's Muslim population. Hazara Shi'a have been particularly vulnerable to attack as a result of the intersectional discrimination they have

encountered as both a sectarian and visible ethnic minority. Indeed, in recent years Sunni militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP) and TTP have increasingly targeted Hazara Shi'a, the majority of whom reside in Quetta. A stark indication that 2014 would bring little significant change to their situation came on 1 January, when a car bomb targeted a bus carrying Shi'a pilgrims returning from Iran to Baluchistan's capital city, Quetta, killing at least three and injuring 31 others. Later that month, a similar attack was perpetrated by LeJ on a bus carrying Hazara Shi'a pilgrims in Mastung District, just outside of Quetta. At least 22 of these passengers were killed, with more than 20 others wounded.

Similar targeted attacks against the community continued throughout 2014. In April, for example, two Hazara men were victims of a targeted killing near a bus terminal in Quetta. In October, at least eight Hazara were killed at a market in the outskirts of Quetta when gunmen opened fire on the bus in which they were travelling. Outside Baluchistan, Shi'a in Pakistan also suffered a number of targeted attacks in cities such as Karachi. This violence had been accompanied by widespread intimidation: for example, in April the banned militant outfit, Lashkar-i-Islam, distributed incendiary pamphlets in a Peshawar neighbourhood, threatening residents – mostly Shi'a Muslims – with violence if they did not leave their homes.

Another marginalized religious group is Pakistan's Ahmadi population, who – despite considering themselves to be Muslims – remained subject to severe legal discrimination in the country's criminal code and Constitution, which officially designates them as 'non-Muslims'. Alongside this persistent institutional discrimination, in 2014 Ahmadis faced a number of targeted attacks, resulting in 11 casualties. In May, an Ahmadi man accused of blasphemy was shot dead by a teenager while he was in police custody. Later that same month, a Canadian-American doctor undertaking humanitarian work in Pakistan was killed, apparently on the basis of his Ahmadi faith. International pressure failed to bring an end to such attacks: less than two months after the UN statement, in response to blasphemy allegations, a mob set fire to homes

in a small Ahmadi community in Gujranwala District, Punjab, killing two children and their grandmother.

The situation for non-Muslim minority groups remained similarly tense in 2014. Discrimination against Pakistan's Christian population culminated in a particularly violent attack in November when a Christian couple in Kot Radha Kishan accused of desecrating the Qur'an were beaten and burned to death in the brick kiln where they worked. More recently, in the first large-scale attack suffered by the Christian community since the bombing of All Saints Church in 2013, Jamaat-ur-Ahrar – a TTP splinter group – bombed two churches in Lahore during Sunday processions in March 2015, killing at least 15 and wounding upwards of 70 people.

Meanwhile, for Pakistani Hindus, there was an alarming increase in attacks on places of worship in 2014. While a total of nine Hindu temples were attacked during the previous year, five temples were targeted in March 2014 alone.

**Below:** Shi'a Muslims protest against the killing of their community members in a suicide bombing on the outskirts of Quetta, Pakistan on 21 January 2014. *EPA/Sohail Shehzad*

According to the NGO Life for All, this signalled the most violent month suffered by Pakistan's Hindus in two decades. Forced conversion and marriages of minority women also continued in 2014, with Dalit Hindu girls especially targeted. These incidents have been perpetuated by the lack of substantial reform to personal laws, which prevent or obstruct certain minorities from registering marriages. Although attempts were made to address such gaps in the province of Punjab with the tabling of the Punjab Hindu Marriage Registration Bill in 2014, substantial reform remains to be seen.

The year 2014 also saw violent attacks against religious minorities who have typically been less affected by such harsh discrimination in Pakistan, such as Zikris and Sikhs. In August, for example, at least six people from the Zikri community



were shot and killed near a shrine in Awaran District, Baluchistan. The attack was preceded by graffiti in the town a week before, calling on Zikris and Hindus to convert to Islam or face death. For Pakistan's small Sikh community, growing religious intolerance manifested in an attack on three shops run by Sikhs in Hashtnagri, Peshawar. In response members of the Sikh community took to the streets to demand greater security.

Muslim and non-Muslim minorities continued to be disproportionately affected by the country's notorious blasphemy laws during the year. In March, Sawan Masih – a Christian man convicted of uttering blasphemous remarks the year before – was sentenced to death. Meanwhile, international efforts to appeal the death sentence of a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was convicted of blasphemy in 2010, were undercut when the Lahore High Court upheld the ruling in October; she has now appealed to the Supreme Court. Amid growing religious intolerance, attempts to challenge blasphemy laws or defend those accused of violating them also became increasingly difficult: in May, human rights lawyer and activist, Rashid Rehman, was the victim of a targeted killing due to his defence of a professor accused of blasphemy.

Although political and social obstacles have stood in the way of improving conditions for minorities in Pakistan, in June 2014 the Supreme Court delivered a groundbreaking judgment in response to the bombing of All Saints Church in Peshawar in 2013. This ruling not only called on the government to ensure that victims of the attack were compensated, but also directed federal and provincial governments to develop institutions to monitor implementation of minority protection laws and to create a National Council for Minorities. Meanwhile, also in June, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pervez Khattak directed that increased security should be provided to protect places of worship for minorities. In response to rising violence against Hindus in Sindh, the provincial government similarly took initiatives to promote the security of minority places of worship, and officially celebrated the Hindu festival Diwali in October. While all these are welcome initiatives, progress has been slow and an effective response

at federal, provincial or local levels is still lacking.

Religious minorities are not the only groups that suffered discrimination in Pakistan in 2014. Pakistan has become an increasingly hostile environment for the country's mostly Pashtun refugees from Afghanistan, the majority of whom have lived in Pakistan for decades. In March, shortly after the government declared its intention to restrict the number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, bulldozers were sent to demolish a settlement outside Islamabad where over 100 Afghan families resided, some for almost 30 years. Meanwhile, in the context of the persistent nationalist struggle in the province of Baluchistan, enforced disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings of members of the Baluch minority by security forces reportedly continued with impunity.

Extreme levels of violence and instability in Pakistan have encouraged many to flee their homes for safer environs, either within or outside the country. In October, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPC) reported that at least 300,000 people – including over 200,000 Hazara, 10,000 Hindus and hundreds of Zikris and Parsis – had left Baluchistan over the last ten years, with many migrating to large urban areas in other provinces. Yet those arriving in Pakistan's cities, many of whom are minorities, typically do so for a variety of reasons: not only to escape insecurity and natural disasters, but also to seek out better public services and opportunities. However, rapid and unplanned growth has perpetuated infrastructural and social problems in Pakistan's cities, with many migrants and other marginalized groups concentrating in informal settlements. For example, a large number of Hazaras who have left Baluchistan to escape insecurity are now living in difficult conditions in cities such as Islamabad and Rawalpindi, where they lack access to adequate housing, jobs and other services.

Although ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in Pakistan have tended to live in particular geographic areas – with the majority of Hindus living in Sindh, for example, and the majority of Punjabi speakers in Punjab – cities such as Karachi are much more densely mixed. Though it is important not to oversimplify ethnic and other divisions, poorly planned urban



development and rapid demographic growth have the potential to escalate levels of violence along sectarian lines, with serious implications for Pakistan's minorities. This is particularly the case in Karachi, where ethnicity is highly politicized. Violent disputes between different parties over control of local settlements are therefore defined increasingly in ethnic terms, placing minorities at even greater risk of attack. With Pashtuns now constituting the largest segment of new arrivals in Karachi, there is concern this could exacerbate tensions between the locally ruling Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which largely represents the *muhajir* population – mostly Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from northern and western India following partition – and the Pashtun-dominated Awami National Party.

Indeed, relocating to cities has also not always ensured greater security for Pakistan's minorities. Hindus who have migrated to Karachi, for example, have continued to fall victim to incidents of forced conversion and marriage. Militants have also increasingly focused their attacks against minorities in urban areas. In Karachi, growing numbers of TTP fighters and high levels of violence led to 750 sectarian targeted killings reported between September 2013 and September 2014. However, government anti-terrorism measures have often only served to increase the vulnerability of minorities and other marginalized groups in urban areas. In response to a double suicide bomb attack in Islamabad in March 2014, for example, the government swiftly blamed and conducted raids on the city's slums, or *katchi abadis*, where many minorities make their homes. Subsequent efforts to demolish slums have been met with protests from those living in these areas, including many of Islamabad's Christians who migrated from other parts of the country in search of better opportunities. These actions reflected increasing hostility from the recently elected government towards these settlements, which it has regarded as a security threat, though some inhabitants have argued that the attempted clearances are also driven by commercial interests.

Patronage networks and discriminatory attitudes in areas such as employment are often reproduced in Pakistan's cities, with

minorities often confined to underpaid and low-status livelihoods. In Lahore, the Christian population accounts for the bulk of the city's sanitation workers and street-sweepers – a fact that reinforces their stigmatization – while most of their supervisors are Muslim. Nevertheless, urbanization has presented opportunities for minorities and other disadvantaged groups to transcend prescribed roles and access services such as education that might otherwise have been unavailable to them. Urban centres have also been a site of resistance where – despite the severe repercussions they can and often do confront – members of minorities and other groups have protested against the persistent targeting they face. One such instance took place in November 2014 when, following the murder of a Christian couple in Kasur, various Christian, Hindu and other groups took to the streets in Peshawar, calling on the government to end impunity for the perpetrators and promote religious harmony.

## Sri Lanka

Throughout 2014 the Sri Lankan government, headed by Mahinda Rajapaksa, continued to obstruct calls by NGOs and the international community for a full investigation into war crimes conducted during the country's long civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed group seeking to establish a separate Tamil state in the north. However, popular resentment against increasing authoritarianism and corruption contributed to the shock defeat of Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in the January 2015 national elections and his replacement by Maithripala Sirisena, a former ally and SLFP member until his surprise defection to the opposition in November 2014. Though Sirisena's election on a ticket of 'compassionate governance' has been welcomed by activists, he has remained quiet on substantive issues of Tamil autonomy. Furthermore, while he has announced plans to conduct an inquiry into alleged war crimes – an apparent step forward after years of prevarication by the Rajapaksa government – the UN and other international investigators will not be involved in the process.

The divisive issue of justice for the families of victims of the decades-long conflict, many of

**Below:** Tamil activist Balendran Jeyakumari was arrested in March 2014 and released on bail one year later. *Vikalpa/Groundviews/ Maatram/CPA*

whom belong to the Tamil or Muslim minorities, remains unresolved. In 2012, after much international and domestic pressure, the cabinet approved a presidential task force to monitor the implementation of recommendations made under the government's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), focused mostly on reconciliation after the war rather than accountability for human rights violations. In January 2014, the government released an update on the LLRC implementation and reported on some positive developments such as a national trilingual policy. But, as noted in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) report to the Human Rights Council in February 2014, the government had pledged to implement only 145 of the LLRC's 285 recommendations. The High Commissioner condemned its investigation as 'limited and piecemeal' and called for an independent

international investigation into allegations of serious human rights abuses – a recommendation accepted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) through a 27 March vote. In response, government officials refused to cooperate with the investigation and on 7 April the minister of mass media publicly threatened legal action against anyone testifying to the OHCHR. On 18 June, parliament passed a resolution opposing such an international investigation with Rajapaksa subsequently announcing on 19 August that OHCHR investigators would not be allowed into the country. Those thought to be cooperating with the UN have been threatened or faced reprisals. One example was Ananthi Sasitharan, a Tamil Northern Provincial Councillor and human rights advocate, who was attacked in the media for planning to attend the HRC session in Geneva.

Despite the civil conflict formally ending five years ago, Sri Lanka's minorities continue to be harassed and intimidated by state security forces for activism or suspected separatism. In February and March, in what the OHCHR called the biggest search operation since 2009,



the government arbitrarily detained over 65 people in the north of the country, claiming that the LTTE was trying to re-establish itself. Human rights defenders were caught up in the sweeps on suspicions of engagement with former LTTE fighters. On 13 March, Balendran Jeyakumari, a Tamil activist known for her work on the disappeared, was arrested by the Terrorist Investigation Division along with her 13-year-old daughter in Kilinochchi district. Shortly afterwards, human rights defenders Ruki Fernando and Father Praveen Mahesan, both from the minority Christian community, were arrested on 16 March after attempting to investigate Jeyakumari's whereabouts. A huge international outcry resulted in the release of Fernando and Mahesan, but at the end of the year Jeyakumari still remained in detention without charge. In March 2015 Jeyakumari was released on bail, although with strict conditions imposed.

Despite these and other cases of minority civil society crackdowns, the government submitted the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Bill for consideration by parliament. Long awaited, the bill has been in preparation since 2006, and is set to give reparations to victims, as well as protection to witnesses from harassment, intimidation or coercion. The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), a public policy research organization based in Colombo, said that while the draft was an improvement on previous versions, there are still some shortcomings that may jeopardize witness safety. The first hearings for the government's Commission on Missing Persons, to investigate disappearances in the Tamil-dominated north and east of the country, were also held early in the year, registering 19,471 such complaints by September. However, some observers questioned how effective it would be.

Since the end of the conflict with the LTTE, Sri Lanka's Muslim population has also experienced increasing hostility from Buddhist nationalists. Anti-Muslim violence and hate speech continued in 2014, including a riot in June when four Muslims were killed and over 80 injured in Aluthgama and surrounding areas in the south-west of Sri Lanka, led by the extremist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS). Protesting the alleged assault of a monk by a Muslim man,

the BBS coordinated rallies through Muslim neighbourhoods, burning shops, homes and mosques. Though extreme, the violence was not an isolated incident. Between January and August, the OHCHR received reports of at least 88 cases of attacks, destruction of property or hate speech towards Muslims, while Christian groups reported 55 such cases. Rajapaksa announced the creation of a high-level panel to investigate the attacks, although the OHCHR reported in September that no prosecutions had yet taken place.

One of the drivers of continued human rights abuses in Sri Lanka is the fact that, five years after the conflict, the country remains highly militarized. Many aspects of civilian life are still controlled by the army, who are now guiding post-conflict reconstruction in the north. One of the most significant steps in this regard was Rajapaksa's decision to bring the Urban Development Authority (UDA) under the purview of the military in 2010. This has had serious implications for urban populations across the country, particularly minorities in the north and east, who resent the army's involvement in infrastructure development, land deals and a range of economic sectors, including hotels, coffee shops and Jaffna's burgeoning tourism industry. Urban areas in the north and east have faced acute stresses as migration from rural areas, the return of displaced communities and the recent settlement of majority Sinhalese from the south has resulted in rapid population growth.

These difficulties have been exacerbated by reported incidents of intimidation and exclusion by authorities in towns with large Muslim populations, such as Pottuvil, where in 2013 the military allegedly supported local Buddhist extremists in erecting Buddhist statues and broadcasting Buddhist prayers in public areas as a provocation. While well-managed urbanization in the region could produce significant social and economic benefits, current policies are likely to deepen religious and ethnic tensions.

Similarly, in the capital of Colombo, where more than half of the population lives in slums, the government has committed to eradicating the city's informal settlements by 2020. However, authorities have been criticized for pursuing an aggressive policy of settlement clearance that, rather than addressing the root causes of

poverty and marginalization, has frequently targeted minorities and other vulnerable groups. In 2010, shortly after control of the UDA was passed to the Ministry of Defence, dozens of houses were bulldozed in Mews Street, Slave Island – reportedly all belonging to Muslim families, except for one Tamil-owned home – to accommodate the expansion of a school for the children of army officers. They were given only five days’ notice of the evictions, despite having title deeds and residing in the houses for decades; other settlements with predominantly minority populations were also identified for redevelopment. As Colombo’s urban beautification has continued with the construction of swathes of luxury apartments and other ‘world-class’ developments, slums have been demolished all over the city without consistent or adequate compensation to affected families. According to a comprehensive 2014 report by CPA, throughout Colombo – one of the most ethnically diverse areas in Sri Lanka – ‘a significantly large section of the population being affected are Tamil and Muslim’.

# East Asia

**Michael Caster**

Violations of minority rights persisted across East Asia during 2014. In China, the troubled western province of Xinjiang witnessed an upsurge in violence during the year, with heavy-handed security crackdowns and official discrimination feeding into increasing dissent, sometimes violent, among the Uyghur population. Restrictive policies on culture, religion and land rights have also served to further alienate the Tibetan population. Meanwhile in Japan, ongoing tensions with neighbours in the region have contributed to the rise of right-wing nationalist groups who protested regularly throughout the year against Koreans, Chinese and other minorities in the country. In Mongolia, too, resentment linked to the exploitation of the country’s natural resources has fuelled vocal anti-Chinese rhetoric and even attacks against Chinese nationals.

Urbanization across the region has taken many forms. Rapid urban growth, frequently sponsored and directed by the state, is transforming China and in the process leading to forcible resettlement, destruction of heritage and other impacts that have been felt especially acutely by minorities in cities such as Kashgar or Lhasa. While urbanization has contributed to rising incomes and development across the country, there is a danger that inequalities will only widen if measures are not taken to ensure that minorities are fully included in this process. Japan, in contrast, has already developed into a largely urban society. Among the most pressing issues there are the resolution of historic discrimination and underdevelopment in certain neighbourhoods, such as Buraku *dowa*, and the conflicts that arise in Tokyo and elsewhere from racist groups who resent the increased diversity of urban Japan. In Mongolia, where the majority of the population is still rural, urbanization is nevertheless transforming the lives of many herders and pastoralists who, in a context of crop failure and limited access to land, are now migrating in large numbers to the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

## China

The year 2014 in China was characterized by continued censorship, the detention of political opponents, forcible resettlement and other abuses. Minority populations, particularly Tibetans and Uyghurs, were especially affected by security crackdowns, restrictions on religious freedom and the detention of rights activists. This included the conviction of Uyghur academic Ilham Tohti in September on separatism charges in a closed-door trial condemned by the European Union and others. He lost his subsequent appeal in November and was sentenced to life in prison. He had been detained in January, along with seven of his Uyghur students, who were also sentenced to between three and eight years in prison.

Tibetan human rights activists, including the Tibetan writer Woesser and singer Gebey, were also harassed during the year. In December, prominent monk Karma Tsewang, an outspoken language and culture activist, was also detained on ‘state security’ charges along with 16 of his



supporters. Soon over 4,000 people signed a petition for his release but he was later sentenced to two years in prison, while another monk was sentenced to 10 years on unspecified charges. The same month, well-known Mongolian rights activist Hada was released from four years of extra-judicial house arrest, following a 15-year prison sentence on 'separatism' charges, but remained in police custody under residential surveillance.

As in previous years, Tibetan activists were assaulted or denied medical care while in

**Above:** A modern Uyghur residential area can be spotted through a partially demolished wall.

*Teo Choong Ching*

detention before being released from custody shortly before their deaths. In March, Goshul Lobsang died soon after being released on medical parole after reportedly suffering torture and a savage beating in jail that left him unable to swallow food. In December, just days after being released from prison, political prisoner Tenzin Choedak also died after prolonged abuse



and ill-treatment in prison. He was less than six years into his 15-year sentence.

The National Security Commission, formed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, had its first meeting in April with a mandate to address issues such as separatism, religious extremism and terrorism. In Xinjiang, China's most westerly region, this has translated into increasingly restrictive policing of the large Uyghur population in response to political dissent and unrest. While some of these incidents have been serious, including attacks on civilians, national policies and local security forces often fail to distinguish between violent crimes and legitimate activities such as peaceful protests or activism. Human rights groups have argued that the government's repressive and indiscriminate treatment of the region's Uyghur population has exacerbated the situation and contributed to further violence.

The year 2014 saw a number of tragic attacks related to ongoing tensions within Xinjiang. This included the massacre of more than 30 people in March outside a train station in Kunming, Yunnan province by a group subsequently reported to be Xinjiang separatists. In May, two cars loaded with explosives also ploughed through a busy shopping street in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province, killing around 30 people. Both incidents were condemned by the President of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), Rebiya Kadeer, though she called on China to refrain from collectively punishing the whole population and drew attention to the role that state policies played in encouraging the violence. However, following the Urumqi bombing, China announced a year-long anti-terrorism crackdown, with Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian asserting the necessity for 'unconventional measures' in the 'people's war' against terrorism. These included numerous raids on mosques, house-to-house searches, harassment and other abuses by police, with several rights groups reporting increased arbitrary arrests and disappearances. Executions were also carried out throughout the year.

Violence in the region peaked over the summer following a riot in Yarkand that resulted in 96 deaths, according to official sources, including 37 civilians and 59 persons identified by the

government as religious extremists. However, the WUC alleged that the actual death toll was much higher, with hundreds of Uyghur civilians killed in the ensuing crackdown by security forces. The details surrounding these events are also contested, with state outlets claiming that the violence began with a premeditated attack on a police station by jihadist militants, while the WUC and other Uyghur sources have suggested that a recent security crackdown on religious practices and reports of police abuses had triggered the protests.

One of the chief sources of resentment among many Uyghurs is the state's repression of various religious and cultural forms of expression, often on the grounds of security. In August, for example, authorities in the city of Karamay banned men with long beards and people with headscarves, veils or clothing with the crescent moon and star from boarding public buses. The local Urumqi parliament also announced a move at the end of the year to ban Islamic face veils in public, while authorities forced Muslim students to eat during Ramadan, threatening students who refused with expulsion. In the wake of new regulations in Xinjiang that went into effect in January 2015, prohibiting the spread of religious propaganda online or clothing with religious messages that could promote extremism, a Uyghur man was reportedly sentenced in March 2015 to six years' imprisonment for growing a beard and 'inciting' his wife, who also received a two-year sentence, to wear a *burqa*. These restrictions have played a major role in triggering opposition, including deadly attacks, across the region.

Ongoing labour migration of ethnic Han into Xinjiang, particularly to urban areas in the north of the region such as Urumqi, has been another source of conflict. This has often occurred through the state-sponsored creation of new towns and cities populated predominantly by Han, often near areas seen as separatist hotspots. Tensions were therefore inflamed by comments in May by Zhang Chunxian, suggesting that China's 'one child' policy should in future be imposed on all ethnic groups in the region: at present, in line with its national policy towards ethnic minorities, the government permits Uyghur families to have two to three

children each. Another policy, reportedly developed during the year by local authorities in Cherchen County in southern Xinjiang, introduced a reward system to incentivize Uyghur and Han inter-marriage with RMB 10,000 (US\$1,600) annual payments for up to five years and other benefits.

Further urban development policies in Xinjiang will lead to the creation of dozens of new cities and towns. One is planned for construction near Hotan, a city with considerable symbolic importance for Uyghur culture. Local residents have reported that Uyghur farm owners in the area have been forced to sell their land for below market rates, which would otherwise be taken without remuneration by the government as part of a 'development policy'. Those who have resisted forced evictions or land grabs have been detained or arrested. The new cities project will be completed by the majority Han Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, or Bingtuan, a semi-military organization that is largely staffed by majority Han and is widely resented by the local Uyghur population.

Poverty and unemployment among Uyghurs is worst in the south of Xinjiang, despite government attempts to boost urban development through special economic zones, such as in Kashgar, established in 2011 and scheduled for completion in 2020. Kashgar has partnered with eastern provinces such as Shenzhen and investment companies to secure investment. Zhongkun, for example, has been active in developing tourism in the city but has been accused of exploitative practices that do not benefit Uyghur residents. Their livelihoods and identity have been further threatened by the ongoing demolition of Kashgar's old city, an area of particular cultural significance to the Uyghur community. The urban redesign project aims to demolish some 65,000 homes and resettle over 200,000 Uyghur residents, 85 per cent of Kashgar's old city. Though some Uyghurs have welcomed the opportunity to live in modern housing with amenities unavailable in their former mud-brick homes, many feel the forced relocation from the ancient centre to high-rise apartments on the outskirts is more of an assault on culture than a sign of modernity.

The Chinese government also continued

to pursue a range of repressive policies in Tibet during 2014, characterized by forced resettlement, restrictions on freedom of belief and other discriminatory policies. In recent years, Tibetans have protested against their treatment through a series of high-profile self-immolations in Tibet and elsewhere in China. In 2014, according to the International Campaign for Tibet, the number of self-immolations since 2011 reached 135, of which 22 involved women and 24 involved those 18 years old or younger. Authorities in Tibet have responded to these incidents by detaining and arresting family members and friends of the deceased. Since 2013 the police have warned Tibetans that anyone accused of abetting self-immolators would be charged with homicide. In 2012 police were offering around RMB 50,000 for tips related to planned self-immolations or protests, and by February 2015 the Tibetan provincial government had raised the reward to RMB 300,000 for information on terrorist activities – a broad term that reportedly includes 'thought, speech or behaviour' undermining the state.

Throughout 2014 police stations were set up in Buddhist monasteries across Tibet, accompanied by 'patriotic education' campaigns targeting the spread of certain Buddhist teachings. Appeals to the Qinghai People's Congress in January 2014 to limit religious restrictions and end police presence in monasteries were disregarded. In July, officials in Tibet issued regulations on temporary prohibition of freedom of movement and religion, prohibiting Tibetans from participating in the Great Prayer Festival in Ladakh, India, one of the most important Tibetan Buddhist festivals that includes special teachings by the Dalai Lama. Later in the year, at least 26 nuns were expelled from the prestigious Jhada Nunnery after it refused to denounce the Dalai Lama in September.

In 2014, the State Council also announced the completion of a massive relocation project of Tibetan nomads from multiple grassland provinces around the Tibetan Autonomous Region, a year ahead of schedule. Those who resisted relocation from traditional herding lands to overcrowded resettlements have had their personal documents and belongings seized or

been detained by the police. Mass resettlement in recent years has already resulted in the forcible relocation of more than 2 million Tibetans, including hundreds of thousands of nomadic herders rehoused in ‘New Socialist Villages’, in some cases impoverishing them or making them dependent on state subsidies.

While only around a quarter of the population in the Tibetan Autonomous Region are currently urban, this proportion is rising rapidly, driven in part by Han labour migration. Urbanization has been closely tied to the state’s large-scale development programme in the region and the significant economic growth that has resulted, with government figures reporting a doubling in average per capita incomes among nomads between 2005 and 2010. This has been sustained by recent investments in infrastructure such as the Beijing–Lhasa railway, completed in 2006 and responsible for a substantial increase in business and tourism within Tibet. However, rapid in-migration of Han Chinese, coupled with the forced relocation of Tibetans to Lhasa, has had significant impacts on Tibetan traditional culture that some argue far outweigh the economic benefits, including the destruction of historically significant areas of Lhasa as the city’s booming tourism industry has driven rapid redevelopment of the old centre.

Nevertheless, urban areas can offer the possibility of better life outcomes for Tibetans, including women, who are sometimes able to enjoy a measure of freedom from oppressive gender norms. While in rural areas Tibetan girls are routinely denied access to education, relocation to cities is slowly creating more opportunities for them to attend school. Tibetan women who work in urban settings also earn their own salaries and therefore do not need to rely on family land or livestock, enabling them to be more independent. However, Tibetan women who travel outside Tibet to eastern cities such as Beijing or Shanghai often experience discrimination in areas such as employment, housing and education for their children. Similar barriers remain for Tibetans in general and other minorities such as Uyghurs, excluding them from the promised social or economic benefits of urbanization.

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**Case study** by Ross Perlin  
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## Urbanizing the Trung – one of China’s smallest officially recognized minorities

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*This research is a result of several years of field work in the north-west corner of Yunnan province, one of the most multicultural and multilingual areas in China. The most recent observations and interviews are from November 2014. Dulong is the widely used Chinese name – the people call themselves Trung.*

November 2014 marked the official completion of a paved 76 km road, including a 6 km tunnel, connecting Yunnan province’s Trung River valley to the rest of the world. ‘The opening of the highway will lead the Trung people to prosperity and happiness,’ announced Yunnan Party Secretary Li Jiheng. At a reported cost of US\$127 million, one of the country’s most isolated places – the mountainous homeland of the Trung people, hard by the border of Burma and the Tibetan Autonomous Region – is now fully open for business.

With a total population of 6,930 according to the 2010 census, the Trung are one of the smallest of China’s 56 officially recognized ethnic groups, and the majority live in the Trung River valley. Until 1999, the valley had remained almost completely inaccessible to outsiders, except on foot or by horse caravan from the neighbouring Nu River valley. Trung people still derived their livelihood from shifting swidden agriculture with a wide variety of crops, as well as subsistence hunting and gathering. For the last 15 years, a treacherous, unpaved road has allowed uncertain access to shared jeeps, but remained closed half the year due to

winter snows. ‘The new all-weather road will cut travel times in half, bring a regular bus service, and allow more frequent visits to the county seat’, said one young Trung man. ‘Everything will be opened up.’

Transformative demographic changes are already under way. On the one hand, the road enables people to leave, prompting classic urbanization patterns in a country where the official urban population has for the first time outstripped the rural – though many in practice move between the two. Until recently, sheer distance and expense had prevented most Trung

**Below: Traditional Trung dance, 2014.**

*Claire Lij*

from joining China’s ‘floating population’, but more are now ascending the rungs from the village to the township to the county seat, and sometimes beyond to the prefectural capital, the provincial capital of Kunming, and (in a handful of cases) even Beijing, over 2,000 miles away. The local government has even encouraged this with a formal labour export programme, attempted in 2008, in which 19 Trung farmers were sent to work in the eastern industrial city of Dongguan.



More typically, education is the way out. Secondary school is only available outside the valley, and the most successful Trung students go on to university, even further afield. They only return to work for the county or prefectural governments, which are major employers, especially of minorities.

The focal quasi-urban environment for most Trung is Cikai, the seat of Gongshan county, where the road into the valley originates. China's county seats are porous membranes where the rural and the urban coexist. About one-third of the county's 35,000 people live in Cikai, where government, trade and education are concentrated for a substantial rural hinterland, not to mention taxis, karaoke clubs, churches and public amenities. 'I came here to make more money and because life in the valley is backward', said a young Trung man who had recently moved to Gongshan to work in construction. 'I first came here for high school so I have a lot of friends here. I have Lisu friends, Tibetan friends, Han friends.'

Though most Trung remain in the valley, they are effectively urbanizing at an even more local level, *in situ* and largely by fiat, as scattered houses turn into denser settlements and hamlets mushroom into villages. Others are being drawn into fast-growing Kongdang, the main town in the valley. Besides being the local government seat and the centre of education and trade, Kongdang is where the road into the valley terminates. Though most cycle through, some non-Trung small business owners and traders have settled there semi-permanently. Although currently less than 10 per cent of the valley's population, such outsiders are over-represented and highly visible in Kongdang, with a palpable effect on the Trung language and culture.

*In situ* urbanization is the direct outcome of deliberate high-profile national policies which have converged on the Trung River valley as a particular test case, in order to combat what is officially viewed as an embarrassing example of 'backwardness' (*luobou*). The early 2000s brought hydroelectric power stations, satellite antennas and mobile phone reception. Village schools were closed in favour of

centralized locations in towns like Kongdang and Gongshan, with boarding for students. Instead of 'barefoot doctors' moving between villages, the emphasis was now on hospitals and clinics in the towns. The government cited service delivery and poverty alleviation as reasons to further concentrate and urbanize the population, which had already been resettled from isolated mountain hamlets, down to the riverside, back in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 2003, the Sloping Land Conversion Programme (*tuigeng huanlin*) abruptly ended traditional subsistence practices in the name of environmental protection and reforestation, promising cash and rice instead and simultaneously 'freeing' Trung people from the land and enabling wage labour. At the same time, the central government's Western Development Programme (launched in 2000) and poverty-alleviation initiative – focused on 592 'key counties', mostly in areas of western China populated by ethnic minorities – provided further impetus and funding. Starting in 2010, a dedicated 'Help the whole Trung nationality' programme has led to the construction of 1,068 new houses with windows and balconies in 26 'settlement areas', near the previously existing villages but denser. Within a few years, almost the entire Trung population has effectively been resettled and rehoused – but at the same time, many have left.

Many inhabitants, particularly younger Trung, emphasize the positive benefits that this urban development has brought to the area. 'It's completely different now, not backward like before,' according to one resident. 'You wouldn't recognize it: new houses, tall buildings, internet, even a museum in Kongdang.' Yet poverty remains endemic, with welfare dependence deepening. Estimates vary, but agree that income in the valley remains under the threshold of US\$1 per day. An eco-tourism boom has yet to materialize, but direct food subsidies and surreptitious subsistence activities help fill the gap. Other problems, such as alcoholism and rising suicide rates, also remain. ■



## Japan

In August 2014 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) reviewed Japan. The committee noted concern that Japan has still not adopted a comprehensive definition for racial discrimination in its domestic legislation, nor legislation enabling victims to seek legal redress. One of the most troubling and urgent issues, however, was the continuing problem of hate speech. This included, in April, the use of Nazi imagery by right-wing nationalists during anti-Chinese and anti-Korean demonstrations in Tokyo, as well as various racist slurs. Persistent anti-foreigner sentiment is reflected in 'Japanese only' signs still posted by some hotels and restaurants. In March, a giant 'Japanese Only' banner was even hung from the Saitama Stadium in Tokyo by supporters of the Urawa Red Diamonds during a football game, prompting an order from the national J-League for the club to play a match in an empty stadium – an edict that cost the club in excess of US\$1 million.

There were some positive developments to address the issue. In July the Osaka High Court, followed by the Supreme Court in December, upheld a groundbreaking October 2013 ruling by Kyoto High Court that had found Zaitokukai, an organization opposed to the granting of certain rights to foreign residents in Japan, guilty of racial discrimination for shouting abuse and slogans in front of a Korean school. At the beginning of 2014, an Osaka municipal human rights committee also drafted recommendations for curbing hate speech, including the creation of a municipal fund to offset court costs for victims. Multiple municipalities have followed suit with similar proposals, though there are concerns that hate speech legislation will be difficult to pass due to free speech concerns.

Legal and institutional discrimination against foreigners and minorities continues to affect many residents, some of whom have spent their entire lives in Japan. In July, for instance, the Supreme Court overturned a Fukuoka High Court decision, ruling instead that permanent residents do not have a guaranteed right to receive welfare benefits. The case involved an 82-year-old Chinese woman who had been born and grew up in Japan, but was denied welfare because she was not a Japanese national.

Japan's indigenous Ainu also continue to face discrimination, limited access to basic services and low levels of political participation. Even in Hokkaido, where the majority are based, most Ainu have lower economic status than non-Ainu Hokkaido residents. When Japan ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 it denied it had any indigenous peoples, but the next year it passed a non-binding resolution recognizing the Ainu as indigenous to Japan. The decision was a major victory in recognizing the distinctiveness of Ainu language and culture. However, in November 2014 Masaru Onodera, a member of the Hokkaido prefectural parliament, created controversy when he publicly stated Ainu indigenousness was 'highly questionable'.

The struggle for recognition is even more acute for indigenous Okinawans (or Ryūkyūans) who, unlike Ainu, have yet to receive official indigenous status, despite previous UN recommendations. Their culture and traditional lands are threatened by the denial of their right to free and informed participation in policy-making, especially concerning the expansion of US military bases in Okinawa – an issue that continues to be perceived as a form of discrimination against the indigenous population. Ongoing construction of a new US base in Henoko, situated in a bay rich in biodiversity including the critically endangered Okinawan dugong, was a particularly contentious issue in Okinawan politics in 2014. Local protests swelled to several thousands demonstrating in September and October, ahead of elections in November, with authorities responding harshly by detaining and arresting anyone who approached the construction site. The subsequent election of Takeshi Onaga in the November Okinawan gubernatorial elections was in large part due to his strict opposition to military base construction. In January 2015, Tokyo announced that, despite considerable local opposition, the plan to relocate a US military base from Futenma to Henoko would still continue. However, as of April 2015 Onaga was still actively opposing plans to relocate the base.

Japan has yet to implement CERD's 2010 recommendation to create a specific government agency to deal with Burakumin

issues. Burakumin are not a distinct ethnic group in Japan, but the descendants of outcast communities from the feudal era who continue to face discrimination in mainstream Japanese society. Although they are not subject to official discrimination, Burakumin still face deep-seated prejudice, especially in marriage and employment, with some companies referring to lists of family names and neighbourhoods to discriminate against Burakumin. Historically, Burakumin neighbourhoods, also known as *dowa*, were isolated and excluded settlements with little in the way of public services or other amenities. Increasing numbers migrated to urban areas in the post-war period, resulting in the expansion of segregated slums.

Following strong advocacy efforts from Buraku organizations, however, the Japanese government committed substantial government funds between 1969 and 1997 to improving Buraku urban neighbourhoods, funding upgraded housing, infrastructure development and other improvements. As a result, in large part because of the active efforts of Buraku residents, living conditions in the areas have generally improved. By 2002, the government had completed urban development projects related to the Dowa Special Measures. Among other positive developments, the physical environment in traditionally Buraku districts has improved and other indicators, such as educational attainment and employment, have also risen. However, some of the community cohesion is being weakened as some more affluent Buraku move out and poorer non-Buraku groups move in from elsewhere, meaning that sub-standard housing and other issues are reappearing.

## Mongolia

Though in recent years Mongolia has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world, 2014 saw a dramatic reduction in foreign direct investment and a fall in its GDP growth rate. The slowdown in the Mongolian economy, which remains heavily dependent on the country's natural resources, has been partly attributed to concerns among foreign companies over stalled negotiations between the Mongolian government and Turquoise Hill Resources, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, over the development

of the controversial Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mine. The multi-billion-dollar mining project, located in the south of the country, has been opposed by local herders and civil society organizations due to the destructive impact the development will have on the surrounding environment. In February 2015, however, following a national text message referendum, Mongolia agreed to further development of the mine, despite opposition from environmental groups. Pastoralist livelihoods are threatened not only by the mine itself, but also by the infrastructure connecting it to China, which runs through traditional grazing and pasture lands. Herders have consistently complained about inadequate compensation for their land.

Rising nationalism, linked in part to resentment of the role of international companies in mining and natural resource extraction, has intensified anti-foreigner sentiment in Mongolia, particularly towards Chinese nationals. This is reflected in regular incidents of abuse and even violence towards migrants, foreign minorities and visitors. In April 2014, for instance, three foreigners were attacked at a rock concert in Ulaanbaatar, while in early 2015 reports emerged of the ill-treatment of Chinese tourists by Mongolian nationalists. In May the Mongolian parliament announced that it would begin discussing anti-discrimination legislation to supplement the relevant provisions in the Constitution. However, critics have argued that the proposal does not go far enough to include a specific category for hate crimes.

Mongolia's Tuvan minority's language and culture remain under threat, despite government support and a modest subsidy. Already, growing numbers of Tuvan children are travelling to attend schools in the capital where they cannot study in their native language. These challenges are especially acute for the Dukha (also known as Tsaatan) community, a Tuvan sub-group and Mongolia's smallest ethnic minority, with fewer than 50 families remaining in the far west of the country. Nevertheless, there have been efforts to support the preservation of Dukha language and culture. In December 2014, the Mongolian National Museum premiered a documentary about Oyunbadam, a Dukha educator who established a grassroots language and culture

school for Dukha children.

Mongolia's recent transition to a market economy, as well as limited livelihood opportunities in the countryside, has also driven rapid urban growth in the country's capital, Ulaanbaatar – a process that has unfortunately outpaced the development of public services and infrastructure. In certain districts more than half of the population live in *ger*, traditional nomadic yurts of wool and felt, in lots for which they do not hold land titles. Forced evictions continue to occur against a backdrop of rising property prices and increasing competition for space, with families evicted without consultation and communities harassed by real estate companies, which have even cut off water and electricity supplies to pressure them to leave. *Ger* residents also have limited access to essential services such as sanitation, education and health.

Many are families of former herders who have been pushed to the city by desertification and the harsh winters of the steppe. Following a period of extreme cold in 2010 – known as a *dzud*, meaning 'white death' – that resulted in the deaths of millions of livestock, thousands of herders moved into *gers* on the edge of the city. They continue to make up a significant proportion of those migrating to the city each year. The increasing settlement of rural and formerly nomadic Mongolians around Ulaanbaatar has contributed to the erosion of their traditional lifestyles. In addition to migration in order to find work, herders are also moving closer to markets in towns, particularly near Ulaanbaatar, because they are switching from subsistence husbandry to raising animals for sale. Many residents of poorer areas of Ulaanbaatar rely on herders for their food supply, which results in more seasonal migration to the city; a number of such in-migrants return to the countryside for the summer months.

# Oceania

Jacqui Zalcborg

The diverse region of Oceania spans approximately 25,000 islands, ranging from the

large land masses of Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea to a variety of smaller states where, in most cases, the numerical majority of the population are indigenous. Their experience of urbanization is similarly varied: while countries such as New Zealand have close to 87 per cent of the population living in towns and cities, the proportion is much lower in Papua New Guinea (13 per cent) or Tonga (23.4 per cent). However, smaller island states are also facing high population growth and rapidly accelerating urbanization. Almost a quarter of Pacific Islanders already live in urban centres, up from only 8.5 per cent in 1950, and half of the region's countries already have majority urban populations. In these countries the challenges of urbanization, particularly for their indigenous communities, are especially acute.

Urban migration among indigenous peoples in the Pacific is driven in part by the potential opportunities cities present in terms of improved employment, health care and other benefits. Furthermore, limited livelihood options and lack of development in rural areas is also a factor, and income generated by urban indigenous people is often used to support families in their communities of origin. Nevertheless, in a context of rapid and largely unmanaged growth, indigenous populations face increasing challenges in urban areas, including lack of housing, limited public services, low economic prospects and other issues. One of the key challenges for almost all Pacific Island countries is that there is insufficient land to keep pace with the growing demands of urbanization. The shortage of land means that many who move to urban centres do not have access to or cannot afford adequate land or housing, contributing to the growth of squatter settlements.

These factors have increased stress on the physical and social environments of urban dwellers, particularly for women and children. Domestic violence, sexual violence and violence against women remain endemic across the region, and these problems are often compounded by the impacts of urbanization, such as fragmented communities and increasing marginalization. In addition, the deterioration of established communal structures in urban areas renders many young people vulnerable to issues such

as gang violence, crime and substance abuse, particularly as traditional governance systems have eroded. In New Zealand, for instance, the rapid urbanization of Māori from the 1960s saw the breakdown of *iwi* (tribe) and *hapū* (clan) systems. Māori leadership, however, worked to address the issues that arose from this breakdown and established multi-tribal urban authorities to help foster the economic, social and commercial development of urban Māori communities. The impacts of urbanization on indigenous communities and minorities across Oceania have therefore been ambiguous, and their future situation will likely depend to a large extent on the region's ability to achieve sustainable and inclusive urban development.

### Australia

The year 2014 began promisingly with the announcement by Prime Minister Tony Abbott in January of a planned amendment to the Constitution to recognize Australia's indigenous population as the original inhabitants of Australia. Abbott subsequently pledged in December to hold a constitutional referendum on the issue in 2017. The amendment is seen by rights activists as an important milestone in reversing the historic marginalization suffered by the Aboriginal community. Nevertheless, considerable hurdles remain before the amendment, which was first proposed in 2010, is likely to be passed.

In addition, the positive effects of the amendment may be limited without broader efforts to address the deep-rooted discrimination that Australia's indigenous population continues to face on a daily basis. One issue that sparked national debate during the year was their disproportionate rates of incarceration, described by the Law Council of Australia as a 'national emergency'. Though they make up only around 2.5 per cent of the overall population, indigenous Australians comprise 27 per cent of the country's prison population. This is even higher in some regions, with Aboriginal youth making up 98 per cent of detained juveniles in the Northern Territory. The UN Committee against Torture, in its 2014 review of Australia, noted its concern about the high numbers of indigenous prisoners, as well as cuts in legal assistance and the use of

mandatory sentencing laws in some jurisdictions – issues which particularly affect the indigenous community.

The issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody also received renewed attention in 2014 following the death in August of a 22-year-old Aboriginal woman while incarcerated in a Western Australia jail. The woman was twice taken by police to a local hospital, but on both occasions was declared well enough to be sent back to prison, despite reportedly not being seen by a doctor. The woman had been placed in South Headland police custody due to unpaid parking fines, a controversial approach that has been blamed for perpetuating the high incarceration rates among the indigenous population and other marginalized groups.

Serious inequalities persist in other areas, too, such as education, employment and health: for example, life expectancy for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations is still a decade less than that enjoyed by non-indigenous Australians. Progress to reduce these disparities has been slow, with Abbott admitting in February 2015 that the country's continued failure to meet most targets on improving outcomes for indigenous communities in areas such as education, employment and community safety was 'profoundly disappointing'. Yet the introduction of the government's controversial Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in July, consolidating 150 different programmes into five broad thematic areas and involving cuts of more than AU\$500 million over the next five years, has generated considerable resentment among indigenous communities. In addition to reduced overall funding, significant portions of the new budget have gone to state departments, sporting clubs and other non-indigenous organizations, while some local indigenous organizations found that their funding had been halted.

One challenge in terms of service access and development is the geographical seclusion of many rural indigenous communities. While the country as a whole is highly urbanized, with almost 90 per cent of Australians now living in urban areas, the proportion is significantly lower among the indigenous population; over 20 per cent are still based in areas classified as remote or very remote, compared to less than 2 per cent





of the non-indigenous population. Many of these isolated communities, particularly in the Northern Territory, struggle with higher levels of child mortality, poor living standards and lack of access to essential services such as health care. These issues are compounded by a lack of culturally appropriate programmes and limited opportunities for bilingual education, with a large proportion of indigenous children in more remote areas of the country barely able to read or write.

Though some remote indigenous communities face significant challenges, the announcement in November 2014 by the Western Australia

**Above:** In the township of Kennedy Hill, Western Australia, a young Aboriginal girl watches as the town's main offices are demolished. The Western Australian government are in the process of closing approximately 150 remote Aboriginal communities. *Ingetje Tadros/Diimex*

state government that as many as 150 of its 274 Aboriginal communities would be shut down sparked widespread outrage among Aboriginal Australians and rights activists. The announcement was made following the decision of the Australian federal government to stop



funding power, water and other services to these communities beyond the next two years, with Western Australia accepting an AU\$90 million one-off payment from the federal government to take responsibility for the services. The Western Australia State Premier, Colin Barnett, claimed that without federal funding the state government could not afford to continue to service the communities, despite being the richest state in Australia. He also justified the closure of the communities in terms of safety and well-being, citing 'high rates of suicide, poor education, poor health [and] no jobs'.

The decision was strongly condemned by the deputy indigenous adviser to the Abbott government, Dr Ngiare Brown, who argued that 'governments have the responsibility to understand the historical and contemporary contexts of those communities and the failure of systems which placed them at risk, and then negotiate the best possible options' for them. Amnesty International has noted that the plan to evict traditional owners from their homes would cause considerable trauma to the communities and that for them migration to larger urban centres would present an even higher risk of substance abuse, crime and other issues. Nor, when the decision was made, was there a plan in place to support community members in transitioning to their new context elsewhere.

The potential effects of uprooting communities in this way were demonstrated in 2011 when the small indigenous settlement of Oombulgurri was forcibly closed by the state government after evidence emerged of high levels of violence, suicide and sexual assault in the area. Those who refused to leave were evicted from the town and public services closed down. In 2014, despite protests from rights groups, the town was demolished. The transition for residents was reportedly traumatic, with inadequate support services and housing in place for displaced residents who were forced to relocate to a larger urban area nearby. Some community members were reportedly still homeless at the end of 2014, several years later.

Notably, similar agreements to transfer responsibility for remote communities have been reached between the federal government and the States of Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania,

with responsibility for the provision of power, water and other services now falling to the state authorities. The State of South Australia initially rejected a payout, but in April 2015 reached an agreement with the federal government to share the management of the state's indigenous settlements, which otherwise would have faced closure. The implications of these changes for other rural indigenous communities remain to be seen.

Nevertheless, with the exception of certain areas such as the Northern Territory where three-quarters of the population are rural, the majority of Australia's indigenous populations are now urban. The relocation of indigenous communities to urban areas is rooted in part in Australia's troubled colonial history, beginning with their displacement and forcible resettlement in missions and reserves. Limited opportunities and the takeover of much of their former homelands subsequently pushed increasing numbers of indigenous people, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, to migrate in search of opportunities. Nevertheless, various improvements in rural areas from the 1960s onwards, such as recognition of land rights and more government funding, reduced the pull of migration to urban areas. In the past few decades, demographic increases have resulted primarily from natural growth over multiple generations, as well as higher levels of self-identification among the indigenous urban population in censuses and population surveys.

The effects of urbanization for indigenous Australians has been mixed. Despite the difficulties of adjusting to unfamiliar urban settings, life in Australia's cities has brought many positive developments. In particular, the interaction of many previously separated communities in urban areas led to the emergence of a shared indigenous consciousness and the beginning of indigenous political activism. While aspects of traditional indigenous culture have undoubtedly been eroded – for example, just 1 per cent of indigenous people in urban areas speak an indigenous language, compared to 56 per cent in rural areas – cities have in some ways helped reinforce indigenous identity and enabled the reinvention of indigenous heritage in new and distinctly urban forms of expression. Urban

indicators in a range of sectors, from employment to education, also outperform those in rural areas by a significant margin.

Nevertheless, indigenous residents continue to experience serious inequalities in cities compared to the non-indigenous population, particularly as shifts in urban labour markets have reduced employment opportunities for workers with limited job skills or education. Indicators such as educational attainment, income and health are also poorer among urban indigenous communities than the non-indigenous urban population. In addition, evidence suggests that indigenous residents are disproportionately situated in poorer and marginalized city districts. Discrimination and exclusion have therefore persisted and have even led to new forms of disadvantage. Some studies have suggested, for instance, that well-being and self-reported levels of happiness among indigenous Australians in rural areas is higher, despite lower levels of development. The overall picture of indigenous urbanization in Australia is therefore mixed, with cities bringing considerable benefits while also maintaining many inequalities.

Though Australia has a vibrant and diverse population, especially in urban areas, there have been ongoing reports of ethnic minorities being subjected to increasing racism. A 2014 survey reported that experience of discrimination remains close to the highest level recorded; 18 per cent of those surveyed reported that they had experienced racial, ethnic or religious discrimination compared with 19 per cent in 2013 – the highest level recorded since this particular survey began in 2007. There have also been repeated reports of minorities and foreigners being subjected to hate speech on public transport in major cities, including two widely reported incidents in Sydney and Perth in which Asian women were verbally abused by other passengers. There were also concerns, following a religiously motivated attack on a Sydney coffee shop in December 2014 which led to the deaths of two hostages, that attacks against Australia's Muslim population would escalate in the aftermath. However, Sydney citizens and activists launched a campaign online with the hashtag #IllRideWithYou, with users offering to accompany Muslims in religious attire on public

transport as a gesture of solidarity.

Increasing racism and xenophobia in Australia, particularly towards Muslims, may also contribute to widespread popular support for the country's punitive policies towards asylum seekers. The majority of asylum seekers, originating mostly from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, are ethnically distinct from the white Australian majority and are often presumed by members of the general public to be Muslim. All asylum seekers entering Australian territory by boat continue to face mandatory, indefinite and non-reviewable detention at centres on Nauru or Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, in conditions described by UNHCR as unsafe and in violation of international standards. Violence and neglect in these centres remain serious issues: an Iranian man was beaten to death in May in a riot at the Manus Island centre, while in September another asylum seeker was left brain dead after an infected cut was not adequately treated, resulting in septicaemia.

The government has nevertheless continued to militarize migration control and forcibly returned boats carrying asylum seekers to their country of origin. In 2014, Australia attempted to return a boat carrying 153 asylum seekers and refugees to Sri Lanka. The Australian High Court blocked the attempt temporarily after it found that another boatload of 41 people had already been returned to Sri Lanka, where they faced persecution. The 153 asylum seekers on the boat were held aboard the Customs vessel as the government sought to arrange their return to India, and were subsequently sent to Nauru. In January 2015 the High Court held that the government had not acted illegally when it detained them at sea for almost a month. These policies were further institutionalized in December 2014 when parliament passed the Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment, strengthening the power of maritime controls to take asylum seekers found at sea to other destinations and also reducing other safeguards for asylum seekers. The Act has been criticized by a wide coalition of stakeholders for further eroding human rights standards relating to asylum seekers.

## **Papua New Guinea**

The indigenous population of Papua New

Guinea is one of the most diverse in the world, with thousands of separate communities and an estimated 800 languages spoken in the country. Many communities continue to live on subsistence agriculture in the isolated mountainous interior, although the presence of natural resources such as forests and mineral reserves in some indigenous areas has resulted in land grabbing, environmental devastation and other abuses. The country also faces governance challenges that persisted during 2014, with an arrest warrant issued by the national anti-corruption watchdog for Prime Minister Peter O'Neill for alleged fraudulent payments. O'Neill subsequently fired the deputy police commissioner and stopped the watchdog's funding, effectively bringing its activities to a halt.

The year 2014 saw the approval of Papua New Guinea's application for Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) candidate status. This was an important move for a country endowed with abundant natural resources, yet in which the UNDP estimates that 40 per cent of the population are living on less than US\$1.25 a day. It is hoped that the initiative will improve relations between communities and development projects, as well as ensure that profits are transparently directed back to the country and its peoples. This is particularly the case for ExxonMobil's US\$19 billion Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project, which began production in 2014. Nevertheless, rights violations against local communities continue to occur. In early 2015, for instance, 14 people, including 11 indigenous women and girls who were raped or violently molested at the Porgera Mine in the Papua New Guinea highlands, reached an out-of-court settlement with the world's biggest gold mining company, Barrick Gold. Apart from these victims, at least 120 women have lodged claims of rape at the mine.

Although Papua New Guinea is the least urbanized of the Pacific Island countries, with less than 13 per cent of the population living in urban areas, this figure is somewhat deceptive due to the country's large landmass. Papua New Guinea in fact has the largest urban population in the Pacific, while Port Moresby is the region's most sizeable city. This has also led to significant challenges, with some estimates suggesting that

close to half of the city's population live in slums. Similar issues have affected other urban areas in the country, such as the coastal city of Lae, where an influx of migrants from rural areas in Mamose, the New Guinea islands and the Highlands Region has dramatically increased the size of its informal settlements. Though the government, through its National Urbanization Policy (NUP), has committed to improving infrastructure, services and urban management, serious problems persist.

One major challenge in urban areas of Papua New Guinea is violence. Urban conflict has increased as cities have become more ethnically diverse, with tribal fighting – a frequent issue between different ethnic groups in the country – now normalized in major urban centres. Furthermore, Port Moresby is also plagued by so-called 'rascalism'. This phenomenon, centring around youth gangs defined along community and cultural lines, has reinforced ethnic division in the capital. The decline of traditional conflict resolution systems, such as village courts, has meant that some communities have become more dependent on *wantok* for protection. *Wantok* – literally meaning 'one talk', someone who speaks the same language – previously served in part as a social support system among rural communities, but in Port Moresby and other urban areas it is frequently adapted to support identity-based criminal gangs, in the process deepening urban divisions. A particularly high-profile case of ethnic violence occurred in January 2011, when an argument between two men from different highland provinces led to an outbreak of fighting between factions of their communities that killed five people. Women are especially vulnerable in Port Moresby, as the city has high levels of sexual assault, domestic violence and rape.

## Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands are an archipelago of approximately 922 small islands. Ninety-five per cent of the population is indigenous Melanesian, with smaller Chinese, European, Micronesian and Polynesian groups also resident. Due to the relative isolation of its communities, there are many diverse languages, culture and traditions. For this reason, local governance systems, including familial ties, are often more important

than national political institutions.

In November 2014, general elections saw Independent candidates secure 32 seats in the 50-seat parliament, which led to the formation of a ruling coalition known as the Solomon Islands People's Democratic Coalition (SIPDC) and the election of Manasseh Sogavare as the country's prime minister. Sogavare had served as prime minister from 2000 to 2001 and again from 2006 to 2007. The election was the country's first since an Australian-led peacekeeping operation, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), transitioned to a police-focused mission in 2013 following ethnic violence that gripped the country between 1997 and 2003.

Despite its return to stability, the Solomon Islands is struggling to cope with rapid urban growth, particularly in the capital of Honiara, as a result of large-scale migration from rural areas. Honiara has experienced a doubling of its population in less than 17 years, and the city's annual urban growth rate of 4.7 per cent is one of the highest in the Pacific. This is putting immense pressure on urban service delivery, already in short supply, and leading to local tensions.

Honiara also faces the challenge of informal urban settlements, where up to 35 per cent of Honiara's residents – the majority of whom are indigenous islanders – now reside. While population growth and increasing rural–urban migration are significant factors contributing to the growth of these informal settlements, a lack of developable land for low- and middle-income earners also drives the trend. Besides poor living conditions and limited or no access to basic services such as sanitation, inhabitants are at increased risk of natural disasters. Over 65 per cent of housing in informal settlements lacks durability, meaning that it would likely not withstand strong winds or earthquakes. The settlements, some of which are located on steep slopes, are therefore at high risk of collapsing in the event of a natural disaster, leaving residents in a situation of extreme vulnerability.

## Vanuatu

The majority of Vanuatu's population are indigenous Melanesian, known locally as ni-Vanuatu, though there are also Chinese,

European and Vietnamese minorities, as well as smaller groups of other indigenous peoples, such as Futunans, i-Kiribati and Wallisians. The country has undergone a series of political crises since the 1990s, resulting in numerous changes in leadership. The year 2014 also saw a change in key leadership positions in the country, with then Prime Minister Moana Carcasses Kalosil defeated by Joe Natuman in a no-confidence vote on 15 May 2014. Presidential elections were held in September, resulting in the election of Baldwin Lonsdale.

The year 2014 saw important changes to Vanuatu's legislation on indigenous land rights. The new laws alter the Constitution to include recognition of customary institutions and establish a role for the *Malvatumauri* (National Council of Chiefs) in advising parliament on changes to land law, as well as to strengthen the control of customary institutions while reducing the power of the minister of lands over customary land. It is hoped that this new legislation will prevent leases on customary land being signed off by the minister without the consent of the communities – a recurring issue since the country gained independence in 1980.

In terms of urbanization, Vanuatu has one of the region's highest growth rates, and it is projected that over half of the Vanuatu population will be based in urban centres by 2050. This is particularly the case in Port Vila, Vanuatu's largest city, where ni-Vanuatu face limited land availability – a situation that has been exacerbated by the development of tourism-related facilities and exclusive residential housing, leased on what was regarded until recently as inalienable indigenous land. As much as 80 per cent of the coastland on Etafe Island, where Port Vila is located, has been leased out. As a result, large tracts of territory have been walled off, restricting access to local beaches and marine resources. Some villages in peri-urban areas are now obstructed by commercial resorts and other developments that have blocked off swathes of community land from public use. The impacts of this are especially acute for ni-Vanuatu inhabitants, who have a particularly close connection to the land – an essential element in their traditional culture and local livelihoods.

Although urban areas tend to have better

services than rural areas, poverty rates are highest in urban communities. A recent UNICEF study found that one-third of children in Port Vila live in poverty – a rate nearly 20 per cent higher than the national average. Living conditions for ni-Vanuatu in poorer settlements are also deteriorating as a consequence of overcrowding and limited services or infrastructure. As a result, Port Vila’s poverty levels are 18 per cent, compared to 10 per cent in rural areas. Furthermore, lack of access to safe water, sanitation or waste disposal facilities are contributing to deteriorating health outcomes among urban ni-Vanuatu. Many urban disenfranchised ni-Vanuatu women are particularly affected by poverty and excluded from paid employment.

Vanuatu has been ranked by UN sources as the country with the highest risk of experiencing a natural disaster in the world. March 2015 saw one of the worst disasters in its history when Cyclone Pam hit the island, displacing at least 3,300 people and affecting more than half of its population. In Vanuatu, as with other Pacific islands, large urban areas are especially vulnerable due to the dense concentration of their populations in disaster-prone coastal locations, particularly the poorest and most marginalized. In Port Vila, the cyclone destroyed makeshift housing and weakened already limited basic services, leaving many informal settlements in even deeper poverty. However, given the scale of the disaster, the death toll remained relatively low, with 11 confirmed fatalities in the whole of Vanuatu. While modern communications and early warning systems helped reduce the death toll, the particular characteristics of the indigenous communal houses – known as *nakamals* – also proved critical. This was due to their construction with lightweight materials such as bamboo, as well as the use of traditional design measures that strengthen their resilience to storms. ■

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**Case study** by Anne-Marie Tupuola-Plunkett  
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## Resilience despite adversity – adapting indigenous communities to climate change in the Pacific region

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Most of the Pacific region’s island states are still predominantly rural, but rapid urbanization is fragmenting indigenous societies and undermining traditional livelihoods. In the process, new forms of poverty and disadvantage such as unemployment, delinquency and inadequate nutrition are emerging in urban areas. The devastating impacts of climate change are now adding to these hardships, particularly in the region’s most densely populated coastal settlements.

The Pacific is one of the most vulnerable parts of the world to climate change which, combined with limited resources and land, has left indigenous inhabitants and other marginalized groups at the mercy of its effects. As highlighted by Aunese Makoi Simati, the Tuvalu ambassador to the UN, at the 2015 Third World Conference on Disaster and Risk Reduction, ‘[T]he word “vulnerable” goes hand in hand with the words “small island” because there is no high ground. As Tuvalu is small, flat and barely three metres above sea level, “moving” means just going to the other side.’

Many of the Pacific’s low-lying islands and atoll communities are already in fear of extinction or the evacuation of their communities due to rising sea levels, eroding coastlines and water contamination. At the same time, the impact of severe storms, cyclones, global warming and ocean acidification are threatening ecosystems, food



security and indigenous livelihoods. Flooding, landslides and other weather-related hazards are also destroying homes and displacing families from their ancestral lands, in the process erasing heritage and sacred sites unique to these communities. Speaking of the flooding of cemeteries in the wake of Hurricane Pam, Simati described how 'we feel that even the dead are calling for help'.

Notwithstanding the adversity that climate change brings, Pacific communities are demonstrating remarkable resilience, ingenuity and resourcefulness in responding to these challenges. In the words of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), 'adaptation to climate change is becoming a Pacific way of life'. The installation of storage tanks and innovative drainage systems has helped to diffuse water contamination and potential health risks arising from unusually long periods of drought and saltwater intrusion. Many Pacific communities are strengthening their biodiversity, planting dense vegetation and building sea walls, mindful of the risks of erosion and landslides to the densely populated areas along their coastlines.

For Samoa, an island group with a growing low-lying urban population, adaptation to climate change is often associated with deforestation and natural disasters. Thus adaptation strategies tend to address the links between climate change and disaster management. For instance, the Samoa Red Cross Society, under the Community Disaster and Climate Risk Management Programme, empowers indigenous communities to become more resilient in the face of disaster threats, as well as build on the skills and resources at hand. One project provides low-income families with free seeds and fertilizers, along with training on how to prepare vegetable beds, so they can grow non-traditional produce like cabbages, tomatoes and cucumbers. This strengthens adaptation by diversifying livelihoods and improving nutrition – both areas where climate change has led to heightened levels of risk.

The increasing threat of climate change has also encouraged renewed interest in traditional

housing in Samoa. Thatched Samoan *fales*, unlike westernized homes, have survived and withstood extreme storms. Their oval shaped, open layout is resistant to strong winds and the natural materials used in their construction are less dangerous than the corrugated iron and concrete blocks of modern houses.

Training locals in the design and building of traditional Samoan architecture therefore promotes resilient housing and may also help minimize the need for residential relocation.

Climate change is a global challenge that affects all of humanity. The rich knowledge and social capital of the Pacific's indigenous populations in responding to climate change is now being disseminated across national and international borders through blogs, websites and multimedia, supported by alliances and partnerships with diverse agencies, corporations and community organizations. A passive response is not an option, most especially for Pacific indigenous communities, as their existence and survival already hang in the balance. In moving forward, climate change must be viewed as a human rights issue for all indigenous peoples, irrespective of where they reside. ■



# Europe

Bill Bowring, Paul Iganski,  
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Ukraine dominated the headlines during 2014, following the removal of then President Viktor Yanukovych in January after weeks of unrest and the establishment of an interim government shortly afterwards. This was followed in late February by the seizure of the Crimean parliament building by pro-Russian armed separatists and a referendum in March, widely condemned as unfair by international observers, that led to Russia's annexation of the region. Since then, continuing into 2015, eastern Ukraine has witnessed an escalation of conflict between the government and separatist forces, causing widespread displacement and an increasingly nationalistic environment in Russian-held areas. This situation has been especially difficult for minorities and indigenous peoples, particularly the Crimean Tatars.

Rising nationalism, meanwhile, was evident across Europe during the year, driven in large part by the protracted effects of the international financial crisis and growing anxiety around immigration. This in turn has helped boost

**Below:** A young Tatar activist holding the flag of the Crimean Tatars on the Maidan, at a rally in Kiev, Ukraine, March 2014. *Panos/Iva Zimova*

the popularity of right-wing political groups in countries such as Hungary, where national elections in April saw the right-wing Jobbik group secure 20 per cent of the national vote on an anti-Semitic and anti-Roma ticket. These sentiments have fed into the mainstreaming of xenophobic and discriminatory policies for certain ethnic and religious minorities, such as targeted police checks, restrictive legislation and other measures.

While generally not officially sanctioned, the stance of authorities towards their minority and indigenous communities can indirectly contribute to a heightened risk of violence. Hate crime and hate speech, though occurring in a range of contexts, has been especially evident in urban areas. Some of the most vulnerable groups in Europe, such as migrants, Muslims and Roma, are concentrated in cities and therefore offer a visible target for attacks. But though these



groups are frequently blamed by racist groups for taking jobs or crime, it is more often the case that they are themselves excluded from urban labour markets and disproportionately affected as victims of violence.

In many cases, the social and political marginalization of these communities is reinforced in European cities by physical distance and separation. Within a context of widening urban inequality and even in affluent capitals such as Paris, black and Arab residents are being pushed out into insecure, segregated suburbs. Roma, too, are typically concentrated in poorer settlements, often in sub-standard housing, and stigmatized by official policies that often encourage segregation or eviction. Without targeted interventions and the creation of more inclusive urban planning, European cities risk becoming even more inhospitable towards their minorities.

Yet despite these challenges, across Europe urban areas continue to attract and sustain minority and indigenous communities. Many disadvantaged groups remain in cities because they are better placed to access employment, health care and education than outside them. There are plenty of examples, too, of thriving urban neighbourhoods across Europe where a large minority or indigenous presence has enriched these areas. The religious and ethnic diversity of urban areas, though it can be a source of tension, has also created more tolerant and welcoming environments for these groups. These issues were demonstrated in Sweden when, following several attacks on mosques at the end of the year that included incidents of suspected arson, fire bombing and vandalism, crowds gathered in Stockholm, Malmö, Gothenburg and other cities to participate in a so-called 'love bombing' – a collective show of support from fellow citizens for the Muslim community.

## **Bulgaria**

Political instability continues to beset Bulgaria in the wake of the collapse of the socialist-led government in July after barely a year in office. Snap elections in October resulted in a precarious coalition between former Prime Minister Boyko Borisov's centre-right GERB party, which garnered the most votes, with the

Reformist bloc, a group of small pro-market parties. The coalition also secured the support of the nationalist Patriotic Front, whose policies include building a wall on the Turkish border and limiting welfare support, of which the Roma minority are among the principal recipients.

Tied for second place was DPS, the ethnic Turkish minority party, with 15 per cent of the vote. During the campaign DPS proposed a bill to make Turkish language lessons compulsory for Turkish students in public schools. Under current laws the language course is elective and the use of Turkish during public election campaigning is banned. Shortly after the election, DPS proposed further bills in parliament to penalize ethnic crimes committed during Communist rule in the country and to review the 1991 Revival Process laws which force ethnic Turks who are Bulgarian citizens to accept Bulgarian names on official documents. However, in November the coalition government, prompted by the Patriotic Front, suggested moving the twice-daily Turkish news bulletins from the national broadcasting stations to cable channels.

Roma are still subjected to high levels of discrimination. Estimates vary regarding the size of the Roma population in Bulgaria. According to the 2011 census, there were over 325,000 Roma, constituting 4.9 per cent of the population. However, commentators point to the fact that feelings of stigma may lead Roma to self-identify as belonging to other groups; they put the figure at double the census results or even higher.

More than half the community live in ghettoized neighbourhoods on the edge of urban centres. The remaining Roma population live in poor isolated villages scattered throughout the country. A 2012 study on housing deprivation by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions found that Roma in Bulgaria are far more disadvantaged than nearby majority populations: for instance, they were 'three times more likely to lack access to improved forms of sanitation and almost eight times as likely to live in sub-standard housing, such as shacks and other run-down buildings'. Since 2010, the European Commission has overseen the national Bulgarian strategy for Roma integration and in the spring it published the results of its latest assessment of their





situation. Although some progress was noted, it found that significant action was required in every area of implementation. Specifically, the report called for a constructive dialogue with the Roma community and the development of anti-discrimination activities to support Roma integration. Positive initiatives for promoting Roma inclusion were observed in the west of the country, where civil society, international donor organizations and local authorities are working together to integrate Roma into the wider community through initiatives such as desegregated school transport, extra-curricular activities such as volunteering, microfinance and various mentoring schemes involving Roma youth.

Nevertheless, prejudice remains. Two incidents in the second half of 2014 highlight the problems that urban-dwelling Roma face in terms of lack of secure tenure and limited access to basic services. In July, Roma residents of 55 houses scheduled for demolition clashed with riot police after forming a human chain around their homes. The structures were deemed illegal, having been built without permits in a

Roma suburb of the city of Stara Zagora. Two protesters were arrested and the demolition eventually proceeded as planned. In December, Bulgaria's health minister Petar Moskov faced criticism when he suggested during a speech in parliament that ambulances should be barred from entering Roma neighbourhoods, claiming that medics were unsafe in predominantly Roma areas. The Sofia-based human rights watchdog, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, described the speech as 'incitement to racial hatred'.

In March the release on bail of a security guard charged with shooting and killing a Roma teenager in 2013 triggered protests by minority groups, which were countered by nationalist demonstrations. Civil society groups have reported a surge in nationalist and xenophobic sentiment, leading to an increase in attacks on ethnic and religious minorities. Unfortunately, this xenophobia is shared by a significant portion of the population, as suggested by recent research conducted by Sofia University which found that half of the city's residents would not want to live in a neighbourhood with African, Arab, Chinese or Roma communities.

**Left:** Roma neighbours in front of their houses in the village of Vrachesh, Bulgaria, January 2015. Bulgaria is home to one of the largest populations of Roma in the EU. *REUTERS/Stoyan Nenov*

Racist attitudes towards religious minorities have been encouraged by Bulgaria's nationalist political wing. In February, in spite of protests from Jewish groups and the ethnic Turkish party, DPS, Bulgarian nationalists marched through Plovdiv to commemorate Hristo Lukov, a Second World War general who espoused anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi views. The annual rally, which is accompanied by pro-fascist and xenophobic slogans, had been banned from Sofia by the city's mayor. The march was organized by the far right Bulgarian National Union. This was followed in June by the defacing of Sofia Central Synagogue with pro-Nazi graffiti alongside a swastika. According to the Anti-Defamation League, 44 per cent of Bulgarians harbour anti-Semitic attitudes – 10 per cent higher than the average for Eastern Europe as a whole.

The extreme nationalist party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization continued to organize protests in front of the courthouse in Pazardjik against the wearing of religious attire and the propagation of Islam. In August the Chief Mufti of Bulgaria announced that there had been 12 hate crime attacks against Muslims and Muslim places of worship since 2012. The most recent attack was reportedly on Karaja Pasha Mosque in July.

In a report on religious intolerance in Bulgaria in 2013, released in July, the US State Department criticized the government for failing to consistently protect religious freedom in the country, citing incidences of anti-Semitism, discrimination against Muslims and harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses. Given that the religious minority communities reside predominantly in urban areas, Bulgaria's cities and towns often provide the setting for the most severe examples of xenophobia and hate speech. In February, for example, over a thousand protesters attacked the historic Dzhumaya mosque in Plovdiv, hurling bricks and fireworks at the building. Of the 120 people detained by police, eight were charged with hooliganism and received fines or other minor sentences. The protest followed moves

by Bulgaria's Chief Mufti to have properties historically owned by the Muslim community formally returned to the community.

The situation of refugees in Bulgaria, particularly in urban areas, is illustrative of the discrimination faced by minorities. Unused to hosting large numbers of refugees, the government has been unable to respond effectively to the influx of thousands of Syrian refugees. According to the FCJ Refugee Centre, Bulgaria previously received about 1,000 asylum seekers every year; in 2013, however, this figure leapt to 9,100, with 4,000 coming from Syria alone. Though conditions appeared to improve later in the year, the influx has put pressure on housing in urban areas and given rise to xenophobic reactions. For example, in April residents of one village petitioned to evict three Syrian refugee families just two days after they moved into rented accommodation in the village. Konstantin Penchev, the National Ombudsman, said that their actions were a demonstration of intolerance and could not be justified. Most of the refugees who remain in Bulgaria identify as Kurdish. In an interview with the FCJ Refugee Centre, Nikolay Chirpanliev, the chairman of Bulgaria Refugee Agency, described Syrian refugees of Kurdish origin as 'a lot worse than our Gypsies in every aspect'. This comment demonstrates the high level of institutional prejudice against ethnic minorities.

## France

The attack on the Paris offices of satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on 7 January 2015 and the subsequent shootings at a Jewish supermarket in the city's eastern suburbs left 17 people dead, stunning a country already struggling with social division and the rise of the far right National Front Party, who in April 2014 won an unprecedented number of seats in local elections on a strongly anti-immigrant ticket. In the aftermath of these events, President François Hollande restated commitment to protect freedom of expression, but also reiterated the government's responsibilities to end France's extreme inequalities, including the ghettoization of certain urban areas. The lack of social integration and spatial segregation of many of France's minorities, particularly its marginalized



**Above:** French citizens gather at the Unity March in Paris to protest against the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, France, January 2015. *Kelly Kline*

Muslim population, was acknowledged by Manuel Valls, France's Prime Minister, shortly after the shooting when he described the 'territorial, social, ethnic apartheid' at work in the capital, which has 'relegated the poor and heavily immigrant population to ghetto-like suburbs of Paris'.

Studies have found that certain ethnic groups, such as those of African descent, find it harder to move out of poor suburbs and are three times more likely to move into the least advantaged neighbourhoods. Spatial segregation also has an impact on unemployment, with recent immigrants facing much longer commutes, thereby restricting their access to jobs and adding to the barriers already raised by frequent discrimination against individuals of North African origin. The inequalities evident in Paris's suburbs or *banlieues* are visible in the poor level of housing, high rates of unemployment and the securitization of these urban fringes. Although tension has not reached the levels witnessed during the 2005 riots, violent crime in the *banlieues* remains a serious concern.

Naturally, the integration of immigrants

and their descendants in French society has become a high priority for the government. Efforts have been further bolstered under the Hollande administration with a series of interventions, including a €5 billion investment in neighbourhoods where social disadvantage is significant. However, research conducted on the social exclusion experienced by immigrants in France concluded that the government's continued push for assimilation, together with the French political tradition of secularism (*laïcité*), may have prevented the state from tackling discrimination and in the process alienated some minorities. For example, France's law banning the wearing of full-face coverings on the grounds that their use reduced opportunities for 'living together' – a stance affirmed by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in July – has been condemned by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other rights groups as a breach of the rights of freedom of religion and expression. According to statistics gathered in 2009, an estimated 1,900 Muslim women in France are affected by the full-face veil ban, many of whom are well integrated into French society. The ban has provoked significant public debate regarding the potentially negative effects of *laïcité*.

According to a survey conducted in spring

2014 by Pew Research Center into European public opinion towards minorities, of the seven countries polled the proportion of French people with a favourable opinion of Muslims – 72 per cent – was the highest. However, a human rights report finalized in December and presented by the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner Nils Muižnieks in February 2015 indicated a rise in intolerance and racism across France, particularly with regard to homophobic, xenophobic and anti-Muslim incidents. There were concerns in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks that hostility towards the Muslim population could increase further.

Anti-Semitic incidents have been on the rise in France as well as across Europe, nearly doubling in France in the first seven months of 2014, compared with the previous year. According to statistics published by the Jewish Agency for Israel, which encourages emigration to that country, the number of French Jews leaving for Israel remained steady at about 2,000 annually until 2013, when it rose to 3,400 before peaking at more than 7,000 during 2014. The agency predicts that as many as 15,000 French Jews will leave the country during 2015 in reaction to the attack in January this year on the Hyper Cacher supermarket in a Jewish neighbourhood of Paris, which left four hostages dead. However, Jewish community leaders urged calm, noting that emigration would be giving in to terror – many pointed out that the person who helped hostages to safety was a young Muslim.

The already tense public debate regarding anti-Semitism and freedom of speech was further polarized in January when French comedian Dieudonné M’bala M’bala was criticized for a down-arm gesture called the *quenelle*, a gesture interpreted by some rights groups as an inverted Nazi salute. It provoked Valls to issue a memo to police providing the legal justification for banning performances considered to be anti-Semitic, such as those by Dieudonné. Twelve months later Dieudonné was in the spotlight once again when, a few days after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, he wrote on Facebook, ‘As far as I am concerned, I feel I am Charlie Coulibaly.’ By combining the popular slogan ‘*Je suis Charlie*’ (meaning ‘I am Charlie’), used by thousands to express their grief for the murdered journalists

and support for the magazine, with a reference to gunman Amedy Coulibaly, Dieudonné was deemed to be publicly supporting terrorism and was promptly detained by police.

Later in January, shortly after the ‘Dieudonné affair’, around 17,000 protesters marched through the streets of Paris chanting racist, homophobic and anti-Semitic slogans. The demonstration, dubbed the ‘Day of Anger’, ostensibly provoked by the government’s inability to counter unemployment, quickly descended into a verbal assault on minorities. At least 150 protesters, mostly youth, were arrested and 19 policemen suffered injuries, including one who was seriously wounded.

The French government’s policies towards its Roma population are an ongoing concern. In 2014, 13,483 people were evicted by law enforcement agencies from 138 different locations. This figure was lower than the number of Roma evicted in 2013, but remains high compared to neighbouring countries.

Many Roma are concentrated in communities on the edges of towns and cities with limited access to basic services such as water and sanitation. Roma face a number of obstacles in accessing education, employment and housing. Their illegal camps are systematically demolished by public authorities and many are often deported to their home countries.

One tactic employed to promote integration, as an alternative to eviction, has been the construction of so-called ‘insertion villages’, housing developments in existing towns, where certain Roma, selected using ‘social diagnostics’ on the basis of their education levels, language skills and job prospects, are rehoused in temporary facilities and provided with basic services and schooling for a limited period. However these methods have been criticized for being akin to social engineering, with the new settlements merely formalizing segregation and benefiting only a small sub-section of the Roma population.

In June the intersecting issues of urban disintegration and social discrimination against Roma and the *banlieues* were brought into stark relief when a group of around a dozen youth from a north Paris estate abducted Darius, a 16-year-old Roma boy, from a nearby camp and



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**Case study** *by Bill Bowring*  
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## Little change, two decades on, for Turkey's displaced Kurds

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Turkey's Kurdish community, besides being the largest minority in the country, is also one of the most discriminated against. Historically, Kurds are concentrated in the eastern and south-western parts of the country. Their situation deteriorated further following the outbreak of fighting in 1984 between the government and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), an armed opposition group fighting for self-determination. Increasing violence on both sides resulted in the displacement of millions of civilians.

A major factor in Turkey's rapid urbanization in recent decades, especially the main cities in south-eastern Turkey, was the policy of village destruction, which was central to Turkey's internal conflict against the PKK. By 1994, at least 3,000 villages had been deliberately destroyed as part of this campaign. The European Court of Human Rights gave judgment in a number of cases and established that Turkey had destroyed many villages as part of a military strategy. In this context, urban centres such as Diyarbakir experienced rapid growth, tripling in size during the 1990s even as many residents themselves moved elsewhere in Turkey or abroad to escape the violence.

Though there is no consensus on how many exactly were displaced, reliable estimates range between 1 and 3 million. This legacy of displacement persists today, with the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimating there to be at least 953,700 Kurdish internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Turkey as of December 2014 –



**Above: Syrian Kurd boys watch people coming to the Thursday animal bazaar in Suruc, Turkey. Panos/Iva Zimova**

the majority of them those who were originally uprooted by fighting between 1986 and 1995. IDMC reports that most have had to survive without external support, either in urban areas in relative proximity to their home villages or in cities in other regions of the country, often in low quality housing.

Though the government has reportedly undertaken periodic attempts to support return, through village rehabilitation and compensation for those displaced, as well as payments to those





affected by the 2013 conflict, IDMC reports that as of 2009 only 187,000 IDPs had returned. However, the political will to implement these changes has been questioned given that conditions in former villages often make return unfeasible, with little in the way of basic services or livelihood options. Some areas still reportedly contained landmines. With hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring Syria now settled in the country, the prospects of a speedy resolution are even slimmer.

Those who have migrated out of the main Kurdish-populated areas to western Turkish cities face other challenges. A 2012 study for the Immigration and Refugee Board of

Canada included interviews with local researchers who described the ‘atmosphere of pressure’ and the ‘nationalist backlash’ that the Kurdish minority often experienced when in western Turkish cities. This poses significant challenges for their long-term integration and well-being. A large portion of Istanbul’s Kurdish population, for example, having been displaced during the conflict, were forced to move to the periphery of the city to live in areas with low rents or weak regulations where they could settle illegally. Many today are still living in neighbourhoods such as Karayollari, a spatially segregated neighbourhood that continues to struggle with high levels of unemployment and crime.

Kurdish communities in Istanbul are facing new challenges, including gentrification. In one high-profile case, Kurds and Roma residents were evicted from informal settlements in Karayollari in order to make way for Avrupa Konutlari, an up-scale gated community comprising numerous high-rise buildings around a large swimming pool and aimed at middle-class commuters. Kurds living nearby have told journalists that they see the buildings as a provocation, while some admit that they welcome the job opportunities which the construction industry provides.

At the same time, some commentators have highlighted that internal migration, even in difficult circumstances, can contribute to cohesion and also bring benefits to Kurds and other marginalized groups in terms of greater life opportunities. Though studies on displaced households have highlighted the continued longing for return among many of those displaced more than two decades ago, it is likely that others will remain in their new locations. As the country attempts to move towards lasting peace, support for those wishing to return and more targeted urban strategies to encourage the development and inclusion of Kurdish communities in urban areas will be essential. ■

beat him severely before dumping him in a car park. *Le Monde* newspaper used their front page editorial to criticize the government, saying the attack was ‘the result of several years of inefficient public policy which maintains the misery of these Roma communities and allows the racism latent in French society to prosper’. The Darius case served to highlight two central problems: the precarious situation of the *banlieues* and the inhumane treatment of the Roma. Certainly there are important questions to be answered about the danger of allowing parallel societies to emerge and the lack of police control in marginalized areas of France’s cities.

## Georgia

In June, Georgia signed an association agreement with the European Union (EU), initialled at the Eastern Partnership Vilnius Summit of November 2013. The agreement, which was ratified by the Georgian parliament on 18 July, is a decisive step in the country’s reform process and includes provisions on the protection and inclusion of minorities. As part of its developing relationship with the EU, Georgia has also committed to a four-year communication and information strategy that explicitly underlines that specific efforts should be undertaken to ensure that minorities in Georgia receive information in a language that they understand. In May the government also adopted an anti-discrimination law that prohibits discrimination on religious, ethnic or other grounds, though the legislation was modified from its original version following strong resistance from the Orthodox Church, particularly over its provisions on sexual orientation.

Though Georgia contains a variety of religious minority communities, including Muslims, various non-Orthodox Christian denominations and other faith groups such as Bahá’í, with freedom of religion guaranteed in the Constitution, the majority Orthodox Church has played an increasing role in recent years in the country’s political life. Numerous human rights organizations have highlighted instances where the Orthodox Church has received preferential treatment from the state, while at the same time many minority communities have experienced discrimination. Despite its legislative framework

**Right:** A family of Syrian migrants who arrived by boat to the island of Lesbos, Greece, 2014. They now live in an apartment provided by an NGO. *Panos/Carlos Spottorno*

on anti-discrimination and the creation of a new state agency on religious affairs in 2014, increased attacks on Muslims and Jehovah’s Witnesses have been recorded across Georgia, including numerous incidents in different villages where the rights of Muslims were infringed by the local population, often with the involvement of local authorities and police officers. Furthermore, some civil society groups and religious leaders have expressed concern about the mandate of the newly established Agency of Religious Issues, fearing it might be used by the government to control religious organizations.

Despite the many positive legal developments in Georgia during the year, including the adoption of the 2014–20 National Human Rights Strategy and an action plan for its implementation, other legislation had negative implications for minorities in the country. In particular, the Law of Georgia on Stateless Persons and Refugees, adopted on 1 September, has decreased the length of visa-free stay for foreigners in Georgia from 360 days to 90 days in any 180-day period. The law also cancelled the visa-free regime with 24 countries. These new migration policies have created serious problems for foreigners who are permanent residents of Georgia and for former citizens of Georgia whose citizenship was suspended because they were granted citizenship of another country. Among those affected are ethnic Armenians living in Georgia’s southern Samtskhe-Javakheti region, since many travel to Russia every year to work as manual labourers. Before the passing of the new legislation, Armenian citizens were able to live in Georgia without any additional documents, as long as they crossed a state border once every year.

Georgia’s urban landscape has changed rapidly since its independence in 1991. The transition towards a market economy was accompanied by economic decline and increasing regional disparities due to the difficulties of moving from a rural to an urban economy. Much of the country’s urban life is concentrated in the capital,



Tbilisi, where almost half of the country's urban population is based. While Tbilisi is responsible for over 50 per cent of national production, other regions are less developed. For example, the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli – the only two of Georgia's nine regions in which minorities make up a majority of the population – have struggled to keep up with the rapid economic growth of the capital. Both remain predominantly agricultural regions.

Rural–urban disparities have reinforced existing inequalities experienced by certain minority populations. These gaps are especially evident in terms of service access: for example, only 29 per cent of the households in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 44 per cent in Kvemo Kartli have bathroom facilities. Regional disparities, poverty and unemployment have been flagged as key priorities by the government in the new Social-Economic Development Strategy for 2020, which if implemented could benefit a large proportion of Georgia's minorities.

## Greece

Under the continuing burden of recession and austerity measures imposed by the EU

to manage Greek debt, many Greeks have been impoverished by unemployment, wage limits, reduced welfare benefits and rising household costs. At the same time, Greece has also experienced a large influx of migrants and refugees due to its geographic proximity to areas of conflict and displacement in the Middle East. The Greek coastguard detained over 17,000 undocumented migrants, over half from Syria, in the first eight months of 2014 alone. Inadequacies in the Greek asylum system over the last decade have resulted in thousands of migrants trapped in detention centres, suspended in a legal limbo without the necessary documentation. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted in its December 2014 *ECRI Report on Greece* that in the centre of Athens many migrants rent and live in sub-standard accommodation, often deprived of access to public social welfare services, with an increasing number who are homeless. According to the report, NGOs are barred by law from providing housing to undocumented migrants, adding to the destitution.

As the large-scale influx has coincided with one of Greece's worst economic and social crises

for decades, attitudes towards the migrant and refugee population in Greece appear to be among the most negative in Europe. A Pew Research Center survey of seven EU countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom) in spring 2014 found that anti-immigrant sentiment was highest among respondents in Greece (86 per cent).

At its extreme, hostility towards migrants and refugees has extended to racist violence which has blighted some urban areas. According to the Greek Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) annual report for 2014, well over half of the incidents of hate crime recorded by the network in 2014 were committed against immigrants or refugees. The majority of attacks occurred in public places or on public transport, often in the centre of Athens in neighbourhoods with concentrations of immigrant and refugee residents. In the great majority of cases the victims believed they were targeted because of their ethnic identity and other characteristics marking them out as ‘foreigners’, such as skin colour and religion. Half of the attacks were reportedly carried out by groups of offenders, apparently including extremist groups. A number of the incidents were allegedly perpetrated by police officers; some occurred in police stations and detention centres. While providing a picture of the racist and xenophobic violence occurring in urban areas in Greece, these incidents are likely to represent only a fraction of racist crimes committed given that many (especially undocumented) victims are reluctant to report them.

In addition to hostility against migrants and refugees, negative attitudes prevail about other minorities in Greece. Public attitudes towards Jews in Greece appear to be among the most negative in Europe. Almost half (47 per cent) of the respondents in Greece in the 2014 Pew Research Center survey were unfavourable towards Jews. Another survey, the Anti-Defamation League’s *ADL Global 100*, also suggested that anti-Semitic attitudes were more prevalent in Greece than other European nations: 69 per cent of the survey’s respondents in Greece were judged to be harbouring anti-Semitic attitudes on the basis of their agreement with anti-Semitic tropes presented in survey

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**Case study** by *Linda Szabó*  
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## How the redevelopment of Józsefváros is pushing out Budapest’s minorities

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In recent years Budapest’s most stigmatized neighbourhood, Józsefváros, has been undergoing significant change. ‘Józsefváros is being rebuilt,’ goes the municipality’s slogan – the only question is for whom. While Józsefváros has long been one of the city’s most diverse areas, with the highest concentration of Roma and migrant populations, the local municipality’s plans for the area threaten to displace its most underprivileged groups, including poor minorities.

Józsefváros has always been attractive for newcomers and migrating traders, though, beginning with the arrival in the late 19th century of Jewish merchants and then Roma musicians, who moved here to play at local restaurants. But while Józsefváros – with the exception of the Palace Quarter – was never considered an affluent part of town, the appearance of slums in the area only became obvious in the 1960s as plans to refurbish





public housing stock were not implemented. At that time, due to the serious shortage of residential housing in Budapest, multiple families were forced to share apartments and the local council did not allocate sufficient funds for the maintenance of its buildings.

Subsequently, from the mid-1970s, a construction boom allowed the most affluent tenants to flee the overcrowded and deteriorating tenement houses. At the same time, a state-led programme which dismantled the impoverished Roma colonies on the outskirts forced many families to move into inner city neighbourhoods such as Józsefváros. By the 1980s, the area had become highly stigmatized due to its bad housing stock, the relatively high number of poor Roma and the concentration of criminal activities such as prostitution in certain neighbourhoods.

The country's reintegration into the global market economy has only worsened the situation of those living in the district. Although most apartments were quickly privatized over the 1990s, the highest number of social houses remained in District 8. The local municipality could not sell its property, either because it was not allowed to by law due to the poor housing conditions or because the tenants could not afford to buy their residences. The efficiency of social regeneration projects based on the accessibility of EU funds has been very limited so far. At the same time, more and more migrants became interested in certain disused areas following the collapse of state socialism; for instance, the underutilized land around Józsefváros railway station was occupied by Chinese and other migrant traders.

Yet despite the fact that these migrant-run businesses have provided poorer residents with lively and inexpensive retail areas, their contribution has never been recognized. On the contrary, their operation is often presented negatively in public media. Though the local municipality has not launched a directly xenophobic or racist campaign, in 2013 it decided to close down the 23-year-old Chinese market, reportedly to construct a local sports

**Left: A derelict building in Józsefváros, Budapest, 2014. *Neményi Márton***

facility, and closure took place in June 2014.

Presumably, the municipality expects further growth in the number of upwardly mobile or upper middle-class residents in the district – most of whom at present are concentrated in a part of the district that already underwent significant redevelopment in the early 2000s. This first major renewal project of the district was carried out in public–private partnership as old social housing blocks were demolished to accommodate private developments, raising property prices in the area to the highest in the district – in the process making housing for the original tenants unaffordable. A significant number of the more than 1,000 households evicted from the neighbourhood were Roma. Some of them were able to stay in the district, but others had to leave, including many who decided to take cash compensation instead of another apartment.

It is very likely that, in the coming years, other housing blocks will be demolished, and the original tenants as well as retailers catering to the current local communities will have to move. The district mayor has publicly promised to transform the area from a 'ghetto full of criminals' to a 'university town', yet it is unclear to what extent minorities and other marginalized groups will be able to share in this vision. This form of urban regeneration is supported by the national government, too, which recently designated a campus area for a newly established university in the district. The new reconstruction project, as opposed to the previous one, is being carried out mainly from public funding and will affect around 2,200 households until the end of 2017. The redevelopment includes plans to replace social housing with university buildings, again threatening the living space of Roma families concentrated in the area. Unless the local housing movement is able to successfully stand up for the rights of the tenants concerned by both the continuing public–private partnership development and the national government-led project, a number of the current inhabitants may be pushed out to the margins of Budapest or even outside the city altogether – a situation that will leave them even more invisible than before. ■



questions. However, despite the apparently high level of anti-Jewish sentiment in Greece suggested by these surveys, incidents of violence against Jews appear to be infrequent. This may be due to the small size of Greece's Jewish minority – numbering a little over 5,000 people, residing mostly in the cities of Athens, Larissa and Thessaloniki. However, cemeteries, Holocaust memorials and other sites have been targeted, with the number of incidents in 2014 reportedly exceeding the total for 2012 and 2013 together, according to the *Antisemitism Worldwide 2014* report. This included, in December, the vandalism of a Jewish cemetery in Larissa with swastikas and abusive graffiti. Notably, however, there were no personal physical attacks against Jews reported.

Conditions for Greece's Roma community, estimated to be in the region of 265,000 persons, or approximately 2.5 per cent of the population, are characterized by social exclusion and deprivation. Many Roma live in sub-standard housing with inadequate water supply and sewage facilities on the periphery of urban areas and on the edge of small towns and villages. Roma have also been subject to racist abuse and violence. In November 2014, three men were convicted of a violent racist attack on a Roma woman Paraskevi Kokoni and her nephew in the town of Etoliko, western Greece, in the previous year. The victim believed that she was targeted because she is a relative of a leader of the local Roma community. This attack did not occur in isolation, but in the context of a series of threats and attacks attributed to members and supporters of the extreme right-wing Golden Dawn party.

Despite the strain on the Greek state in managing Greece's financial and social crisis there have been some positive developments. In September 2014 a new anti-racism law was adopted by the Greek parliament which strengthened the response to racist violence and incitement. An extensive investigation of Golden Dawn was pursued across 2014. The parliamentary immunity of all Golden Dawn MPs was removed and they were charged with membership of a criminal organization, along with other criminal charges. Incremental gains are being made in improving living conditions and attacking the social exclusion of Roma

through the National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma 2012–20. Legislation in 2011 promised an overhaul of Greece's asylum system. This was delayed, in part by government austerity measures, but the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has recently noted some improvements, including reduced waiting times and better quality of interviews. Nevertheless, in January 2015, UNHCR maintained that other EU countries should not return asylum seekers to have their applications processed in Greece – a clear sign that more still needs to be done. The new government, elected in January 2015, has released many detainees from immigration detention centres and promised further reform. However, tensions persist in the areas in which undocumented migrants and refugees are concentrated. Municipal authorities, especially in Athens, have struggled to provide adequate support and housing. Some local business people and residents blame migrants for the ghettoization and deterioration of their neighbourhoods; however, this does not acknowledge the constraints faced by migrants without the necessary legal documentation.

## Latvia

While Russians comprise the largest of Latvia's minorities, amounting to over a quarter (27.2 per cent) of the population, the country includes a diverse range of smaller ethnicities as well. There are also, in a country with a population totalling 2.1 million, more than 270,000 'non-citizens': this category was introduced after Latvia's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union to designate former Soviet citizens without direct links to the pre-Soviet Latvian Republic. These people were not granted automatic Latvian citizenship; instead they became 'non-citizens' eligible for naturalization subject to conditions – including passing Latvian language tests.

The naturalization process has since been simplified through successive legal amendments, mostly to satisfy the conditions of EU membership, which was obtained in 2004. But while more than 142,000 were granted citizenship between 1995 and January 2014, applications for naturalization have since fallen. Moreover, while the children of 'non-citizens' may be registered as Latvian citizens by at least one parent – and many

parents have chosen to do so – in July 2014 there were still over 8,700 ‘non-citizen’ children, their parents having refrained from registering them. The reasons for this included: parents’ belief that citizenship should be granted automatically; insufficient knowledge of existing registration procedures; and more favourable travel conditions to some Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries for ‘non-citizens’. According to 2012 official figures, while 99.8 per cent of ethnic Latvians had Latvian citizenship, there was a much higher incidence of non-citizenship among those belonging to other ethnic groups: 34 per cent of Russians, 54.6 per cent of Belarusians and 55.6 per cent of Ukrainians.

While ‘non-citizens’ have continued to have access to rights such as social benefits, they have not been granted voting rights and access to some forms of employment, mostly in the civil service. A survey conducted in May and June by the research centre SKDS among people belonging to national minorities (Belarusians, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians and others) showed that 58 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement ‘I am proud of being Latvian’, up from 35 per cent in 2009. Yet 80 per cent of minority ‘non-citizens’ stated that they did not wish to acquire Latvian citizenship, while only 11.3 per cent planned to apply for it (the remaining 8.1 per cent were uncertain). In light of these findings, in August Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma conceded that ‘too little has been done in the field of community cohesion’, while the importance of national unity was stressed in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. Straujuma added that the government would intensify efforts to provide Latvian language training and facilitate citizenship acquisition.

Public protests, particularly with the participation of Russians/Russophones, were triggered in early 2014 by an agreement among coalition members of the former government, proposing that publicly funded minority schools incrementally switch to education in the state language. Existing legislation has provided for Latvian to be employed in no less than 60 per cent of teaching time, while the remaining time can be devoted to other (both minority and foreign) languages. Approximately a quarter of students have been receiving part of their

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**Case study** by *Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach*  
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## Remembering Warsaw’s Jewish community through heritage conservation

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Before the outbreak of the Second World War, when Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in Europe, more than 380,000 Jews lived in Warsaw. During the war, however, the Nazis annihilated the majority of the city’s Jewish population and destroyed much of their physical heritage. Under Communist rule, the surviving synagogues and other Jewish buildings deteriorated further due to neglect. Only a few monuments were protected as valuable historic sites.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first efforts to rediscover Warsaw’s forgotten heritage emerged. But it was not until February 1997, when the Law on the Relationship between the State and the Union of Jewish Religious Communities was adopted, that the long process of restituting Jewish communal heritage began. The law also provided for the establishment of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ) to reclaim and administer synagogues, cemeteries and other sites, especially outside large cities where there was no longer a Jewish population to take care of them. The same year also witnessed the revival of the Warsaw Jewish Community, the largest of the eight Jewish municipalities operating in major Polish cities and which together form the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland.

So far, the Foundation and the Communities have become the owners of only a small portion of Poland’s Jewish physical heritage. Besides the restoration, reconstruction and protection

of existing buildings, there are also efforts to commemorate pre-war Jewish communities with monuments and memorial plaques, often in cooperation with local non-Jewish residents. However, limited funding and insufficient capacity has meant that the Warsaw Jewish Community is only able to deal with one or two projects at any time.

The subject of Jewish physical heritage remains controversial, however. There is no consensus on how the reclaimed buildings should be used since the number of Jews living in Poland is very small, and they cannot afford to maintain all Jewish properties. Should the synagogues be preserved as architectural monuments due to their historical value? Should they be retained for their symbolic value to remind people of Poland's multicultural past? Should they be sold for commercial use? Or perhaps, should they serve local, mostly non-Jewish communities, who will then take care of them? There is no clear vision about this. In Warsaw, apart from an active *mikvah* located in the historical Nożyk synagogue, the building of an old *mikvah* in Praga houses a secondary school and the Polish Jewish Youth Organization. The Nożyk synagogue itself, besides its religious



function for the city's Jewish population, is a venue for cultural events, such as concerts, debates or exhibitions.

Lingering anti-Semitism continues to threaten the survival of Warsaw's Jewish heritage as well, with occasional acts of vandalism at cemeteries, synagogues or other monuments. In February 2015, for instance, an unknown group of people defaced the fence of the Okopowa Street cemetery, an old but still active cemetery managed by the Jewish Warsaw Community. The gate was spoiled with yellow paint and on the walls vandals painted in red: 'Jews for slaughter.' According to FODZ's annual reports, several such incidents take place in Poland every year, mostly consisting of anti-Semitic slogans or swastikas painted on buildings or other forms of damage inflicted on memorial plaques, graves and fences. Though the incidents are reported to the police, in most cases the perpetrators are never found.

One way to raise social awareness of Poland's minority heritage is through education, especially in a form which is attractive to younger generations. A lot of hope has been invested in the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which inaugurated its main multimedia exhibition on 28 October 2014 after years of preparation. It is hoped that the museum, with its innovative approach to commemoration, will engage visitors by linking the multi-faceted Jewish life directly to Polish history. Contemporary art, performance and new technologies are employed to enrich the experience and give visitors the opportunity to explore Jewish heritage. Instead of focusing on the Holocaust, the exhibition – developed by an international team of over 120 respected researchers, activists and curators – presents the rich history of Jewish life in Poland, based on the idea of an open-ended past. In doing so, it emphasizes the continuity of Jewish heritage throughout Poland's history, testifying not only to the immeasurable loss Warsaw has suffered but also the continued enrichment Jewish culture brings to the city today. ■

**Left: Inside the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Magdalena Roeseler**

education in a minority language, mostly Russian. Plans for near-monolingual education were ultimately set aside.

Roma remain one of the most marginalized groups in Latvia and still suffer disproportionately from discrimination in areas such as employment and education, as well as being victims of racist attacks. In December 2014 the ECRI issued conclusions on the implementation of its 2011 recommendations to improve the integration of Roma in schools. Roma children have been at times placed in separated schools or classes, with added problems relating to poor school attendance and low educational achievements. Despite efforts to facilitate their integration in the education system, the percentage of Roma children who attended special needs schools increased from 10.6 per cent in 2011 to 16.1 per cent in the academic year 2013/14.

In 2014 Latvia's levels of urbanization were just below 70 per cent and predicted to slightly increase in the coming decades, although unemployment and economic austerity have contributed to emigration, which is particularly felt in large cities. Latvian cities such as Riga and Dagavpils often have a high proportion of Russian speakers. The Russophone minority is represented in Latvian municipal organs, particularly in Riga, where the parties supported by Russian speakers have generally performed well in local elections. Since 2009 the mayor of Riga has been an ethnic Russian, Nils Ušakovs.

The majority of Latvia's Roma are also city dwellers, residing in the cities of Riga, Jelgava and Ventspils. Latvia's Roma became largely settled in the post-war period, while post-independence they have moved from rural to urban areas, and from smaller to larger towns, given the disappearance of collective farms. Roma often live in overcrowded housing and are affected by social exclusion. Research conducted in various Latvian cities and towns has revealed a high level of intolerance towards a range of ethnic groups, particularly Roma.

At the same time, urban areas in some instances provide opportunities to advance minority rights. For example, public discussions and training seminars have been held in various cities of Latvia for teaching assistants of Roma ethnicity with a view to facilitating the

integration of Roma children. Moreover, in Riga, compared to other parts of the country, there seems to be better majority–minority dialogue on the issue of education and linguistic policies, while nearly half of schools provide bilingual education.

## Russia

According to the 2010 census, nearly 20 per cent of the Russian Federation's population identify themselves as belonging to ethnic groups other than the Russian majority and there are more than 170 peoples recognized in the country, including indigenous peoples. Diversity is entrenched in the very structure of the Federation, with 21 ethnic republics in which local languages are recognized as official alongside Russian. Despite this, under President Vladimir Putin an emphasis has been placed – in official discourse, the education system and the media – on national unity and Russian patriotism, a trend that continued during 2014. Throughout the year, authorities continued to repress civil society organizations, including those working on minority and indigenous peoples' rights, through the application of the controversial 2012 'Foreign Agents' law that requires NGOs in receipt of foreign funding and engaged in 'political activities' to register as an 'organization performing the functions of a foreign agent'. Among others, the Anti-Discrimination Centre (ADC) Memorial, which had campaigned against discrimination against Roma and migrants, closed its office in St Petersburg in April 2014 following a court ruling requiring it to register as a 'foreign agent'.

In March, following civil unrest and protests in Ukraine, Russia annexed Crimea after a referendum that was condemned by international observers as neither free nor fair. Unsurprisingly, this development and continued fighting with pro-Russian armed separatists in eastern Ukraine has had a profound impact on Russian society. Among its consequences has been the acute politicization of issues concerning Ukraine, and at times direct harassment of Ukrainians residing in Russia. For example, in April 2014, a swastika was painted on the door of the flat belonging to a Ukrainian residing in Vologda, while flyers were stuffed in the mailboxes of other residents in the

**Below:** A young Uzbek migrant sells SIM cards outside a metro station after leaving his family in Andijan, Uzbekistan to find work in Moscow.  
*Zachary John Krahmer*

same building ‘informing’ them, through the use of derogatory terms, that a Ukrainian lived there. While such direct harassment has been uncommon, Ukrainians have reportedly been affected by a general atmosphere of intimidation, particularly in light of the state media’s biased coverage of events, routinely linking Ukrainian nationalists to fascism. At the same time,

developments in Ukraine have overshadowed the actions of ultra-nationalists, resulting in their public events, such as anti-immigration rallies, gaining less media attention and public support than in previous years.

The conditions of migrant workers have continued to deteriorate. Migration regulations are continuously modified and are becoming increasingly restrictive. In addition to bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining work and residence permits, since 2013 law enforcement officials have used particularly repressive means to crack down on illegal immigration. Measures





have included police raids and the rounding up of people on the basis of their 'non-Slavic appearance'. For example, between 23 October and 2 November 2014 the Moscow authorities implemented 'Operation Migrant 2014', reportedly arresting 7,000 migrants in the first four days, in some instances resorting to violence; some of those arrested had administrative or criminal charges brought against them. A similar operation took place in St Petersburg in September and October 2014. The absence of registration or even identity documents has made migrants – and some particularly disadvantaged



minorities such as Roma – vulnerable to police abuse, leading to illegal searches, arbitrary detention and extortion of bribes. Ultra-nationalist groups have carried out their own attacks on migrants, in a form of vigilantism seeking to combat crimes allegedly perpetrated by ethnic minorities and illegal immigration. The groups most at risk of ethnically motivated violence have been people of 'non-Slavic appearance', particularly people from the North Caucasus (Russia's southern republics), the South Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as Roma. The SOVA Centre's preliminary data for 2014 indicate that 19 people were killed and 103 injured in Russia as a result of hate crime; as in previous years, most victims were from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Instances of hate crime can go unreported. For example, the Moscow Helsinki Group in 2014 documented cases of Meskhetian Turks in the south of Russia who had been victims of ethnically motivated attacks, and who did not report these instances to the police – due to fear of reprisals and distrust of law enforcement officials themselves. Meskhetian Turks are a minority who have been subjected to widespread harassment and discrimination, and hundreds of whom are still reportedly stateless.

Indigenous peoples, besides enduring higher unemployment rates, poorer standards of living and lower life expectancy, face limited opportunities for political participation. In September, representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations were prevented from leaving Russia to attend the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in New York. Various means were used to this end, including obstructing their journey to the airport (e.g. Valentina Sovkina, head of the Saami parliament of Kola Peninsula), or the confiscation of passports at Sheremetyevo airport before their flight (e.g. Rodion Sulyandziga, director of the Centre for Support of Indigenous Peoples of the North).

As in previous years, 2014 saw poor implementation of the legal rights of indigenous peoples, which include their free access to lands in 'territories of traditional nature use' (TTNUs). These are protected territories, which require impact assessments before the exploitation of their natural resources (oil, gas and metals) or



**Above:** A Roma woman in Ukraine, June 2014.  
*Steve Evans*

construction projects (such as pipelines and dams) can take place. Though Russian law provides that TTNUs are to be established at the federal, regional and local levels – and some TTNUs have been designated at the regional level (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous *okrug* and Khabarovsk *krai*) – the federal authorities have continued to refrain from designating TTNUs at the federal level. Moreover, in December 2013 the definition of TTNU changed from ‘specially protected natural territories’ to ‘specially protected territories’. This lowers the legal status of such territories and eliminates requirements to conduct environmental impact assessments before commercial projects are implemented.

Two-thirds of the approximately 250,000 persons belonging to indigenous communities do not reside in urban areas: they are scattered around two-thirds of Russia’s territory, often in regions with limited access to public transport or means of communication. As a result, they do not benefit from the essential infrastructure and political institutions available in urban areas, frequently leading to their social and political marginalization. Their children often have no choice but to study in special boarding schools which, in addition to separating children from

their parents, tend to have lower educational standards than regular schools. This can make the preservation of their languages, many of which are on the verge of extinction, logistically difficult: the remoteness of these locations, and the vast distances between speakers of these languages, complicate the organization of own-language tuition.

Levels of urbanization in Russia are high: nearly three-quarters of its population live in urban areas. Small villages have continued to be depopulated as their inhabitants – including those belonging to minorities – have left rural areas for cities to seek employment opportunities. This trend leads to the reduction in the number of locations where people belonging to the same minority live in substantial numbers, reinforcing a tendency among new generations growing up in urban areas that are effectively monolingual. Moreover, ongoing plans for the ‘optimization’ of the education system have led to the closure of small village schools, which are more likely than city schools to teach minority languages, or to provide instruction through the medium of these languages.

While access to services is generally better in cities than in rural areas, some of those belonging to minorities residing in urban centres continue to experience extremely poor living

conditions. This is particularly the case with Roma settlements and the typically overcrowded areas where migrant workers reside. Both groups have remained affected by sub-standard living conditions due to poverty and discrimination. Announcements of housing for rent are often accompanied by statements ‘only for Russians’ or ‘only for Slavs’, resulting in darker-skinned people being penalized. Roma have at times been subjected to expulsion from their settlements and the destruction of their houses, without alternative accommodation being provided. These groups have further been the targets of ‘special operations’ carried out by law enforcement officials, nominally for document checks but often leading to ill-treatment.

Cities have also been the location of the majority of violent attacks against minorities: according to the SOVA Centre, in 2014 most such incidents occurred in Moscow and St Petersburg. On 15 May, hundreds of football fans in Moscow chanted racial abuse and nationalist slogans as they marched to a migrants’ dormitory, before being stopped through the intervention of the riot police. Raids took place on commuter and underground trains throughout the year, perpetrated by right-wing extremists. In some instances those who tried to defend ‘non-Slavs’ were themselves physically attacked.

## Ukraine

Demonstrations in late 2013 against the government of Viktor Fedorovych Yanukovych, in response to his decision to abandon a planned agreement with the EU, intensified in early 2014 when hundreds were killed or injured in violent clashes between protesters and authorities before Yanukovych was removed from office on 21 February. Shortly afterwards, as an interim government was formed in Kiev, pro-Russian militias seized control of the Crimean parliament building with the stated intention of declaring independence from Ukraine. Following a controversial referendum on 16 March that was condemned by international observers as neither free nor fair, Crimea was formally annexed by Russia – a situation enforced by the growing presence of Russian troops.

From April, Russia had gained control over much of the region and began establishing state

institutions, while state buildings were then seized by armed rebels in the provinces of Donetsk and Luganska in eastern Ukraine. In response, the Ukrainian government deployed soldiers to these areas, leading to direct conflict with separatist forces in June that, despite multiple attempts to reach a ceasefire, continued throughout 2014 and into 2015. As of April 2015, parts of Luganska and Donetsk remain under separatist control. According to UN estimates, the conflict had led to around 6,000 people killed and another 15,000 injured between April 2014 and the end of February 2015. The conflict also triggered a wave of internal displacement amid increasing insecurity, with hundreds of thousands of civilians – including many from ethnic or religious minorities – affected.

Though the uprising against the Yanukovych government was not motivated primarily by ethnic concerns, the subsequent annexation of Crimea and the separatist seizure of territory in eastern Ukraine with suspected Russian involvement has deepened existing political divisions in the country that correlate with ethnicity. Troublingly, one of the first acts of the interim government in February 2014 was the voting in of a controversial amendment to 2012 legislation on minority languages, which recognized Russian as a second official language in some areas of Ukraine. Its annulment could have deepened the tensions between Russian speakers and other linguistic minorities in the country. However, the move provoked criticism from rights activists and the recently appointed president of the interim government, Aleksandr Turchinov, subsequently announced that it would not be implemented.

Another legislative development related to minority and indigenous peoples’ rights, this one positive, was the amendment of Ukraine’s existing anti-discrimination laws in May. The revisions added new definitions, strengthened protections for victims and expanded the powers of the Ukraine’s Commissioner for Human Rights. However, human rights defenders have noted significant problems with implementation and stressed the importance of practical support, such as free legal assistance for victims and training for law enforcement agencies, to reduce hate crimes and other forms of discrimination.

The need for adequate protection is especially acute for Ukraine's growing population of IDPs, many of them from minority or indigenous communities. Until recently a migration hub due to its location between the EU and Russia, Ukraine now faces mass internal displacement as a result of the conflict. As of April 2015, the country had close to 1.3 million IDPs concentrated largely in the eastern provinces. Women and children constitute the majority of IDPs as men tend to stay home, either for work-related reasons or in an attempt to protect family property. One of the most pressing issues is the integration of IDPs in new communities, particularly for minorities, who often face disproportionate challenges during displacement. Very few have been able to find jobs since their displacement, with most relying on savings, family assistance or limited social benefits to survive. Many cannot even search for jobs as they have to take care of small children, pensioners or disabled persons.

Housing is another area where IDPs have experienced difficulties. As the state did not have emergency infrastructure in place to accommodate displaced civilians from the conflict zone, resettlement has been ad hoc and varied according to the policies of the regional or local authorities. As a result, a large proportion have been housed in dilapidated sanatoriums, dormitories, summer camps and other forms of sub-standard shelter. These facilities are often located in isolated locations outside urban areas, which complicates the search for employment and creates further obstacles for IDPs attempting to integrate into new communities. At present, one of the best responses to the crisis has come from authorities in Khersonska province, next to Crimea, where 18,000 free land plots were granted to Crimean Tatars for resettlement. By contrast, Roma – already one of the most discriminated against groups in the country before the conflict began – have reported experiencing particular difficulties in accessing housing from local authorities due to discrimination.

Displaced Roma from eastern Ukraine face additional hurdles as, according to NGOs working with community members, more than half of them have never had birth or identity documentation, meaning they cannot be registered as IDPs or gain access to social

welfare. Furthermore, from the first stages of the conflict, ethnically motivated violence against the community appears to have escalated. In April 2014, a joint statement by the European Roma Rights Centre and other rights organizations highlighted the rising levels of violence directed against Roma. This included, among other incidents, an attack on a Roma community earlier in the month in Sloviansk, with residents beaten and their homes looted. Following the attack, Roma residents fled the city. At the end of April, a Roma family's house in Cherkassy was set on fire after weeks of intimidation from locals, with the police reportedly failing to intervene to protect the victims.

The conflict also had a negative impact on the lives of religious minorities. In Donbas, the active efforts of Protestant pastors to provide shelter to IDPs, distribute humanitarian assistance and take civilians out of the zone of conflict led to frequent intimidation, theft and violence from separatists. After parts of eastern Ukraine fell under separatist control, many churches and religious facilities, particularly those belonging to evangelical Christian sects, were expropriated and community members forced to leave their possessions.

Much of the conflict has been concentrated in urban areas such as Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as other smaller cities in the eastern conflict zones, with rising casualties among civilians and widespread damage to urban infrastructure. According to Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) research, the vast majority of IDPs have come from urban or semi-urban areas. Those minorities still living in separatist-held areas face new challenges in an increasingly nationalistic climate. In Donetsk, for instance, where until recently the population included a diverse mix of Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Tatars, Turks and foreign students, there have been accounts of increased intolerance and hate speech. African nationals, who even before the conflict faced frequent discrimination, have reportedly been particularly exposed to verbal abuse. Religious minorities, too, have been exposed to threats and intimidation, particularly people following non-Russian Orthodox forms of Christianity, with places of worship and other buildings seized from their communities by

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**Case study** by *Nataliya Novakova*  
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# Deteriorating rights for Crimean Tatars under Russian rule

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At the beginning of 2014, following the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the government of Ukraine lost control over the peninsula. The subsequent transition to the legislation of the Russian Federation and the continued presence of unregulated paramilitary groups, known as *samooborona*, posed considerable threats to the local population, particularly for ethnic and religious minorities.

The concerns were especially acute among many of Crimea's indigenous Tatar population, given their history of repression under Soviet rule. This culminated in their eventual mass deportation by Stalin to Siberia in 1944. Though many have returned to Crimea following the collapse of communism, the community continued to struggle with unemployment, lack of access to basic services and ongoing barriers to the restoration of their former lands. Ukraine itself never resolved the issue of providing land or other housing opportunities to returnees. The temporary solution was so-called 'fields of protest' – places where illegal settlements of Tatars were built. The authorities did not legalize the settlements, but also did not prevent them from being set up.

However, although following the annexation the Russian government initially wooed the Tatar population with promises to address housing and other pressing concerns, since then the behaviour of the authorities towards the community has become increasingly draconian. On 15 November, for instance, around 60 people were arrested *en masse* in a market in Simferopol and taken to the police station to be questioned about their migration status. Several days later, a crackdown in another of the city's markets led to the detention of around 15 people of 'non-Slavic' appearance, all of whom were reportedly Crimean Tatars.

Political bodies and civil society organizations representing Tatars also face constant intimidation, with two leading Tatar representatives, Mustafa Dzhemylov and Refat Chubarov, denied re-entry to Crimea in the wake of the annexation. Meanwhile members of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, an executive committee that has served as a representative body to the Ukrainian government and international community, has reported increased harassment in the form of constant checks and ad hoc requests to provide immediate reports on their activities to authorities. Since the organization was forced to register in the Russian Federation as an ordinary non-profit organization, its status as an elected representative body of the Crimean Tatars no longer applies.

There have also been a number of cases of forced disappearances of Crimean Tatar activists, with at least eight documented cases between March and early December. Little progress has taken place in the investigation of these incidents. Several Tatar activists have also been brutally killed, and others detained, tortured or threatened, including many who have advocated on issues such as land rights for their community. This is part of a general crackdown on freedom of expression that has particularly affected minorities, as evidenced by the attack on Nadir Bekirov, a Crimean Tatar activist, in September ahead of his planned attendance at the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in New York, leaving him unable to travel to the event. Tatar media has also been targeted, with the forced closure of ATR, Crimea's only Tatar television channel, after it was repeatedly refused registration as a Russian channel by regulators in Moscow.

Tatars, most of whom are Muslim, have also found themselves affected by a climate of increasing nationalism and religious chauvinism in Crimea. Muslim communities have been attacked, religious literature burned and members of the remaining Tatar population have been pressured to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship. Other communities, such as members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, have also faced persecution. In this climate, the possibility of Crimea's Tatars finally achieving a resolution to decades of injustice seems slimmer than ever. ■





LIBYA

LEBANON

SYRIA

ISRAEL/OT/  
Palestinian Authority

EGYPT

JORDAN

IRAQ

KUWAIT

IRAN

SAUDI ARABIA

BAHRAIN

QATAR

U.A.E.

YEMEN

OMAN

ARABIAN  
SEA

# Middle East and North Africa

Sarah El Ashmawy, Tom Palmer,  
Miriam Puttick and Derek Verbakel

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region experienced one of its bloodiest years in 2014, with ongoing fighting in Syria between President Bashar al-Assad's army, opposition forces and the increasingly powerful presence of the extremist group *Da'ash*, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). In neighbouring Iraq, ISIS launched a summer offensive in the north of the country which saw their forces overrun large swathes of territory. This area has long been home to many minority communities, including Chaldo-Assyrians, Shabak, Turkmen and Yezidis, who were actively targeted as ISIS captured Mosul, Tal Afar and other major cities, as well as numerous towns and villages with large minority populations. Thousands were killed or abducted, while hundreds of thousands of people were displaced. In addition, ISIS has spread fear across the region with a number of high-profile incidents in other countries, such as the suicide bomb explosion at a Beirut hotel in June 2014,

the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts in Libya in February 2015 and an attack by armed gunmen in central Tunis in March 2015.

Though some of these attacks may have been intended to exaggerate the actual presence of ISIS in these countries, it is also the case that even religious and ethnic minorities in relatively stable countries in the region routinely experience discrimination, intimidation and violence. In many cases these incidents occur in urban areas where diverse populations have coexisted for centuries. However, ongoing violence, particularly in Iraq and Syria, is increasingly leading to segregation and homogenization in cities. ISIS, besides displacing minority communities in the areas under its control, has also systematically destroyed churches, shrines and non-Sunni mosques. As a result, the historical legacy of centuries of coexistence is being erased. Yet urban centres such as Cairo, despite significant challenges, still offer minorities more opportunities to engage in activism, enjoy personal freedoms



and interact with members of other communities. Ensuring the security and dignity of minorities in urban areas is therefore essential to achieving long-term stability across the region.

## Egypt

The year 2014 began with a referendum in January on a new Constitution that prohibits political parties based on religion, with 98 per cent of participants voting in approval, though opposition groups complained of intimidation and partisan media coverage. For the country's most vulnerable social groups, however, the drafting process at least provided an opportunity to promote a more inclusive environment for Egypt's diverse religious and ethnic population. In the preceding months, representatives of long-marginalized communities such as Amazigh and Nubians were able to meet with members of the drafting committee to advocate for various amendments to the text.

The approved version was generally regarded as an improvement on the 2012 Constitution, passed under former President Mohamed Morsi and widely criticized by rights groups for its lack of protections for many minorities. Among other achievements, the 'right to return' of Egyptian Nubians whose lands were flooded during the government-led construction of the Aswan dam in the 1960s, without prior consultation or consent, was recognized for the first time. Furthermore, the 2014 Constitution finally recognized 'incitement to hatred' as a crime, tasking the future legislative body with the creation of a special commission to implement the provision. This is a significant milestone for Egypt's minorities, as in recent years hate speech has been linked with outbreaks of violence against Bahá'í, Copts and Shi'a.

However, the Constitution has also been criticized for perpetuating many of the shortcomings of its predecessor. While Article 64 on religious freedom has been strengthened, its provision on religious practice and places of

worship still refers specifically to the 'Abrahamic' religions – a term that includes Christianity, Islam and Judaism, but potentially excludes Bahá'í and other faiths that are discriminated against. More generally, there is continued scepticism about the government's willingness and ability to tackle the broader context of discrimination towards minorities in the country. Despite some positive signs during the year – culminating in President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's attendance of a Coptic Christmas mass in January 2015, an unprecedented gesture by an Egyptian head of state – many challenges remain. This is particularly the case for Copts and other religious minorities in a country where Islam is still elevated as the state religion and Sharia principles form the main source of legislation.

For example, the fraught issue of regulations on church construction, despite apparently receiving legal approval through the new Constitution – Article 64 stipulates 'the freedom of practising religious rituals and establishing worship places for the followers of Abrahamic religions' – has not yet been resolved. Though steps were taken later in the year to address the existing restrictions on church building, with the Coptic Church and other Christian organizations drafting a proposed law, at the end of the year the restrictions remained in place. The regulations, rooted in Ottoman law, have for decades been used to obstruct the development or renovation of Christian places of worship, and have contributed to the wave of attacks in recent years against Coptic buildings. Though authorities have reportedly been more accommodating in approving church construction since Sisi took power, Coptic communities continue to be targeted by militant groups. In January 2015, for example, two policemen were killed outside a church in Minya, followed by further attacks three months later in Alexandria and Cairo.

Another source of deep concern is the Sisi government's ongoing human rights abuses and repression of civil freedoms. Shortly after staging a coup against Morsi in June 2013, the military were responsible for the killing of more than 1,000 protesters. This served to deepen divisions within the country which Sisi, since securing democratic election in May

*Left: A Yezidi girl and her family at a refugee camp in north eastern Syria. Some of the 12,000 Yezidis at the camp walked up to 60km in searing heat to flee Iraq. Rachel Unkovic/ International Rescue Committee*

**Below:** Muslim men stand with a Coptic Christian man holding a lit candle in tribute to the 21 Egyptians beheaded in Libya in February 2015. *REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman*

2014, has failed to resolve. In particular, the government's crackdown on supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, involving arbitrary arrests, indefinite detention and killings, has alienated a significant portion of the population and, by extension, may have put Copts and other religious minorities at increasing risk of attack. While minorities have long been targeted by militants, the mass execution of 21 Coptic Egyptians in neighbouring Libya in February 2015 by ISIS was a painful reminder of the community's continued vulnerability. Media investigations revealed that many of the victims came from Upper Egypt villages and had left their homes to financially support their families. The government was criticized by some activists

for its failure to ensure their protection.

Whether they are in search of economic opportunities or displaced due to violence or disruptive development such as the Aswan dam, many members of Egypt's minorities have relocated to towns and cities within Egypt as well. Urban development is therefore a key area of concern for these communities, reflected in the inclusion of Article 235 in the 2014 Constitution, which stipulates that 'the state shall guarantee setting and implementing a plan for the comprehensive economic and urban development of border and underprivileged areas, including Upper Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula, Matrouh and Nubia'. It is hoped that this text will lead to support for Nubians who wish to return to their area of origin.

Cairo is not only Egypt's capital, but also the largest megacity in the MENA region. Rapid and largely unmanaged urban growth has led to large swathes of informal settlements across the





city, with many sheltering in makeshift housing and unsanitary living conditions. These issues are especially pronounced, however, for the city's '*Zabbalin*' – the Arabic word for garbage collectors – a large community whose livelihood is based on the collection and recycling of solid waste. Operating in the informal sector, the majority are Coptic and originally migrated from Upper Egypt with their families in search of a source of income. Though their activities provided Cairo with a highly efficient system of waste collection, in 2004 the community was dealt a blow when authorities contracted their work out to corporations. While in practice they continued to earn a living informally from this activity, their income was greatly reduced. However, authorities have now officially reinstated the involvement of the community in waste collection and, despite continued discrimination, the community has developed strong solidarity networks to support each other.

## Iraq

The spread of armed conflict during 2014, propelled by the rise of ISIS, has taken an enormous toll on the civilian population. Over the course of the year, over 17,000 civilians were killed and more than 2 million displaced, with minorities disproportionately affected. After ISIS took control of the Ninewa plains, traditionally home to many of Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious minority groups, militants carried out a brutal campaign of executions, abductions and expulsions. Entire minority communities, including Armenian Christians, Chaldo-Assyrians, Sabean Mandaeans, Shabak, Turkmen and Yezidis, have been uprooted from areas where they have been living in some cases for thousands of years. Minority women have been the targets of particularly horrific forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including kidnapping, rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery and trafficking.

The spread of the conflict over the course of the year assumed increasingly urban dimensions as ISIS took control of major cities previously thought to be firmly under the control of the Iraqi government. In January, ISIS seized Fallujah and Ramadi in Al-Anbar governorate before moving into Mosul in Ninewa governorate in June as the Iraqi Security Forces collapsed.

As the country's second largest city, Mosul was previously home to a wide array of minority groups. Hundreds of Christian families and other minorities joined the exodus of civilians leaving Mosul, with the UN estimating that 500,000 people fled in the first week following the entry of ISIS into the city. The remaining Christian families received an ultimatum to either convert to Islam, pay *jizya* (a tribute levied on non-Muslims) or be killed. In June ISIS also took control of Tikrit and then Tal Afar, causing the displacement of approximately 200,000 Turkmen. Further massacres of civilians in Shi'a Turkmen and Shabak villages took place as ISIS's advance continued, with hundreds also taken captive and towns such as the Turkmen-majority town of Amerli besieged. ISIS also took control of many Assyrian areas in the Ninewa plains in early August, forcing thousands more to flee for their lives, leaving behind everything they owned.

Among the worst affected by this advance are Iraq's Yezidis. In the beginning of August ISIS reached Sinjar, home to a large portion of the community. The Kurdish *peshmerga* forces, who had been protecting the area, withdrew without warning, leaving the local population defenceless. An estimated 200,000 Yezidi civilians fled for their lives, with at least 50,000 heading to Sinjar mountain, where they were trapped in the scorching summer heat for days without food or water. Those unable to escape or who attempted to defend their villages from ISIS fighters were subsequently murdered or abducted, with large-scale massacres of Yezidi men and boys in the villages of Qiniyeh, Kocho and Jdali. Meanwhile, thousands of Yezidi women and girls were abducted for the purpose of forced marriage or sexual slavery. Large numbers of women were subsequently transported to Syria to be sold or forcibly married to ISIS fighters. As of the end of 2014, only about 300 had managed to escape.

ISIS has imposed a new order in urban areas under its control, marked by the imposition of strict interpretations of religious law, the silencing of all forms of opposition and the destruction of any traces of minority culture and heritage. In Mosul, ISIS issued orders mandating women to wear the veil and instructing them not to leave the house unless accompanied by a man. Residents of the city have been tried in

**Below:** A Yezidi woman hauls water containers toward a Yezidi refugee camp in the Sinjar mountains, Iraq, March 2015.  
*Panos/Noriko Hayashi.*

self-styled Sharia courts for violating or opposing the group's ideology, with many sentenced to public executions and other punishments. ISIS also expropriated houses belonging to Christians and other minorities before looting them of their contents.

In addition, militants have destroyed or defaced sites of enormous religious, cultural and historical value, including several churches and monuments in Mosul, the Assyrian Green Church in Tikrit, the oldest and largest library in Tel Afar and countless mosques, shrines and tombs of religious importance to Shabak, Turkmen and Yezidis. Evidence of the region's historic diversity, reflected in the wealth of churches, mosques and other buildings in its urban areas, has been systematically eradicated

in a process described by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, as a campaign of 'cultural cleansing'.

Most Iraqis displaced by the recent wave of violence are currently living in desperate conditions. The majority have fled to urban centres in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, where around 930,000 IDPs, or 47 per cent of Iraq's total IDP population, were based by late 2014. While a few have been able to find accommodation with friends and relatives or are using their savings to rent apartments, the majority are living in overcrowded camps, unfinished building structures, churches, malls, schools and other public buildings. The influx of IDPs raises difficult dilemmas related to informal and illegal housing occupancy in Kurdish cities. It also risks creating future conflicts over lands and properties that IDPs were forced to leave behind, in some cases exacerbating unresolved land claims dating back to the Ba'athist era.

Adapting to life in displacement in cities or



camps in the Kurdish region has been particularly difficult for minorities. In addition to lacking all the basic necessities of life, including food, drinking water, clothing, medicines and hygienic products, many are suffering from the effects of severe trauma and have little access to support services such as psychosocial counselling to help them to deal with experiences such as sexual violence. The prospect of accessing employment and public services is bleak for many IDPs, due to high competition, language barriers and discrimination by Kurdish authorities against minorities. IDP women are also especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, assault and other forms of exploitation.

Although the latest crisis has greatly compounded the suffering of Iraq's minorities, the struggle for recognition and access to basic rights in the urban context is not new. In the context of spiralling sectarian violence in the years following the US-led invasion, Iraq's urban centres have long been unsafe for minorities. Formerly mixed neighbourhoods in major cities such as Baghdad have become segregated along sectarian lines, leaving minorities especially vulnerable to targeted violence. Faced with the government's unwillingness to protect minorities or prosecute those responsible for attacks against them, many minorities have left and resettled elsewhere, especially in the Ninewa plains. However, living in minority areas has meant facing the reality of neglect in public service provision from the Iraqi government. In the past, the government has allocated the Ninewa governorate less than its legally required share of the federal budget, and many towns lack basic public services. In the southern and central regions of Iraq, areas inhabited by black and Roma minorities are marked by deplorable living conditions, including lack of suitable housing and inadequate access to drinking water or sanitation.

The long-term process of marginalization of Iraq's minorities, compounded by recent events, has opened up the possibility that the existence of these historical communities in Iraq could be coming to an end. The latest crisis has led many to abandon hope of a safe return to their homes and focus instead on restarting their lives elsewhere. However, given the deep roots of minorities in Iraq and their centrality to the

country's history and culture, many minority leaders emphasize the importance of establishing safe areas allowing minorities to return to their lands, with reconciliation measures to enable reintegration with other faiths and ethnic backgrounds.

## Israel/Palestine

For the marginalized and besieged communities of Israel and the State of Palestine, 2014 was the most deadly year in recent history. Over a seven-week period in July and August, Israel's aerial and ground assault against militant groups in the occupied and blockaded Gaza Strip, known as Operation Protective Edge, resulted in the deaths of at least 1,486 Palestinian civilians, including 513 children, and the displacement during the hostilities of around 500,000 people. This was the latest episode in a series of violent escalations in recent years, set against a backdrop defined by unstable progress towards the reconciliation of the two main Palestinian factions, another failed round of US-convened peace talks and unprecedented Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The unstable political situation led to rising tensions in the West Bank at the start of the summer, triggered in part by the abduction of three Israeli teenagers who, it later transpired, had been murdered by two members of Hamas. In the wake of their disappearance, Israeli military shot and killed five Palestinians, and detained at least 150 more during raids on Palestinian towns and villages in search of the missing boys – actions condemned by Human Rights Watch (HRW) as amounting to 'collective punishment' of the Palestinian population.

Incitement to violence and racist language on social media directed at the Arab minority in Israel also rose dramatically during Operation Protective Edge, as did incidents of abusive graffiti and attacks on private property. Arabs were also harassed and physically attacked by ultra-nationalist gangs during demonstrations against Operation Protective Edge. The hostile atmosphere was aggravated by provocative statements from public figures and by attempts to pass legislation undermining the rights of the Arab minority. This was exemplified by the endorsement of the so-called 'nation-state

bill' by a majority vote in the Israeli cabinet in November. If enacted, the bill will limit collective rights to Jewish citizens of the country and could pave the way for other discriminatory policies against non-Jewish populations.

Israeli civilians were also attacked by militants on a number of occasions during the year. Besides the abduction of the three Israeli teenagers, there were several other incidents, including two in which Palestinian drivers targeted Israeli pedestrians at Jerusalem light rail stations located in Palestinian neighbourhoods. The series of attacks against Israeli civilians culminated in an armed assault in November by two Palestinians on a West Jerusalem synagogue, killing five civilians and injuring six others. Israeli authorities responded by conducting large-scale arrests, including hundreds of children, and reinstating their policy of demolishing the homes of the families of the Palestinians involved. This was again condemned by HRW as tantamount to collective punishment and a policy liable to stoke the cycle of violence.

The Israeli army was also criticized for its excessive use of force in response to demonstrations by Palestinians throughout the year. This included, in December, the death of Ziad Abu Ein, a senior minister in the Palestinian Authority, following an assault by an Israeli soldier during a peaceful protest against illegal Israeli settlements. On the same day, during protests against Abu Ein's killing, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy was seriously wounded in Jalazone Refugee Camp by a gunshot to the head fired by Israeli security personnel. The UN reported that a total of 56 Palestinians had been killed during incidents with Israel's security forces in the West Bank during 2014, double the number for 2013, and 5,868 injured – the highest annual figure since records began in 2005. Almost half of these injuries were recorded in Jerusalem, where tensions were stoked by the murder of a 16-year-old Palestinian by Israeli settlers in retaliation for the murder of the three Israeli teenagers. Israel's suppression of Palestinian protests and decision to limit access for Muslims to the city's holy sites led to an increased number of violent clashes between Palestinian youth and the Israeli military.

House demolitions in general also increased to unprecedented levels in 2014, with more than

**Right:** Bedouin children play on a rooftop in the 'unrecognized' village of Um Al-Hiram in southern Israel's Negev desert, October 2014. *REUTERS/Finbarr O'Reilly*

1,200 people displaced in the West Bank, the highest figure recorded by the UN since it began tracking incidents in 2008. A large number of these concern buildings and shelters erected by Palestinian communities in land assigned under the 1993 Oslo Accords as Area C, where Israel has control over law enforcement, planning and construction. Area C makes up over 60 per cent of the West Bank, with the remainder divided and designated either as Area A or Area B, which nominally fall under full and partial Palestinian administration respectively. The 300,000 Palestinian residents of Area C are especially vulnerable to displacement due to discriminatory planning policies and the threat of violence from groups of religious and nationalist extremists living in neighbouring Israeli settlements. Large swathes of Area C have been designated as nature reserves or closed military areas, and are therefore off-limits for Palestinian construction. Additionally, over 6,000 Palestinians live in 38 communities located within Israeli-designated 'firing zones' allocated for military training.

While only 1 per cent of Area C is slated for Palestinian development, Israeli settlements continue to expand in violation of international law. There are currently 340,000 Israelis living in these illegal settlements in Area C and that number is set to rise. The Israeli NGO PeaceNow has reported that during the peace talks that spanned August 2013 to March 2014 the Israeli government promoted plans and tenders for at least 13,851 housing units in the settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – a significant increase on the same period from the previous year. Settlement growth comes at the expense of living standards for Palestinians throughout the West Bank, and communities in Area C are particularly vulnerable to the neglectful provision of public services and infrastructure, specifically electricity, water and sewerage. According to the UN, more than 70 per cent of these communities are not connected to the water network and depend on tankered water, at significantly greater expense.



Daily water consumption in some areas is as little as 20 litres per capita, just a fifth of the World Health Organization's recommended minimum.

At even greater risk of displacement due to Israel's settlement expansion policies are the Bedouin communities of the West Bank. There are around 7,000 Palestinian Bedouins and herders, some 60 per cent of them children, living in 46 small residential areas in Area C. Over 3,600 have been displaced since 2008. In September, Israel published plans to move six communities from the vicinities of Jericho, Ramallah and Jerusalem. Over a dozen others are also under threat of displacement and have endured months of eviction orders, as well as the destruction of their homes and livelihood

structures. The designated 'relocation' sites include three new townships to be developed in Area C. As there is limited grazing land at the proposed sites, the resettlement will likely threaten the traditional livelihoods and culture. These communities have been specifically targeted as they are in an area designated for the expansion of Israeli settlements as part of the so-called E1 Plan. This controversial proposal, which has been widely condemned by the UN and rights groups for violating international humanitarian law, would see the construction of thousands of residential and commercial units linking settlements in East Jerusalem to the large Ma'ale Adumim settlement, creating a bloc spanning much of the central West Bank.



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**Case study** by *Tom Palmer*  
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# Life in a divided city – one Palestinian community under threat in East Jerusalem

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While 35 per cent of land in East Jerusalem has been expropriated for the establishment of a dozen Jewish settlements, housing around 200,000 Israeli citizens, under the current Israeli master plan only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem is zoned for Palestinian construction, even though 300,000 Palestinians reside in the area. Decisions regarding planning policy are unofficially based on the Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan, despite the fact that it has not been submitted for public review. While it does allocate areas for expansion, these tend to be places that are already built up due to unpermitted construction. In combination with the deliberately labyrinthine application procedures, this has led to a third of Palestinian homes being built without the mandatory Israeli-issued building permit, placing over 90,000 residents at risk of eviction. As well as causing practical problems, this has a considerable psychological impact.

The practical effects of these policies can perhaps be best appreciated at a local level. A typical example of a once thriving village, dating back centuries, is the Palestinian village of Al-Isawiyyah. A large part of the district, including the built-up area, fell under Israeli control from 1967 and much of this area has since been expropriated from residents. Today, cut off from other areas of East Jerusalem by a web of Israeli-built development that includes military camps, the Hebrew University campus and the Eastern Ring Road, it is a crowded enclave with a population density 2.5 times higher than neighbouring Israeli settlements. Blocked

off on three sides and with little land zoned for construction, there is a severe housing shortage and residents have no choice but to build without permits. Many have been issued with demolition orders and some have lost their homes already.

In this regard, conditions in Al-Isawiyyah are typical of many Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem and their struggle with Israel's draconian planning restrictions. However, the village also faces the threat of another form of Israeli planning that has been used repeatedly to limit the development of Palestinian neighbourhoods and even expel Palestinians from their land – the zoning of supposedly 'vacant' areas in East Jerusalem as parks and protected green spaces.

In September 2014, the Israeli National Planning Committee announced controversial plans to build a new 'national park' on the slopes of Mount Scopus, where Al-Isawiyyah is based. The plans as they currently stand would lead to the confiscation of 700,000 square metres of land belonging to Al-Isawiyyah and another Palestinian neighbourhood, At-Tur. News of the proposal provoked widespread condemnation from rights groups and community residents.

Though the committee has so far refused to cancel the park, it has conceded that its boundaries should be re-examined due to insufficient consideration of the needs of the two adjacent Palestinian neighbourhoods.



The decision regarding these boundaries has been referred back to a lower-level planning committee. The Israeli non-profit organization, BIMKOM – Planners for Planning Rights, which provides legal representation for an association of Al-Isawiyyah residents – is now hopeful that the plans for the park will be curtailed.

If this is the case, it will be a rare positive development in a history of long-running disputes with Israeli authorities, whose planning policies have been a recurring source of tension for the community. In 2008 the Jerusalem Municipality began to advance plans for a solid waste dump to the north which would leave the community completely surrounded. And should the E1 Plan be implemented, the result will be even more exclusionary development – leaving it more isolated and overcrowded than ever.

Though the story of Al-Isawiyyah would be tragic even if it was unique, the problems facing the community are shared by many other Palestinian neighbourhoods – problems that, without a significant shift in Israel's urban policy, will only become worse in future. ■

**Below: A Palestinian boy walks on the rubble of his demolished house in an East Jerusalem neighbourhood, November 2014. REUTERS/ Ammar Awad**



Israel's barrier has intensified the separation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, incorporating 13 checkpoints through which Palestinian residents in the remainder of the Palestine require special permits to cross. The barrier's circuitous route has been planned as such in order to include the large majority of Israeli settlements. As a result, some Palestinian communities such as Kafr 'Aqab and Shu'fat refugee camp are now situated within the Jerusalem municipal boundary, on the West Bank side of the barrier, and therefore required to pass through checkpoints to access health care and other services. On the other hand, an estimated 1,400 West Bank residents are now caught on the Jerusalem side of the barrier, but still denied residency rights, employment or services in East Jerusalem.

The barrier is not the only example of divisive Israeli infrastructure. The light rail has also been a target of Palestinian anger and resentment since its completion in 2011, reflected in multiple attacks against rail commuters during the year. Running from West Jerusalem to the Israeli settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev on the eastern edge of the municipality, the light rail was initially portrayed by Israel's leadership as a symbol of coexistence and unity. However, its importance to the projection of Israeli sovereignty over the entirety of Jerusalem has since been explicitly stated by public figures such as the city's mayor Nir Barkat. For Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, the light rail has been seen as another expression of the occupation, and a 2010 resolution from the UN Human Rights Council declared its route to be in clear violation of international law.

The lack of government investment in East Jerusalem has resulted in significant discrimination and overcrowding for Palestinian residents. Besides neglected municipal services such as rubbish collection and lighting, there is a severe shortage of public buildings and facilities like schools or playgrounds. The June announcement of a five-year plan for East Jerusalem was only a partial step forward: NIS200 million will be invested in infrastructure, education, welfare and employment, while NIS95.4 million will go towards security. And commentators noted

that the government's express intention is to strengthen its control over East Jerusalem, rather than to secure the rights of Palestinians living there.

In densely populated Gaza, on the other hand, restrictions on the importing of construction materials imposed by blockade, enforced by both Israel and Egypt, make any systematic planning very difficult. To make matters worse, 118,000 housing units were destroyed or damaged during Operation Protective Edge in addition to schools, hospitals and the enclave's sole power plant. Their repair will depend on all parties upholding the terms of the ceasefire and implementing the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism which has since been set in place. Ultimately, Israel will have the final say about what materials will be allowed into Gaza and who will supply them. However, as HRW has reported, Israel's policy in the past has been to impose blanket restrictions 'unconnected or disproportionate to security considerations [which] unnecessarily harm people's access to food, water, education, and other fundamental rights in Gaza'.

Israel has also employed discriminatory planning policies to marginalize minorities within its own borders. Despite the welcome freezing towards the end of 2013 of the legislative process behind the Praver plan to forcibly remove 70,000 Bedouin living in unrecognized villages in the Negev (*Naqab* in Arabic), civil rights groups fear that they are still in danger of displacement due to the appropriation of large parts of their land. Amnesty International reports that the enactment of the Regional Master Plan for the Be'er Sheva Metropolitan Area, approved in August 2012 despite outstanding objections by the Bedouin community, would result in the eviction and destruction of most of the 35 unrecognized villages. In the meantime, the Bedouin and herding communities are prone to house demolitions because of the obstacles to obtaining building permits.

Other discriminated communities include Ethiopian Israelis and Mizrahim, who are Jews from Arab countries. A lack of investment or policies directed at improving social cohesion in urban areas, such as south Tel Aviv, where large numbers from these groups reside, has resulted in poor living conditions, high levels of crime

and social unrest. This has been exacerbated by Israel's policy towards African migrants and asylum seekers, who are assigned to social housing in neglected neighbourhoods that lack the necessary welfare services, infrastructure or personal safety measures to cater for the increased population.

More broadly, Arab minorities in Israel have been subjected to policies resulting in significant housing inequality. The most recent statistics show that in 2013, the Israel Land Authority issued tenders for the construction of more housing units in the illegal settlements in the Palestine than it did in the Arab communities in Israel, despite there being more than double the number of inhabitants in these villages than Jewish residents living in the occupied West Bank. Arab communities make up just 2.5 per cent of the territory of Israel and this has barely increased since 1948. Annually, 12,000 new housing units are required to close the housing gap; in 2013, however, only 3,547 housing units in Arab communities were marketed out of a total of 27,840. As a result, in contrast to the extensive planning and development of Jewish localities, Arab neighbourhoods in Israel have urbanized without any overarching strategy in place to meet the needs of the population.

## Saudi Arabia

Sunni Muslim-majority Saudi Arabia is home to a large Shi'a minority, comprising an estimated 10–15 per cent of the population. Most belong to the Twelver sect and are concentrated in the country's oil-rich Eastern province, although there are also an estimated 700,000 Isma'ilis and smaller numbers of Zaydis living primarily in Najran and other areas along the Yemeni border. In a country where Sunni Islam is the official religion and other forms of religious expression are strictly prohibited, Shi'a Muslims are subject to restrictions on their religious practice and widespread discrimination. Shi'a are also officially discriminated against in public sector employment – a key component of social status in Saudi Arabia – including in the judiciary, military and education. For Shi'a women, religious discrimination compounds the problem of finding a job in a country in which employment opportunities for women are already

severely limited by strict gender segregation policies, restricted mobility and cultural mores.

The Saudi government has a zero-tolerance policy for dissent and has cracked down harshly on Shi'a activists and others calling for reform. In a troubling development, authorities passed a sweeping anti-terrorism law in January 2014 that made a host of vague and undefined charges, such as 'insulting the reputation of the state', prosecutable offences. Throughout the year, the Saudi authorities imposed harsh prison sentences on a number of minority rights activists. In April, Fadhil al-Manasif, who documented abuses against protesters in the Eastern province in 2011, was sentenced to 15 years in prison, a lengthy travel ban and a fine. In August, Shi'a cleric Tawfiq Al-Amer was sentenced to eight years in prison, as well as a travel ban and a prohibition on giving sermons. Al-Amer had called for political reforms in his speeches, including moving towards a constitutional monarchy, and better treatment of Shi'a citizens. In November, Mikhlif al-Shammari, a Sunni activist who advocated for equality between Sunni and Shi'a citizens, was sentenced to two years in prison and 200 lashes following accusations which included meeting with Shi'a activists in the Eastern province.

Several activists were also sentenced to death during the year for their activities, including Rida Al-Rubh, the son of a Shi'a cleric, in May, for his involvement in protests in 2011 and for allegedly shooting at security officers. The same week, Ali Mohammed Baqir Al-Nimr also received the death sentence in connection with the protests, despite the fact that he was 17 years old at the time. HRW asserts that the trials of these activists were rife with due process violations, including forced confessions. On 15 October, prominent Shi'a cleric and activist Sheikh Nimr Baqir Al-Nimr was sentenced to death. Al-Nimr had a wide following and often criticized the government's treatment of the Shi'a minority in his sermons. He called on Shi'a citizens to resist discrimination through peaceful means and was involved in organizing protests in 2011. News of his sentencing sparked street riots in the Eastern province. The following week, two more activists were sentenced to death in connection to the 2011 protests and a third was given a 12-year

prison term.

There are fears that the atmosphere of increased polarization of sectarian identities that has taken hold of the wider region over the last year could have negative repercussions for Saudi Arabia's Shi'a minority. On 3 November, a bloody attack carried out against Shi'a worshippers observing the religious occasion of Ashura in Al-Ahsa governorate confirmed some of these fears. Masked gunmen attacked the worshippers as they were leaving their place of worship in al-Dalwa village, killing at least seven, including children, and leaving dozens injured. The Saudi authorities arrested a number of people in connection with the incident and have indicated that the attackers were led by a Saudi national who had recently returned from fighting in Iraq and Syria. However, in a positive development, the Saudi public, as well as leading government and religious figures, were unanimous in condemning the attack and presenting a united front of solidarity with the victims. Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef visited the wounded in the hospital and paid his condolences to the families of those killed.

While sectarian violence in Iraq and Syria has added a new dimension of fear, the marginalization of Saudi Arabia's Shi'a citizens is much more deep-seated in nature and has long-term roots. Driven by the discovery of oil, Saudi Arabia has undergone massive social and economic changes over the last few decades, including a rapid transformation over several decades into a largely urban population. However, this development process has been uneven, with Saudi Shi'a claiming that the government has favoured Sunni-majority areas for development projects while neglecting cities such as Qatif, which has a large Shi'a population. Residents claim that there is only one government hospital to serve the population, exceeding half a million, whereas Sunni towns of a similar size typically have many more hospitals and specialized health centres. Shi'a-majority cities also lack universities, whereas even small Sunni towns boast new university campuses. Moreover, Shi'a face difficulties in obtaining permits to build mosques, constraining their religious practices in many areas.



Migrant workers represent another excluded sector of the population. Despite forming the backbone of the private sector workforce and playing a vital role in construction, they are often the last to benefit from urban development. In Saudi cities, migrants are often segregated from other residents and confined to overcrowded, low-cost living arrangements. In Mecca, for instance, multi-billion-dollar projects to expand and modernize the Holy Mosque, the Masjid al-Haram, and surrounding areas have transformed the city centre into a haven for wealthy pilgrims, replete with luxury hotels, restaurants and shopping malls, while marginalizing the city's poorer inhabitants and destroying much ancient heritage in the process, including numerous Sufi shrines. Rents in the city have skyrocketed and the government has not invested in affordable housing, leading to the growth of slums populated largely by migrants. Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia already live a precarious existence due to the sponsorship system, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, violence and sexual abuse by their Saudi employers, as they do not benefit from minimum wage regulations and other protections afforded to Saudi nationals.

## Syria

Fighting in Syria intensified throughout 2014, with at least 7.6 million Syrians internally displaced and another 3.7 million refugees by the end of the year. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that more than 76,000 people had died during the year, bringing the death toll of the conflict so far to over 200,000. The conflict has been strongly urban in nature, focused particularly on cities such as Aleppo and Damascus, with civilians especially vulnerable as regime forces deliberately target schools, hospitals, mosques and other non-military targets. Both the government and armed opposition groups have also denied civilians in besieged areas access to food, water, electricity, medical care and other essential services. Women are at particular risk due to the increasing use of gender-based violence as a weapon of war in the conflict.

The brutal and destructive nature of the conflict in Syria has caused untold suffering for

all civilians, majority and minority communities alike. At times, however, minorities including Alawis, Christians, Druze, Ismailis, Kurds, Turkmen, Twelver Shi'a and Yezidis have been targeted by opposition militias on the assumption, whether accurate or not, that they support the regime. Alawis are among the groups most in danger of violent persecution by armed opposition groups due to their perceived association with the Assad regime, although in general minority





**Below:** Women mourn near graves of Kurdish fighters who died in Kobane, Syria. *REUTERS/Kai Pfaffenbach/Files*

political allegiances are divided between support and opposition. Alawis and other Shi'a Muslims were exposed to several brutal attacks during the year. In February, rebel fighters attacked the village of Maan in Hama province, killing 40 Alawis. In May, an entire Alawi family was

executed in Zanuba, Hama province, while a series of car bombings in Alawi areas of Homs between March and June led to high civilian casualties. Many Alawis worry for their future in Syria, fearing they will be reduced to second-class citizens if a Sunni-dominated regime takes power or forced to negotiate their minority status along with the rest of Syria's religious minorities. The Assad regime has been accused of attempting to manipulate minorities by encouraging fears of



sectarian division.

Furthermore, as extremist groups such as Jabhat an-Nusra and ISIS have risen in influence over the year, minorities have been targeted because of their faith. Since some of these communities are already small in number, there are fears that continued attacks could lead to their exodus from the country. Members of Syria's Yezidi minority, for instance, are at risk following ISIS's brutal campaign against community members in Iraq. ISIS has smuggled unknown numbers of abducted Yezidi women and girls from Sinjar into Syria, where they have been sold as commodities, enslaved, raped and forcibly married to ISIS fighters.

Among the many areas subjected to intense fighting over the year were several Christian-majority towns, where attacks led to the displacement of the civilian population and irreparable damage to historic archaeological and religious sites. In May, the Armenian Christian town of Kesseb was attacked and taken over by opposition fighters, causing approximately 2,500 Armenians to flee for their lives. The Assyrian Christian town of Ma'aloula, one of the few places in Syria where the Aramaic language is still spoken, switched hands between government and opposition forces four times between the end of 2013 and April 2014, when it was retaken by the government. According to the regime, many of the town's churches and monasteries were vandalized, destroyed or looted: some of the churches were found with extremist slogans scrawled on their walls and icons removed or defaced, although it is unclear who was responsible for these actions.

Armed groups have continued to target Christian religious leaders for abduction and assassination. Father Frans van der Lugt, a 75-year-old Dutch Jesuit priest, was shot and killed in his monastery in Homs in April by an unknown assailant. Van der Lugt had been living in Syria for several decades and was the founder of a community centre to help people with disabilities from all religions. Meanwhile, the whereabouts of the kidnapped Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi and Jesuit priest Father Paolo Dall'Oglio are still unknown. Thirteen nuns and three maids, who were kidnapped from

Ma'aloula in December 2013, were released in March following negotiations between Jabhat an-Nusra, which was holding them captive, and Syrian, Lebanese and Qatari officials.

The Druze community, whose adherents follow a monotheistic religion with roots in Islam, has largely attempted to stay removed from the conflict but were nonetheless drawn into the fighting this year. In August, Druze fighters clashed with Bedouin Arabs backed by Jabhat an-Nusra, leading to at least a dozen deaths, including those of three spiritual leaders.

As for Syria's ethnic Kurdish minority, long disenfranchised by Ba'athist rule, the conflict has provided an opportunity to carve out a sphere of autonomy. In January, Syrian Kurds established an Interim Transitional Administration in the cantons of Jazira, Kobane and Afrin. However, as fighting with Sunni Arab factions for control of territory is ongoing, Kurdish civilians continue to pay a high price. When ISIS entered the village of Tel Akhader in March, the group issued an ultimatum to the Kurdish residents to leave or be killed. In May, the group kidnapped nearly 200 Kurdish civilians from the village of Qabasin. The same month, they kidnapped 153 Kurdish schoolboys, held nearly all of them captive in Minbij for five months, and showed them violent videos while imbuing them with the group's ideology. Beginning in September 2014, ISIS besieged the Kurdish city of Kobane, cutting off food supplies, water and electricity from the city and causing over 200,000 people to flee.

The sharpening of sectarian identities, which continues to increase as the conflict progresses, represents a significant shift in Syria's social dynamics. For much of its recent history, Syria's various religious and ethnic minorities have to some extent been concentrated in different parts of the country. However, cities such as Damascus were places where people from all sects congregated. In this sense, cities often played a positive role in reducing barriers and enabling some interaction between different groups. However, urbanization also contributed to increasing social discontent. The years preceding the outbreak of protests were marked by large-scale population movements from the countryside into the cities, following some of the worst droughts and crop failures in recent history. The

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**Case study** by *Derek Verbakel*  
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# Everywhere but invisible – the continued marginalization of Dubai’s migrant construction workers

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Dubai’s construction boom has transformed this desert city into a dense urban landscape of skyscrapers, shopping malls, roads and swimming pools. This extraordinary development has been made possible by the labour of many hundreds of thousands of migrant construction workers, who first began arriving in the city in the 1960s and now number around a quarter of its population. Hailing mostly from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, they typically work six days a week and 11 or 12 hours each day to earn the equivalent of just US\$100–300 every month.

Though a ubiquitous presence on its construction sites, Dubai’s migrant workers are largely invisible in the city centre. Largely sequestered in labour camps guarded by private security on the outskirts of the city, migrant construction workers have little choice but to suffer sub-standard living conditions. Settlements such as Sonapur, with some 300,000 inhabitants – the world’s largest labour camp – are populated almost exclusively by men, who live in overcrowded rooms in cramped and unsanitary conditions. Each day, workers are bussed from their living quarters to construction sites, then back again. Workplace accidents are not uncommon and deaths tend to go unreported, as safety oversight is lax and conditions are harsh. Relaxation can also be hard

to come by, as workers have been accused of harassing tourists and arrested just for resting on public beaches, while shopping malls have frequently turned away migrant workers.

Making possible these conditions is the *kafala* system. Introduced by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government in 1971, this sponsorship scheme exposes migrant construction workers to systemic abuse in many forms. Under *kafala*, a migrant’s residence and work visas are tied to their sole sponsoring employer. Despite slight reforms in 2010, the ability to switch employers remains severely restricted. Migrant construction workers are often recruited largely in poor, rural areas in their home countries and then obliged to make sizeable down-payments to their prospective employer to cover the cost of their flights and visa. On arrival in Dubai the terms of agreement frequently change, however, with many employers confiscating migrant passports and forcing them to accept lower wages, longer hours and worse work conditions than promised. This can leave many workers without documents and in a limbo of unpaid debt.

Workers are also prohibited from undertaking strikes, collective bargaining or forming associations to advocate for their rights. Strikes are very rare, but in May 2013, striking workers from Dubai’s largest construction firm, Arabtec, mobilized in their thousands, resulting in nearly 500 deportations. Reports also emerged in May 2014 of a similar incident that had occurred in October 2013, when more than 3,000 employees of a major UK-based construction company working on Abu Dhabi’s Saadiyat Island went on strike to protest over low pay. Some, having stayed in their accommodations at Camp 42 in Dubai’s Jebel Ali industrial zone, were handed over to police by company management and subsequently deported. In this context, many migrants have turned to work in the informal economy, rather than reporting abuse and taking their chances with the biased judicial system.

The UAE government has largely failed to address any of these issues and continues

to obstruct rights organizations working on behalf of migrant workers from monitoring or documenting these abuses. Nevertheless, a small number of informal civil society groups have had some success in pushing for positive developments and providing social services to those migrants most in need.

These organizations have also aided migrant construction workers in navigating the complex legal issues surrounding visas and supported those accused of 'absconding' or attempting to reclaim withheld wages from employers. They also raise funds to provide transport to hospitals in case of emergencies and plane



tickets to return home for those trapped without means. One example is the Indian Workers Resource Centre, a welfare centre for Indians connected to the Embassy of India, which has targeted construction workers with information campaigns on rights, financial issues and health care. ■

**Below: Arabtec workers on strike in Dubai, in protest of low wages.**  
*Getty Images/Brent Stirton*





largely Sunni rural migrants settled down in sprawling, overcrowded neighbourhoods which grew out of the suburbs of Syria's major cities, increasing the strain on urban infrastructure and public resources such as water. Meanwhile, government-led, modified neoliberal policies created enormous wealth for the ruling elite, in stark contrast to the neglected countryside. After protests against the regime began in rural Dera'a in 2011, these resentments fed into the uprising.

The rising influence of extremist groups over the course of 2014, especially ISIS, has dramatically changed the urban landscape in cities under their control. The town of Al-Raqqa has become the informal capital of ISIS's self-declared caliphate. In February, ISIS released an edict giving the small number of Christians living in the town one of three choices: conversion to Islam, the payment of a tribute or the risk of death. Those under ISIS rule are subject to a host of restrictions on their religious practice, with prohibitions on church renovation, the display of crosses and other acts of public worship. ISIS also subjects the Muslim population of the town to a brutal regime of control, regularly carrying out public beheadings, stonings, crucifixions and amputations for transgressing the group's authority. In addition, militants have destroyed cultural and religious sites belonging to minorities, including the Shi'a mosque of Uwais Al-Qarni and tombs dating back to the 7th century in Al-Raqqa in May. The control of extremist groups over urban centres and districts has had particularly severe consequences for women, with restrictions on their dress and movement in areas under their control.

With continued waves of displacement, many Syrians face the challenge of adapting to new urban environments, both inside and outside of Syria. Outside the country, an estimated 70 per cent of Syrian refugees are based in urban areas. Only a small proportion of minorities have registered with UNHCR, with more than 90 per cent of refugees identifying as Sunni Muslims. However, fear of attacks from other groups or reprisals by the government on their return may be discouraging minority refugees from registering. Some receiving countries have made special arrangements to protect minorities, with Jordan and Turkey establishing separate procedures for Alawi and Turkmen refugees

respectively. Towards the end of 2014, news also emerged of plans by the Canadian government to prioritize Syrian refugees from minorities for resettlement, on the basis that these groups experienced higher levels of persecution. The proposal was strongly criticized by rights groups, who argued that preferential selection would be discriminatory and could further inflame sectarian tensions within Syria.

## Yemen

The year 2014 began with the completion of Yemen's ten-month-long National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in January. With 565 representatives invited to attend and the final outcomes of the process agreed for inclusion in the country's new Constitution, scheduled for a referendum by 25 January 2015, the NDC's conclusion was welcomed by many observers as an important milestone in the country's transition to democracy. However, the process was undermined by the failure to fully represent the country's various minorities, including Yemen's tiny Jewish minority, which was left out despite previous promises that they would be included. Also sidelined were Yemen's Muhamasheen, literally 'marginalized ones', a visible and much discriminated minority known commonly as Akhdam or 'servants'. Despite accounting for around 10 per cent of the population, they were represented by just a single delegate in the NDC proceedings. Nonetheless, one of the NDC outcomes stipulated the establishment of 'fair national policies and procedures to ensure marginalized persons' access to decent housing, basic public services, free health care, and job opportunities', including placement in 10 per cent of public jobs. The NDC Final Communiqué also affirmed the need to preserve elements of national heritage and cultural rights, such as the Mahari and Socotri languages.

However, the NDC received a fatal blow with the withdrawal of the Houthi movement from the process and the subsequent spread of its armed insurgency across Yemen. The Houthis, based in the north, are comprised overwhelmingly of Zaydis, a branch of Shi'a Islam that represents the country's largest minority group and accounts for a quarter to a third of the country's population. Houthis have

**Below:** An abandoned Jewish village on the southern outskirts of the Yemeni capital Sana'a, April 2014. *REUTERS/Khaled Abdullah*

presented their rebellion as an effort to challenge years of marginalization by the government in Sana'a, as well as an attempt to counter the growing influence of ultraconservative Sunni Salafism in the north. The uprising has tipped the country into a state of profound upheaval and led to the effective withdrawal of government control over large parts of the country.

The advance of the armed group in the months following their departure from the NDC saw Houthi forces overtake a number of key strategic positions in the centre and south of the country. By September, they had taken control of a number of cities including Sana'a, seizing ministries and other government buildings, and severely weakened the leadership of Yemen's president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Their progress continued into 2015, with Houthi forces advancing through southern Yemen all the way

to Aden, where they battled forces loyal to the president, whose government they had effectively deposed. With mounting air strikes on Houthi targets by a Saudi-led coalition of Arab states, by the beginning of April, Yemen – already the Arab world's poorest country – was in the throes of a major humanitarian crisis. As of January 2015, an estimated 334,100 people were internally displaced, with numbers rising further in the months that followed.

Following their initial successes, Houthis were also targeted by suicide bombings and clashed with al-Qaeda-affiliated Sunni extremists towards the end of 2014. One of the deadliest attacks, however, took place on 20 March 2015, when two suicide bombings targeted Shi'a mosques in Sana'a frequented by Houthi supporters, killing 137 people in the first major attacks in Yemen claimed by ISIS. Incidents such as these have raised concerns about the threat of the country sliding into sectarian violence.

However, largely excluded from this picture are Yemen's other minorities, including its Jewish



population. Long-established as a historical presence in the country, and reaching a peak population of more than 50,000 in the early-to-mid 20th century, Yemen's Jewish community has dwindled severely in recent years to less than 100 people, due in part to harassment and persecution. This situation has not improved in the wake of Houthi political gains due to the conflation among Houthi sympathizers, as well as Yemenis more generally, of the Jewish faith with Zionism. In a rare show of official support, however, Yemen's Minister of Culture, Arwa Othman, dedicated a major human rights award she received in September to Yemen's Jewish population and called for greater tolerance in the country.

Other religious minorities also continued to face discrimination during the year. A Yemeni Bahá'í named Hamed Kamal bin Haydara remained in prison throughout 2014, where he faced various forms of torture and abuse. In not the first case of its kind, he was accused of committing the crimes of proselytizing the Bahá'í faith and collaborating with Israel. It was not until January 2015 that he was finally indicted.

Muhamasheen continued to struggle during the year for greater political inclusion, access to justice and an end to discrimination. In April 2014, dozens of Muhamasheen staged a demonstration near Jabal Habshi, Ta'izz, to protest government inaction regarding the demolition and torching of 16 Muhamasheen homes eight months prior. According to the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms (HOOD), the attacks were a response to the intended marriage of a young Muhamasheen man with a young woman from a nearby tribe, and were believed to be carried out as a gesture of disapproval by members of the girl's tribe. Following the demonstration, some Muhamasheen families fled the area due to fears of further attacks.

One factor in their ongoing exclusion is the lack of national identification cards and birth certificates issued to Muhamasheen who, when located at both the social and geographical margins of Yemen's urban centres, have faced difficulties accessing state institutions. While urban centres can offer opportunities for upward mobility and improved access to services such as education and health care, for

Muhamasheen and other minorities they have often deepened existing forms of discrimination while also creating new patterns of exclusion. Urbanization in Yemen has been fuelled by the country's population growth, one of the highest rates worldwide, as well as rising investment, construction and labour migration in recent years. This has led to acute pressure on basic services and housing in major urban centres such as Sana'a, one of the world's fastest growing cities, with some projections suggesting it could be the first national capital to run out of a viable water supply.

In this context, minorities, migrants and other marginalized groups have been disproportionately affected. Yemen's Muhamasheen have been forced to make their homes overwhelmingly in slums, within or on the outskirts of the country's expanding urban centres, often in settlements housing many inhabitants in a single room and lacking basic amenities such as plumbing and electricity. Squalid living conditions, including unsafe drinking water, with only nine per cent of Muhamasheen homes having a piped supply, have contributed to widespread health problems.

While there have been instances of integration into the Yemeni working and middle classes, Muhamasheen have largely faced protracted urban poverty and limited livelihood opportunities, with many engaged in menial labour such as street sweeping and trash collection. Yet as rural poor, other migrants and those uprooted by conflict have in recent years rushed to Yemen's urban centres in greater numbers, competition for even these low-level jobs is growing.

Yemen's Jewish community has also been forced to migrate to urban areas due to insecurity, with the majority having moved from the north to Sana'a in 2007 after being driven from their homes in the wake of the Houthi takeover of Sa'dah. Those in Sana'a are now living in a guarded compound, and at the end of 2014 the only other Jewish community in Yemen, numbering no more than a dozen or so families, remained in the town of Raida in 'Amran governorate. ■

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**Case study** by *Rania El Rajji*  
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# The disappearance of Wadi Abu Jmil, Beirut's Jewish district

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Lebanon's wars have had a lasting impact on the country's urban fabric. The infamous 'green line' which divided Beirut into East and West between 1975 and 1990 forced various religious groups – primarily Muslims and Christians, but also other smaller minorities who found themselves drawn into the conflict – to resettle on either side of the city for their own safety. With a few exceptions, many of the city's once diverse neighbourhoods were left homogenized by the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict – a legacy that sadly persists to this day.

Beirut as a city has always been a haven for refugees, dating back to the arrival of persecuted Armenians in 1915, the subsequent wave of Palestinians from 1948 and more recently, an influx of Syrians displaced since 2011. The Lebanese war also caused a large wave of internal displacement, accompanied by an exodus from rural areas. All of these movements led to the multiplication of informal settlements and the occupation of land within or on the fringes of Beirut. Due to Lebanon's religious diversity, these migrations contributed to the remapping of the city into increasingly segregated districts. The confinement of particular religious groups in different parts of Beirut, such as the largely Shi'a southern suburbs of Dahieh or the predominantly Sunni Palestinian camps of Shatila, Bouj Al Barajneh and Mar Elias, has reinforced their separation.

Meanwhile the smaller religious minorities, particularly the Jewish population of Beirut, became undocumented casualties of the war. During the 1960s, Lebanon's Jewish population numbered a few thousand and even grew as a

result of migration from neighbouring Arab countries where they were declared *personae non gratae* following the 1948 creation of the state of Israel. In Beirut, the city's Jewish population was centred in the neighbourhood of Wadi Abu Jmil, west of the city centre. The eruption of the war in 1975 led the last of the city's Jewish population into exile, while an unknown number – estimated by some to be between 200 and 500 individuals – remained, but disguised their religious identity, or in some cases converted, to avoid being targeted during the years of civil war. Wadi Abu Jmil was emptied of its population and the beautiful synagogue of Maguen Abraham, once the centre of the community, was closed down and subsequently damaged by Israeli bombardment during the war.

In 1994, the privately owned Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District, otherwise known as Solidere, took on the task of reconstructing and developing the city centre. Since then, the controversial organization has been strongly criticized for its role in exacerbating social divides in Beirut as well as displacing yet again the original inhabitants and shop owners in the city's downtown. Although it is impossible to know the exact number of Lebanese Jews who still live around Wadi Abu Jmil or own property within the area, Solidere's reconstruction of Wadi Abu Jmil has transformed it, like other parts of central Beirut, into an upmarket 'urban village' with clubs and other facilities that are unattainable for anyone but the city's most affluent population. Despite numerous efforts to complete its restoration, the area's synagogue has yet to be opened to the public.

The city centre, as a result of Solidere's policies, has therefore become a ghost town, deprived of its original religious diversity and the many inhabitants who once gave it life. Redevelopment, like the conflict before it, continues to erase the rich history of Beirut's Jewish community – a process that, if it continues, could make its disappearance complete. ■

# Peoples under Threat 2015

Mark Lattimer and Derek Verbakel



## Introduction

The 2015 release of the *Peoples under Threat* index marks the 10th year that Peoples under Threat has sought to identify those communities around the world that are most at risk of genocide, mass political killing or systematic violent repression.

A number of the countries which rose most sharply in the index last year, including Syria, Yemen and Ukraine, saw escalating violence over the course of 2014–15 and the killing, in total, of tens of thousands of civilians.

This year again the publication uses current indicators from authoritative sources to highlight where the risks are highest and where they have risen most significantly over the last year. It also provides an opportunity to review risk factors over the last decade and the predictive power of the index itself.

## Rising threats

The list of major risers in the *Peoples under Threat* index in 2015 features countries from every major world region except the Americas. Four out of ten are from the Arab world. Most of the civilian killing in the region is currently perpetrated by governments or government-backed forces, but the threat levels have also increased with the expansion of attacks attributed to the opposition extremist group *Da'ash* or the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), including attacks in Lebanon, Yemen, Egypt and Libya.

With over 200,000 people now dead in the conflict and up to half of the population forced from their homes, the crisis in **Syria** continues to worsen. The situation has become highly fractured, with the military involvement of neighbouring states, foreign armed groups including ISIS and Lebanese Hezbollah, and US-led air strikes. The extreme sectarianism which characterizes ISIS and related jihadi groups, as well as the pro-government *Shabiha* militias, has now infected much of the country. Nearly all the remaining Christian communities in Syria live in enclaves in government-held areas. Only in the Kurdish-held regions of the north in al-Jazeera, Kobane and Afrin has there been a serious attempt at establishing an inclusive democracy.

Its fragility was demonstrated by a prolonged ISIS assault on Kobane in autumn 2014 that emptied the city and surrounding countryside of its inhabitants, until it was retaken by Kurdish and opposition forces in January 2015.

**Iraq** headed the table when the *Peoples under Threat* index was first published in 2006 and it has never been far from the top of the index in the intervening years, despite earnest protestations from the Iraqi government and its international partners that the security situation was coming under control. An increase in killings in 2013 was followed by a catastrophic upsurge in violence over the last year, with the advance of ISIS first into Anbar in western Iraq and then across Ninewa in the north. Over 14,000 civilians were killed in 2014, many of them in massacres perpetrated by ISIS as it expelled minority communities, including Chaldo-Assyrians, Shabak, Turkmen and Yezidis, from Mosul, Sinjar and the Ninewa plain. Thousands of Yezidi women and girls remain in ISIS captivity. The risk remains acute not just for minority groups and for Shi'a communities threatened by ISIS, but also for Sunnis at risk of retaliation from Iraqi Security Forces and allied Shi'a militias seeking to recapture territory.

Conflict in the **Central African Republic (CAR)** continued between the largely Muslim former *Séléka* rebels and anti-*balaka* militias comprised mainly of Christians. In the aftermath of the January ouster of the ex-*Séléka* from Bangui, the country's new interim government and African Union, European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) peacekeepers failed to quell the violence. While both sides have been accused of committing mass atrocities against civilians and reprisal attacks have been widespread, in the wake of an ex-*Séléka* withdrawal to the north and east of the country, members of the Muslim minority – regarded as *Séléka* sympathizers by virtue of their religion and language – have faced a violent campaign by Christian militias to extirpate them from the CAR. Upwards of 850,000 people – nearly one-fifth of the country's population – were refugees or internally displaced at the end of 2014, and many tens of thousands more fled their homes in the first months of 2015. With fighters on the ground still out of control, and without the backing of the transitional government, the

## Major Risers since 2014

Rank	Rise in rank since 2014	Country	Groups	Total
1	+2	Syria	Political targets, Shi'a/Alawis, Christians, Kurds, Palestinians	24.95
4	+1	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	20.50
5	+1	Iraq	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Mandaeans, Yezidis, Shabak, Failsi Kurds, Bahá'ís, Palestinians	19.90
9	+3	South Sudan	Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, Jie, Kachipo	18.37
10	+4	Central African Republic	Muslims, Christians; Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Gula, Aka	18.35
16	+3	Russian Federation	Chechens, Ingush and others in North Caucasus; indigenous northern peoples, Roma, Jews	14.82
17	+8	Libya	Black Libyans, Sub-Saharan migrants, Tebu, Berbers	14.78
20	+3	Egypt	Copts, Shi'a, Bahá'í; Nubians, Bedouin	13.76
21	+39	Ukraine	Tatars, Krymchak and Karaites in Crimea; Russians, Hungarians, Moldovans and other national minorities	13.70
29	+15	China	Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols, Hui, religious minorities	12.21

UN, or France, a controversial peace agreement was signed in April 2015 between *ex-Séléka* and anti-*balaka* leaders in Nairobi.

**Egypt** rose another three places in the index this year. Former army chief Abdul Fattah el-Sisi became president in May 2014, leading to a further crackdown on opposition groups and human rights activists. Hundreds of sentences of death, or life imprisonment, were imposed on members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood. While under pressure from escalating military operations, Islamist militants based in North Sinai enlarged the scope and scale of their attacks against security personnel and other government targets, and in November pledged loyalty to ISIS. Ongoing fighting and toughening security measures have affected the lives of Sinai Bedouin, who have long suffered political and economic marginalization. Human rights activists also continued to criticize the government for doing too little to provide security for Coptic and other Christian communities, especially in Upper Egypt, where individuals, their homes and places of worship regularly came under attack.

The dominance of Middle Eastern and African states in the Peoples under Threat table this year was perhaps inevitable, but of equal concern is

the rise in risk in two of the world's major powers: China and Russia.

In **China**, there was a severe escalation in the tactics used by Uyghur militants seeking independence in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Public train stations as well as police stations were targeted in attacks, including suicide bombings, both in Urumqi and also outside Xinjiang in Hunan, Yunnan and Guangdong. Hundreds of people were killed, many others detained in mass arrests and dozens of death sentences handed down. Little was done, however, to address the legacy of under-development and exclusion of Uyghur communities that lies behind the unrest, with the authorities placing further restrictions on association and religious activities during the last year. The government's strategy of labelling Uyghur human rights activists as terrorists has forestalled attempts to improve the situation.

The return of a more autocratic style of government in the **Russian Federation** is regularly denounced by President Putin's critics, and it coincides with rising xenophobia in Russian society against migrants, whether from abroad or from the Caucasus. But the threat is greatest in the North Caucasus itself, where

regular clashes continue between Russian forces and Islamist separatists in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and, particularly, Dagestan.

While the rising threat level in Russia has left minorities there living in fear, Russia's proxy war with **Ukraine** has seen whole communities in Donbas and other areas of eastern Ukraine sheltering in their basements or pushed from their homes. Some 2 million Ukrainians have now been displaced within the east or have fled to Russia, Belarus or Poland. Even in the heart of Europe, objective monitoring of the situation of populations on the ground has been submerged by waves of allegation and counter-claim issued by the different parties to the conflict. In Russian-annexed Crimea, the voices of human rights activists have been suppressed, including a prominent activist from the minority Tatars, who was prevented from testifying to the UN and the OSCE when he was attacked on the street and his documents stolen in September.

## Peoples at greatest risk

Although *Peoples under Threat* is designed to assess the risk or threat of future events, in those states that occupy the very top of the table, mass killing is already under way.

Ongoing armed conflict involving the extremist group al-Shabaab continues to secure the place of **Somalia** near the top of the *Peoples under Threat* table. Due to advances by the Somali National Army and the African Union mission AMISOM, throughout 2014 al-Shabaab lost much of the territory previously under its control. Still, particularly in South-Central Somalia, al-Shabaab persisted in launching numerous deadly assaults on AMISOM and Somali forces, as well as assassinations of political figures associated with the federal government and attacks on significant government buildings in Mogadishu and the compound housing AMISOM's headquarters. Severe political instability continues to exacerbate the vulnerability of minorities including Bantu and Benadiri.

In December the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court suspended investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur in **Sudan** in the face of inaction by the UN Security Council, which

had referred the situation to the Court back in 2005. It was symptomatic of a wider failure by the international community over Sudan, where hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed since 2003 in campaigns of repression by government-backed forces against insurgencies in Darfur and, more recently, in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. Government forces repeatedly targeted civilians over the last year, including bombing hospitals and schools, leaving thousands dead. The re-election of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2015 signalled a policy of no change. He won 94 per cent of the vote in an election boycotted by the main opposition parties and widely criticized as unfair.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, a series of rapidly mutating conflicts involving local Mayi-Mayi militias, Ugandan and Rwandan rebels, and Katangan separatists, continued to claim hundreds of lives, even as limited progress was made in the demobilization of fighters of the former M23 rebellion. The UN mission MONUSCO continues to undertake operations in support of Congolese armed forces who themselves have repeatedly been accused of committing atrocities.

The contested outcome of the presidential election in **Afghanistan** in 2014 brought a period of worrying uncertainty and fears over ethnic politics, so it was with some relief in the international community that defeated candidate Abdullah Abdullah was appointed 'chief executive officer' in President Ashraf Ghani's new national unity government in September. Civilian casualties reached record levels in 2014, rising 22 per cent overall compared with the previous year and including nearly 3,700 deaths, according to the UN mission. NATO declared the end of its combat role in December 2014, but a new status of forces agreement, as well as a bilateral security agreement between the US and Afghanistan, mean that up to 18,000 foreign troops will stay. Fighting between Taliban and Afghan forces rose during the year, and the Taliban gained ground in parts of the country. Hazara continued to face targeted killings and the Taliban presence in peace talks has raised fears over what the future may hold for Afghanistan's minorities. In April 2015 ISIS was blamed for a suicide bomb attack on government

## Peoples most under threat – highest rated countries 2015

Rank	Country	Group	Total
1	Syria	Political targets, Shi'a/Alawis, Christians, Kurds, Palestinians	24.95
2	Somalia	Minorities incl. Bantu, Benadiri and 'caste' groups (Gaboye etc.); clan members at risk in fighting incl. Hawiye, Darod, etc.	23.58
3	Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Ngok Dinka, Nuba, Beja	20.68
4	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	20.50
5	Iraq	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Mandaeans, Yezidis, Shabak, Faily Kurds, Bahá'í, Palestinians	19.90
6	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Batwa/Bambutu, other groups	19.80
7	Pakistan	Shi'a (incl. Hazara), Ahmadi, Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities; Baluchis, Mohajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	19.01
8	Burma/Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	18.40
9	South Sudan	Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, Jie, Kachipo	18.37
10	Central African Republic	Muslims, Christians; Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Gula, Aka	18.35
11	Yemen	Zaydi Shi'a, Sunni tribes, al-Muhamasheen, Southerners	17.49
12	Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	17.33

staff and military personnel in Jalalabad.

Following the collapse of peace talks in **Pakistan**, the military intensified its offensive in June against the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) in the country's north-west, where more than a million people were displaced during the year. Across the country religious extremism has grown while the situation faced by both Muslim and non-Muslim minorities has become more perilous, characterized by growing intolerance and hate crimes, as well as political and social marginalization. Extremist groups continue to perpetrate mass killings with apparent impunity: MRG reported in June that some 700 Shi'a had been killed over the previous year. Ahmadis and Hindus have also been targeted. The threat to Christians was underscored in March 2015 when a TTP splinter group bombed two churches in Lahore.

Multi-party elections in **Burma** scheduled for late 2015 have raised hopes, not least among supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, that the Burmese generals

will ease their grip on power. Members of the country's ethnic nationalities appear sceptical about whether this will actually happen, or whether it would make much difference if it did. After seven rounds of talks, a draft ceasefire agreement between the government and representatives of 16 ethnic armed groups was concluded in March 2015, even while conflict continued in Kachin state and martial law was declared over a new crisis in Kokang. Meanwhile, the Rohingya and other Muslims in Burma face continued violence from Buddhist nationalists.

### Predicting persecution: 10 years of *Peoples under Threat*

In one sense, the position of Syria at the head of the *Peoples under Threat* table this year does not tell us anything new. We already knew that things were very bad, and if the sectarian dimension to the conflict has grown over time, with Syria rising continuously in the index over the last four years

(see graph), it is still only one facet of a deadly combination of forces in the country.

The value of the index is clearer where significant rises in the index appear to anticipate episodes of mass killing, particularly if they provide a form of early warning that is otherwise absent in the international system. Sri Lanka, for example, rose sharply in the index in 2007 and continued to rise until 2009 when a bloodbath of Tamil civilians accompanied the final stages of the Sri Lankan government's war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The year 2007 also witnessed a jump in the place of Pakistan in the index. Within a year, increased militancy in Pakistan's tribal areas (itself partly a response to US air strikes) led to the formation of the Pakistani Taliban. In Baluchistan, hundreds of political activists were forcibly disappeared in the course of 2008. The country has been found in the critical level of the index ever since.

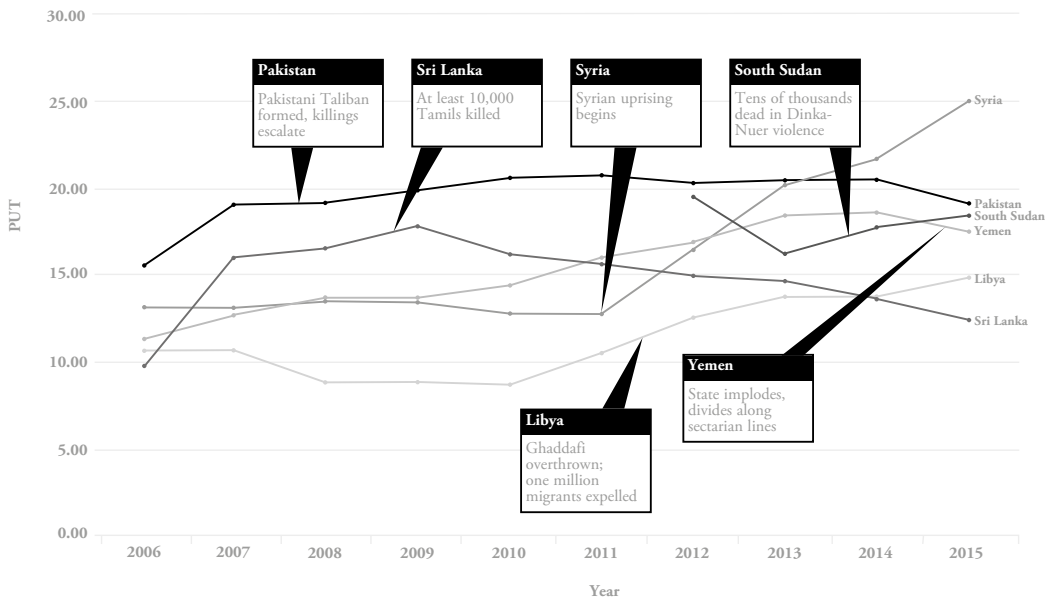
The country that has climbed most consistently in the index over the past decade is **Yemen**. In 2014 the state fell apart. Having taken control of numerous cities including Sana'a by September, al-Houthi (Shi'a) rebels succeeded in deposing President Hadi's government. Fighting with

Sunni militas brought concerns of violence escalating along sectarian lines. March 2015 then saw the first major attack in Yemen by ISIS – suicide bombings of two Shi'a mosques in the capital. As Houthis engaged in fierce clashes with Hadi loyalists in Aden, a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia launched country-wide air strikes on Houthi targets. Yemen's slide into humanitarian catastrophe continued with al-Qaida seizing the port city Mukalla in April.

The creation of the state of **South Sudan** in 2011 was marked by much celebration among the population as well as international human rights activists, but also by the new country's entry straight into the uppermost levels of the *Peoples under Threat* index. Two and half years after independence, a dispute between the president and his deputy triggered a spate of mass ethnic killing. Neither the threat of famine nor the imposition of US sanctions in 2014 brought a reconciliation between the mainly Dinka forces of the government of President Salva Kiir Mayardit and the opposition forces, largely recruited from ethnic Nuer, of former Vice-President Riek Machar.

**Libya** is another case of a country whose rise in the *Peoples under Threat* index has at times

### Selected countries, 2006-2015





appeared to run against the grain of international public opinion. Libya re-entered the index in 2010, a year before the war that removed President Gaddafi from power, but then steadily rose in the table as Libya held its first democratic elections in 2012 and many international actors hailed a new era of democracy for the country. In fact the revolution had seen the expulsion from their homes of up to 1 million migrant workers and black Libyans in the context of public attacks on sub-Saharan Africans and the rise to power of unaccountable, and at times openly racist, armed militias. As Libya rises again in the index this year, these forces are now tearing the country apart in renewed civil war. In early 2015, a group pledging allegiance to ISIS publicized its mass

beheadings of Ethiopian and Egyptian Christians. It is feared that tens of thousands of refugees may die seeking to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to Europe unless EU search-and-rescue operations are restored. ■

*Additional research by Kara Chiuchiarelli and Umamah Basit*

**Visit [www.peoplesunderthreat.org](http://www.peoplesunderthreat.org) – a new online map presenting information from the *Peoples under Threat* index. View data by year or by country and links to reports, press releases and further information on the communities under threat.**

## How is *Peoples under Threat* calculated?

Since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, our ability to identify those situations most likely to lead to genocide or mass killing has improved. A number of comparative studies of the factors preceding historic episodes of political mass killing had been undertaken since the 1970s, but it was not until the 1990s that researchers pioneered quantitative longitudinal analysis of a wide range of such factors, enabling the testing of different causal hypotheses. This research enabled the identification of those preconditions that were most likely to lead to genocide and political mass murder (politicide).

Minority Rights Group International has drawn on these research findings to construct the *Peoples under Threat* table, although responsibility for the final table is exclusively our own. *Peoples under Threat* is specifically designed to identify the risk of genocide, mass killing or other systematic violent repression, unlike most other early warning tools. Its primary application is civilian protection.

Indicators of conflict are included in the table's construction, however, as most, although not

all, episodes of mass ethnic or religious killing occur during armed conflicts. War provides the state of emergency, domestic mobilization and justification, international cover, and in some cases the military and logistic capacity, that enable massacres to be carried out. Some massacres, however, occur in peacetime, or may accompany armed conflict from its inception, presenting a problem to risk models that focus exclusively on current conflicts. In addition, severe and even violent repression of minorities may occur for years before the onset of armed conflict provides the catalyst for larger scale killing.

The statistical indicators used all relate to the state. The state is the basic unit of enquiry, rather than particular ethnic or religious groups at risk, as governments or militias connected to the government are responsible for most cases of genocidal violence. Formally, the state will reserve to itself the monopoly over the legitimate means of violence, so that where non-state actors are responsible for widespread or continued killing, it usually occurs with either the complicity of the state or in a 'failed state' situation where the rule of law has disintegrated. Certain characteristics at the level of the state will greatly increase the likelihood of atrocity, including habituation to

illegal violence among the armed forces or police, prevailing impunity for human rights violations, official tolerance or encouragement of hate speech against particular groups, and in extreme cases, prior experience of mass killing. Egregious episodes of mass killing targeted principally at one group have also seen other groups deliberately decimated or destroyed.

However, some groups may experience higher levels of discrimination and be at greater risk than others in any given state. Minority Rights Group International has identified those groups in each state which we believe to be under most threat. (This does not mean that other groups or indeed the general population may not also be at some risk.) It should be noted that although these groups are most often minorities, in some cases ethnic or religious majorities will also be at risk and in relevant cases are therefore also listed in the table. In some cases, all the groups in the country are at risk of ethnic or sectarian killing.

The overall measure is based on a basket of ten indicators. These include indicators of democracy or good governance from the World Bank; conflict data from the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research and the Center for Systemic Peace; data on the flight of refugees, internally displaced persons and other populations of concern from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; indicators of group division or elite factionalization from the Fund for Peace and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; the US State Failure Task Force data on prior genocides and politicides; and the country credit risk classification published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (as a proxy for trade openness). For citations and further information, see the notes to the table. For a fuller discussion of the methodology, see *State of the World's Minorities 2006*.

Based on current indicators from authoritative sources, *Peoples under Threat* seeks to identify those groups or peoples most under threat in 2015. ■

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**Case study** by *Mark Lattimer*  
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# Aleppo, Syria

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The general threat to civilian populations increases according to a known set of conflict- and governance-related indicators, but within the city environment risk levels are also affected by patterns of settlement and the structure of the urban space.

Aleppo is Syria's largest city and boasts a history of continuous civilization and cultural diversity going back thousands of years. Many Armenians who fled the Ottoman genocide during the First World War settled in Aleppo. By the turn of the last century, Sunni Arabs lived side by side with communities of Kurds, Christians, Alawis and Druze (although nearly all Syria's Jewish population had left in the decades following independence). When Aleppo was named Islamic cultural capital of the year in 2006 by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a Syrian official statement praised the city as 'an example of coexistence among religions, communities and races'.

Neighbourhoods of central Aleppo around the Citadel display a typical maze of unplanned and often very narrow streets, with high population density. At the start of the battle for Aleppo in July 2012, this helped the eastern part of the city fall quickly under rebel control and made it hard for government forces to retake. Heavy civilian casualties have been recorded in the attempt, including thousands killed by indiscriminate government shelling.

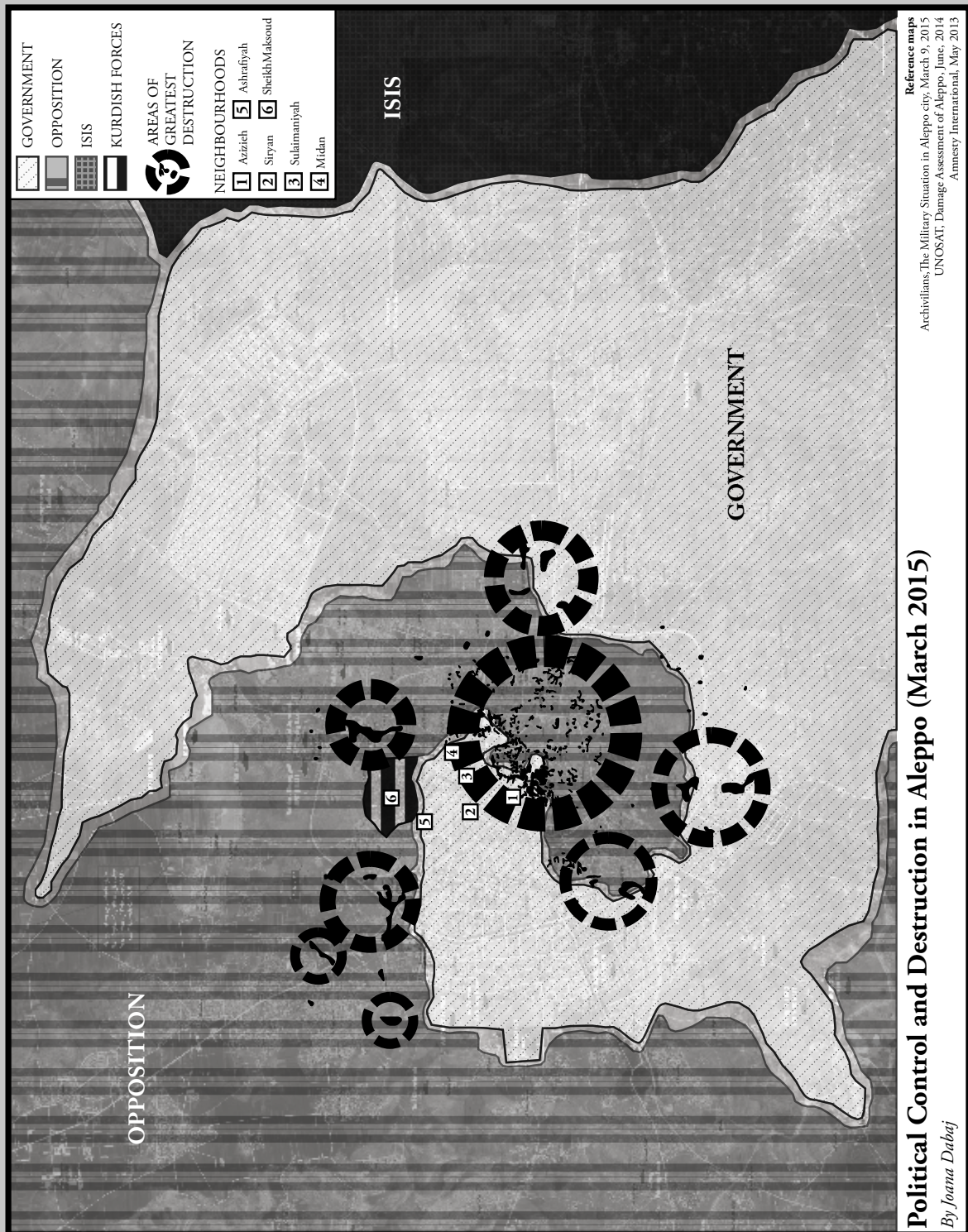
The situation as at March 2015 is shown in the map. Territory still controlled by the government extends in the shape of a claw from the south into central Aleppo, but is surrounded by opposition-held areas. The zones of greatest destruction are focused on the current and former frontlines and, in particular, the opposition strongholds of east-central Aleppo with mostly Sunni Arab neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, ISIS threatens along a separate wide front further east.

The precarious situation of the predominantly

Christian neighbourhoods of Azizieh, Siryan, Sulaimaniyah and Midan (numbered 1–4 on the map) can readily be appreciated from the geography. A relatively small change in the frontline could have catastrophic effects for the communities living there. Although there are Christian individuals who are prominent in both the Syrian government and in the opposition, Christians often state that they have not taken sides in the conflict. Nevertheless, their remaining communities in Syria, including in Aleppo, are now almost all located in government- or Kurdish-held areas. This has not protected them from bombings. But what the Christians fear most is the advance of ISIS.

The Kurdish enclave of Sheikh Maksoud is controlled by Kurdish forces. It has avoided being the target of government shelling and a truce has also been agreed with the opposition. This has led the neighbourhood to become a haven for thousands of IDPs, including Arabs from eastern Aleppo as well as Kurds. Humanitarian conditions within Sheikh Maksoud are difficult, however.

If political control in Aleppo city is finely balanced, it is also highly unstable. Given recent events, almost any change will result in threats to the population. In April 2015, rebel shelling of Sulaimaniyah led to dozens of reported deaths. The extremist group Jabhat al-Nusra attempted an incursion in Sheikh Maksoud in May. And in June, the UN special envoy for Syria condemned the death of at least 70 civilians from barrel bombs dropped by government helicopters in Aleppo, including on a market in the eastern neighbourhood of Al Shaar. ■



**Political Control and Destruction in Aleppo (March 2015)**

*By Joana Daboj*



Country	Group	Conflict indicators		
		A. Self-determination conflicts	B. Major armed conflict	C. Prior genocide/politicide
<b>Syria</b>	Political targets, Shi'a/Alawis, Christians, Kurds, Palestinians	5	2	1
<b>Somalia</b>	Minorities incl. Bantu, Benadiri and 'caste' groups (Gaboys etc.); clan members at risk in fighting incl. Hawiye, Darod, etc.	4	2	1
<b>Sudan</b>	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Ngok Dinka, Nuba, Beja	5	2	1
<b>Afghanistan</b>	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	4	2	1
<b>Iraq</b>	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Mandaans, Yezidis, Shabak, Faili Kurds, Bahá'í, Palestinians	5	2	1
<b>Dem. Rep. of the Congo</b>	Hema and Lendu, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Batwa/Bambutu, other groups	4	2	1
<b>Pakistan</b>	Shi'a (incl. Hazara), Ahmadis, Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities; Baluchis, Mohajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	5	2	1
<b>Burma/Myanmar</b>	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	5	2	1
<b>South Sudan</b>	Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, Jie, Kachipo	0	2	1
<b>Central African Republic</b>	Muslims, Christians; Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Gula, Aka	0	2	0
<b>Yemen</b>	Zaydi Shi'a, Sunni tribes, al-Muhamasheen, Southerners	5	2	0
<b>Nigeria</b>	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	5	2	1
<b>Ethiopia</b>	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	5	1	1
<b>Israel/ Palestine</b>	Palestinians in Gaza/West Bank, Israeli Palestinians, Bedouin	5	2	0
<b>Iran</b>	Arabs, Azeris, Bahá'ís, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomen	4	0	1
<b>Russian Federation</b>	Chechens, Ingush and others in North Caucasus; indigenous northern peoples, Roma, Jews	5	2	1
<b>Libya</b>	Black Libyans, Sub-Saharan migrants, Tebu, Berbers	2	2	0
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	Ndebele, Europeans, political/social targets	2	0	1
<b>Mali</b>	Tuareg, Arabs, Maure, and others in the north	4	2	0
<b>Egypt</b>	Copts, Shi'a, Bahá'í; Nubians, Bedouin	5	1	0
<b>Ukraine</b>	Tatars, Krymchak and Karaites in Crimea; Russians, Hungarians, Moldovans and other national minorities	5	2	0



Indicators of population flight/group division			Democracy/governance indicators				Total
D. Flight of refugees and IDPs	E. Legacy of vengeance – group grievance	F. Rise of factionalized elites	G. Voice and accountability	H. Political stability	I. Rule of law	J. OECD country risk classification	
0.4370	10.0	9.6	-1.773	-2.685	-1.477	7	24.95
0.2104	9.3	10.0	-2.190	-2.748	-2.443	7	23.58
0.0757	9.9	10.0	-1.775	-2.201	-1.252	7	20.68
0.1178	8.7	9.4	-1.288	-2.474	-1.671	7	20.50
0.0698	10.0	9.6	-1.096	-1.989	-1.471	7	19.90
0.0497	9.6	9.5	-1.467	-2.230	-1.549	7	19.80
0.0078	10.0	9.5	-0.831	-2.595	-0.879	7	19.01
0.0168	9.3	8.6	-1.497	-1.155	-1.220	7	18.40
0.1557	10.0	10.0	-1.407	-1.759	-1.440	7	18.37
0.2762	9.5	9.7	-1.529	-2.146	-1.834	7	18.35
0.0136	9.3	9.4	-1.353	-2.349	-1.159	7	17.49
0.0004	9.8	9.5	-0.744	-2.079	-1.158	5	17.33
0.0013	8.9	8.7	-1.293	-1.394	-0.622	7	16.38
0.0086	9.7	8.1	-0.869	-1.900	-0.440	7	15.63
0.0013	8.8	9.4	-1.600	-1.269	-0.983	7	15.28
0.0007	8.5	8.1	-1.013	-0.750	-0.784	4	14.82
0.0131	7.5	8.1	-0.996	-1.810	-1.363	7	14.78
0.0084	8.1	10.0	-1.386	-0.690	-1.568	7	14.12
0.0272	7.5	4.9	-0.302	-1.685	-0.750	7	13.95
0.0003	8.6	9.4	-1.040	-1.620	-0.602	6	13.76
0.0016	6.4	8.0	-0.326	-0.758	-0.825	7	13.70

Country	Group	Conflict indicators		
		A. Self-determination conflicts	B. Major armed conflict	C. Prior genocide/politicide
<b>Philippines</b>	Indigenous peoples, Moros (Muslims), Chinese	5	2	1
<b>Cote d'Ivoire</b>	Northern Mande (Dioula), Senoufo, Bete, newly-settled groups	3	1	0
<b>Burundi</b>	Hutu, Tutsi, Batwa	0	0	1
<b>Lebanon</b>	Druze, Maronite Christians, Palestinians, Shi'a, Sunnis	2	1	0
<b>Equatorial Guinea</b>	Bubi, Annobon Islanders	1	0	1
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	Tamils, Muslims	4	0	1
<b>Chad</b>	'Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	2	0	0
<b>China</b>	Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols, Hui, religious minorities	5	1	1
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	Uzbeks, Russians	2	1	0
<b>Thailand</b>	Chinese, Malay-Muslims, Northern Hill Tribes	5	2	0
<b>Eritrea</b>	Afars, Saho, Tigre, religious minorities	0	0	0
<b>Colombia</b>	Political/social targets, Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples	2	2	0
<b>Algeria</b>	Berbers, Saharawi	2	1	1
<b>Uganda</b>	Acholi, Karamojong, Basongora, Batwa	2	0	1
<b>Angola</b>	Bakongo, Cabindans, Ovimbundu, Pastoralists, San and Kwisi	2	0	1
<b>Tajikistan</b>	Uzbeks, Pamiris, Russians	1	0	0
<b>Kenya</b>	Borana, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luyha, Luo, Muslims, Turkana, Endorois, Masai, Ogiek, other indigenous groups	2	1	0
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Croats, Bosniac Muslims, Serbs, Roma	2	0	1
<b>Kosovo</b>	Serbs, Roma/Ashkali/Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani	4	0	0
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Ahmadis, Hindus, other religious minorities; Chittagong Hill Tribes	3	0	0
<b>Guinea</b>	Fulani (Peul), Malinke	0	0	0
<b>Guinea Bissau</b>	Balanta, Fula (Fulani), Manjaco, Mandinga, Papel, Ejamat (Felupe), Jola (Diola), Susu, Cape Verdeans	0	0	0
<b>North Korea</b>	Political/social targets, religious minorities	0	0	0
<b>Rwanda</b>	Hutu, Tutsi, Batwa	0	0	1
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	Armenians	4	0	0
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	Tajiks, Islamic political groups, religious minorities, Karakalpaks, Russians	1	0	0
<b>Venezuela</b>	Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants	0	0	0

Indicators of population flight/group division			Democracy/governance indicators				Total
D. Flight of refugees and IDPs	E. Legacy of vengeance – group grievance	F. Rise of factionalized elites	G. Voice and accountability	H. Political stability	I. Rule of law	J. OECD country risk classification	
0.0065	8.3	8.0	-0.012	-1.059	-0.427	3	13.16
0.0057	9.0	9.4	-0.768	-1.051	-0.932	7	13.00
0.0317	8.1	7.9	-0.965	-1.298	-1.062	7	12.68
0.0014	8.9	9.3	-0.441	-1.695	-0.776	7	12.58
0.0003	6.6	8.2	-1.962	0.081	-1.318	7	12.54
0.0085	9.3	9.4	-0.619	-0.606	-0.271	6	12.45
0.0054	8.5	9.8	-1.384	-1.101	-1.372	7	12.34
0.0002	8.6	7.2	-1.577	-0.546	-0.456	2	12.21
0.0007	8.2	8.0	-0.565	-0.910	-1.139	7	11.95
0.0000	8.0	9.5	-0.432	-1.322	-0.133	3	11.68
0.0547	6.4	8.1	-2.149	-0.776	-1.389	7	11.66
0.1249	7.7	7.7	-0.116	-1.269	-0.449	4	11.65
0.0002	7.9	7.3	-0.891	-1.170	-0.681	3	11.40
0.0016	8.3	8.9	-0.549	-0.841	-0.357	6	11.38
0.0039	7.1	7.2	-1.120	-0.372	-1.280	5	11.32
0.0002	7.0	8.4	-1.475	-1.137	-1.239	7	11.30
0.0002	9.3	9.3	-0.242	-1.148	-0.744	6	11.24
0.0429	7.4	8.7	-0.160	-0.366	-0.165	7	11.18
0.0311	8.0	8.0	-0.270	-0.985	-0.570	7	11.18
0.0002	8.7	9.3	-0.423	-1.613	-0.832	6	11.12
0.0023	8.4	9.6	-1.065	-1.226	-1.421	7	11.11
0.0015	6.0	9.6	-1.414	-0.932	-1.623	7	10.96
0.0001	6.6	8.2	-2.192	-0.530	-1.286	7	10.85
0.0082	8.5	8.2	-1.179	-0.084	-0.148	7	10.65
0.0653	6.7	7.9	-1.354	-0.410	-0.674	5	10.65
0.0002	7.4	8.8	-1.944	-0.549	-1.204	6	10.65
0.0004	6.8	7.7	-0.953	-1.077	-1.790	7	10.62

Country	Group	Conflict indicators		
		A. Self-determination conflicts	B. Major armed conflict	C. Prior genocide/politicide
Djibouti	Afars	3	0	0
Cambodia	Cham, Vietnamese, indigenous hill tribes (Khmer Leou)	0	0	1
Niger	Djerema-songhai, Hausa, Tuaregs	2	0	0
Turkey	Kurds, Alevis, Roma, Armenians and other Christians	5	1	0
Cameroon	'Westerners', Southerners	2	0	0
India	Assamese, Bodos, Nagas, Tripuras, other Adivasis; Kashmiris, Sikhs, Muslims, Dalits	5	2	0
Nepal	Madheshis (Terai), Dalits, Janajati, linguistic minorities	2	0	0
Laos	Hmong, other highland peoples	2	0	0
Mauritania	Haratins ('Black Moors'), Kewri	0	0	0
Vietnam	Montagnards (Degar), other highland peoples, religious minorities	2	0	1
Haiti	Political/social targets	0	0	0
Serbia	Bosniaks, Ethnic Albanians, Croats, Roma	2	0	1
Georgia	Adzhars, Abkhazians, South Ossetians	4	0	0
Turkmenistan	Uzbeks, Russians, Kazakhs, religious minorities	0	0	0
Belarus	Poles	0	0	0
Indonesia	Acehnese, Chinese, Dayaks, Madurese, Papuans, religious minorities	4	0	1
Moldova	Trans-Dniester Slavs	4	0	0
Congo (Rep.)	Lari, M'Boshi, Aka	1	0	0
Guatemala	Indigenous peoples, Garifuna	0	0	1
Togo	Ewe, Kabre	0	0	0
Madagascar	Côtier, Merina, Indians/Pakistanis	0	0	0
Ecuador	Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples	2	0	0

## Notes to Table

Sources of the indicators are as follows:

- *Conflict indicators:* The base data used was Monty G Marshall, 'Major Episodes of Political Violence 1946–2014' (Center for Systemic Peace, 2015) and, for self-determination conflicts, Monty G Marshall and Ted R Gurr, 'Peace and Conflict 2005' (CIDCM, University of Maryland, 2005) updated for 2014–5 using figures from Center for Systemic Peace, MRG and the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (Conflict Barometer 2014, Heidelberg, HIIK, 2015).
- Self-determination/autonomy conflicts in 2015 were ranked on a scale of 0–5 as follows: 5=ongoing armed conflict; 4=contained armed conflict; 3=settled armed conflict; 2=militant politics; 1=conventional politics. Major armed conflicts were classified as 2=ongoing in late 2014; 1=emerging from conflict since 2010 or ongoing conflict with deaths under 1,000.
- *Prior genocide or politicide:* Harff, US Political Instability Task Force (formerly State Failure Task Force). 1=one or more episodes since 1945, updated using MRG data.
- *Indicators of Flight and Group Division:* Data for the flight of refugees and IDPs comes from UN High Commissioner for Refugees, total population

Indicators of population flight/group division			Democracy/governance indicators				Total
D. Flight of refugees and IDPs	E. Legacy of vengeance – group grievance	F. Rise of factionalized elites	G. Voice and accountability	H. Political stability	I. Rule of law	J. OECD country risk classification	
0.0013	6.4	7.6	-1.445	-0.119	-0.756	7	10.54
0.0009	7.3	8.6	-0.980	-0.156	-0.990	6	10.53
0.0020	7.5	8.9	-0.355	-1.296	-0.745	7	10.53
0.0010	9.0	7.3	-0.263	-1.195	0.080	4	10.36
0.0007	7.8	9.5	-1.042	-0.518	-1.046	6	10.25
0.0000	7.8	6.8	0.412	-1.187	-0.099	3	10.19
0.0004	9.0	8.3	-0.568	-1.141	-0.756	6	10.11
0.0011	6.0	8.3	-1.588	0.065	-0.769	7	10.06
0.0095	7.2	8.5	-0.931	-1.017	-0.947	7	9.98
0.0034	6.0	6.9	-1.336	0.224	-0.487	5	9.91
0.0075	7.0	9.1	-0.790	-0.663	-1.299	7	9.88
0.0311	8.0	8.0	0.286	-0.095	-0.343	6	9.88
0.0628	8.0	9.5	0.099	-0.464	-0.025	6	9.68
0.0002	6.9	7.8	-2.171	0.175	-1.360	6	9.56
0.0006	7.1	8.3	-1.539	-0.025	-0.889	7	9.40
0.0001	7.6	7.0	0.003	-0.500	-0.554	3	9.36
0.0009	6.2	7.8	-0.106	-0.034	-0.410	7	9.27
0.0033	6.3	6.7	-1.125	-0.466	-1.092	6	9.13
0.0010	7.6	6.0	-0.404	-0.695	-1.112	4	8.99
0.0017	4.8	7.6	-0.979	-0.427	-1.009	7	8.87
0.0000	4.9	7.6	-0.780	-0.714	-0.897	7	8.85
0.0002	7.5	8.2	-0.286	-0.195	-0.950	6	8.80

of concern by country of origin, Mid-Year Trends 2014, as a proportion of total country population at the same date (population figures from UN DESA). Group division indicators are from the Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014.

- *Democracy/Governance Indicators*: Annual Governance Indicators, World Bank, 2014.
- *OECD country risk classification*: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 'Country Risk Classifications of the Participants to the Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits', January 2015.

Data for Kosovo include some indicators relating to Serbia. Where separate indicators are available for Israel and Palestine, the latter have been used.

Indicators were rebased as necessary to give an approximate equal weighting to the five categories above, with the exception of the prior geno-/politicide indicator. As a dichotomous variable this received a lesser weighting to avoid too great a distortion to the final ranking. Resulting values were then summed.

The full formula is:

$$(A/2) + (B \times 1.25) + (C \times 2) + (D \times 10) + (E + F)/6 + (G + H + I)/-1 + (J \times 0.625)$$



# Reference

# Who are minorities?

Minorities of concern to MRG are disadvantaged ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups who are smaller in number than the rest of the population and who may wish to maintain and develop their identity. MRG also works with indigenous peoples.

Other groups who may suffer discrimination are of concern to MRG, which condemns discrimination on any ground. However, the specific mission of MRG is to secure the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples around the world and to improve cooperation between communities.

## Selected abbreviations

African Charter – African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights

ACHPR – African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights

ACHR – American Convention on Human Rights

AU – African Union

CERD – Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

CESCR – Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CSO – Civil society organizations

DRD – Declaration on the Right to Development

ECHR – European Convention on Human Rights

ECRI – European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

ECtHR – European Court of Human Rights

FCNM – Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities

FPIC – free, prior and informed consent

HRW – Human Rights Watch

IACHR – Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

IACtHR – Inter-American Court of Human Rights

ICC – International Criminal Court

ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICERD – International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

IDMC – Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

IDPs – Internally displaced persons

NGO – Non-Government Organization

OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNDRIP – UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

UNEP – UN Environmental Programme

UNESCO – UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA – UN Population Fund

UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – UN Children’s Fund

WHO – World Health Organization

# Contributors

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**Rita Izsák** (*Foreword*) is the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues. Prior to this, she worked with a variety of minority and human rights organizations in various European countries, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Somalia. She served as Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration of Hungary. She was President and CEO of the Tom Lantos Institute (TLI) in Budapest, Hungary. Rita holds a Masters in Law diploma from the Péter Pázmány Catholic University, Hungary.

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# Minority Rights Group International

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities.

Our activities are focused on international advocacy, training, publishing and outreach. We are guided by the needs expressed by our worldwide partner network of organizations which represent minority and indigenous peoples.

MRG works with over 150 organizations in nearly 50 countries. Our governing Council, which meets twice a year, has members from nine different countries. MRG has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), observer status with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, and is registered with the Organization of American States.

MRG is registered as a charity and a company limited by guarantee under English law. Registered charity no. 282305, limited company no. 1544957.

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Visit our website for news, publications and more information about MRG's work:  
[www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org)

### *Minority Voices Newsroom*

An online news portal that allows minority and indigenous communities to upload multimedia content and share their stories:  
[www.minorityvoices.org](http://www.minorityvoices.org)

### *Peoples under Threat*

MRG's annual ranking showing countries most at risk of mass killing is now available as an online map:  
[www.peoplesunderthreat.org](http://www.peoplesunderthreat.org)

### *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*

The internet's leading information resource on minorities around the globe:  
[www.minorityrights.org/Directory](http://www.minorityrights.org/Directory)