Middle East and North Africa

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LIBYA

LEBANON

SYRIA

ISRAEL/OT/
Palestinian Authority

EGYPT

JORDAN

IRAQ

KUWAIT

IRAN

SAUDI ARABIA

BAHRAIN

QATAR

U.A.E .

OMAN

YEMEN

A R A B I A N

S E A

The wave of revolts in the Middle East and North Africa since 2011 has brought both opportunities and insecurities for minorities in the region. In the wake of these uprisings, 2013 saw minorities acquire new civil, political and cultural rights in some countries. But positive developments were largely counterbalanced by the persistence of deep-rooted patterns of discrimination, often encouraged by leaders in power in order to maintain the political and social status quo. Furthermore, 2013 was characterized by a deterioration in the security situation in a number of countries, putting members of marginalized minorities at particular risk.

At a domestic level, as constitutional processes were going forward, tensions between competing concerns and aspirations for the future – *Sharia*-based and secular politics, federal and unitarian systems, the rights of minorities and fears of secession – frequently erupted into violence. Regional dynamics also played an important role in the increasing insecurity faced by minorities. In particular, the intensification of the armed conflict in Syria and its simplistic narrative of a Shi'a–Sunni divide was reinforced by the growing involvement of regional actors along sectarian lines. This has also paved the way for an escalation of religious tensions throughout the region.

The many religious and ethnic minorities in the region have found themselves at the heart of these developments. In the context of often bitter power struggles, religious and ethnic identities have been exploited by different stakeholders to serve their own political interests. Against this backdrop, the hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric disseminated through *fatwas*, speeches, sermons, mass media and online are both a cause and a reflection of growing sectarian tensions. In the contexts of civil wars or protracted insecurity, this rhetoric often amounted to incitement to violence against minorities.

Nevertheless, counter-initiatives throughout the region, either as a result of official government policy or promoted by media, NGOs and youth activists, are also indicative of an increasing awareness of the problems of hate speech and hate crimes, and the urgency of addressing incidents to prevent a wider outbreak of conflict. In the current context of social and political transformation, the rights of minorities and their protection from intimidation or attacks will be fundamental tests of the ability of governments to ensure peaceful coexistence and respect for diversity – both fundamental preconditions for lasting stability in the region.

Egypt

The year 2013 was a pivotal one for Egypt. The ousting of President Mohamed Morsi by the army in July marked a turning point for the country, with significant implications for the country's religious minorities. After taking power, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) introduced in December a new draft Constitution containing a number of new legal guarantees for minorities. At the same time, the anger of Morsi supporters after his ousting, reinforced by the army's violent crackdown on their protests, resulted in an escalation of attacks against Christian Copts, Egypt's largest minority, for their perceived support of the military's actions.

Incidents of sectarian violence against Christians have been a recurring pattern in Egypt for years. Their intensity and frequency have been on the rise, however, since the fall of former President Mubarak following the January 2011 uprising. Despite some signs of political progress, repeated attacks against Copts, Shi'a and Bahá'i minority members occurred under Morsi. This included, in one of the most violent episodes, an outbreak of violence against Copts in April in the village of Al-Khosous, followed by a related incident shortly afterwards outside St Mark's Cathedral in Cairo. These incidents left a number of people dead and over 80 injured. The attack on the cathedral was particularly significant as it is the seat of Coptic Pope Tawadros II; police were accused of standing by as assailants attacked those inside the compound. The congregation had gathered to mourn the five Copts who had died the weekend before in Al-Khosous; a Muslim also died in the earlier incident.

The sectarian violence further intensified after the deposing of Mohamed Morsi. Through inflammatory speeches, flyers and online postings, Muslim Brotherhood supporters alleged

Above: Coptic Christians in Egypt walk around a damaged church. *Louafi Larbi/REUTERS.*

that Copts had agitated for Morsi's removal and participated actively in the subsequent crackdown. Morsi's Freedom and Justice Party posted a message on its Facebook page warning: 'Christians in Egypt … deserve these attacks on churches and their institutions. For every action, [there is] a reaction.' As a result, the second half of the year saw repeated attacks against priests, abductions of Copts (including women and children) and frequent assaults on Coptic churches, houses and shops. Instances of local imams inciting violence against Coptic inhabitants were also reported. The violence peaked in August, following the dispersal of sit-ins held by pro-Morsi supporters. Mobs then attacked at least 42 churches, as well as Coptic houses, schools and associations, resulting in heavy damage. Reports of the death toll varied from four to seven people killed.

The Coptic minority was not the only victim of sectarian violence. Egyptian Shi'a were also targeted during the year by both Salafi movements and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Anti-Shi'a hatred was aggravated by the increasingly divisive conflict in Syria, as well as frequent inflammatory statements from prominent Sunni clerics and opinion-leaders presenting Shi'a as a threat to Sunni populations. In June, a large crowd violently attacked a group of Shi'a, including women and children, privately celebrating a religious ceremony in the village of Abu Mussalam. Though four men were killed and other Shi'a houses were also set on fire, the police allegedly failed to take action to halt the attacks. The incident reportedly followed weeks of violent rhetoric by Salafi preachers in local mosques. Sufi Muslims have also been targeted, with more than 100 attacks against Sufi places of worship reported since 2011.

The Egyptian state's response to this sectarian violence has been inadequate on a number of levels. Besides not taking sufficient action to prevent or curb violence against minorities, authorities have often failed to hold perpetrators of sectarian violence to account and have

favoured 'reconciliation sessions' over the prosecution of offenders and reparation. This has helped create a climate of impunity. Finally, the authorities have failed to prevent these attacks by tackling the root causes of this violence, including the country's discriminatory legislation, and the use of hate speech to incite violence. A report issued by MRG in December 2013 highlights the prevalence of hate speech against religious minorities in the media and political rhetoric. Minority representatives have also denounced the failure of the state to curb anti-Shi'a and anti-Christian sermons in mosques. President Morsi himself failed to condemn violent and hateful rhetoric used by his supporters during a rally he attended in June.

Article 53 of Egypt's new Constitution, presented in December 2013 and passed in January 2014, requires that 'incitement to hate' be punishable by law. However, its effectiveness will depend on subsequent legislation and whether it is specifically used as a basis for tackling hate speech against religious minorities. Indeed, a provision on 'incitement to hatred' already exists in the Penal Code, but has in the past been used to repress religious defamation. A 2013 report from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights shows that this law has been widely used in Egypt, including in 2013, to arrest, detain and prosecute members of religious minorities. The 2014 Constitution also includes other potential improvements for minorities. While *Sharia* remains 'the main source of legislation', the responsibility for its interpretation shifts from Al-Azhar, the Sunni religious institution, to the secular Supreme Constitutional Court. Article 235 provides that the parliament pass a law governing church building and renovation, potentially putting an end to long-standing local restrictions on Christian worship.

Nevertheless, the new Constitution has retained some of the discriminatory aspects of its predecessor. First, the protection of religious freedoms is restricted to the 'heavenly religions', namely Islam, Judaism and Christianity, but continues to exclude other minorities such as those of the Bahá'i faith. The drafting committee expressly rejected proposals to expand the scope of rights granted to all 'non-Muslim' groups. In addition, despite the change in Constitution, other discriminatory aspects of Egyptian law – such as the prohibition of public worship for Shi'a and the non-recognition of Bahá'is as a religious group – remain in place. This has helped perpetuate the vulnerability of religious minorities in the country. Bahá'is, for example, continue to face difficulties in obtaining identity cards. As a result, they may be barred from setting up a bank account, registering in a school and enjoying other basic rights.

More fundamentally, the entrenched discrimination that minorities face, as well as the role that official policies play in its facilitation, is still largely denied by authorities. This is made worse by the frequent failure of Egyptian media to provide a clear-sighted analysis of the causes of sectarian violence. Constitutional protections are also relatively ineffective without the commitment of the government, security forces and judiciary.

Iraq

The year 2013 was the deadliest in Iraq since 2007, claiming the lives of between 7,800 and 9,500 civilians. The Iraqi population has been increasingly targeted in recent years, with more attacks aimed at recreational areas and intended to spread terror. Minorities have continued to pay a particularly heavy price in this context. While Kurdish, Shi'a and Sunni communities have developed their own armed groups as a means of self-defence, marginalized minorities such as black Iraqis, Christians, Sabian Mandaeans, Shabaks, Turkmen and Yezidis have found themselves with little effective protection in this deteriorating security environment.

Numerous factors, both internal and external, have contributed to this escalating violence. The sizable Sunni population has felt marginalized by the Shi'a-dominated government; such sentiments led to a series of protests beginning in December 2012. In April 2013, a sit-in held in Haweeja was violently stormed, allegedly on the orders of senior government officials, leaving dozens dead. The crackdown sparked other deadly clashes in Sunni strongholds, bringing the total death toll to more than 170, and exacerbating the Sunni population's resentment. Tensions escalated during the year, culminating

in December with the arrest of prominent Sunni politician Ahmed al-Alwani on charges of terrorism and the decision the same month to raid one of the main Sunni protest camps in Ramadi; both incidents sparked fresh violence.

The escalation of the conflict in Syria also played an important role in fuelling sectarian tensions and reinvigorating Sunni and Shi'a militias, including al-Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq, which merged with its Syrian counterpart in April to become the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). The head of the UN Mission in Iraq noted in July that 'the battlefields are merging. [The] Syrian conflict is not only spilling over into Iraq. Instead, the conflict has spread to Iraq, as Iraqis are reportedly taking arms against each other in Syria, and in Iraq.'

In this context, members of smaller minorities have been particularly targeted for a variety of reasons. First, rebel groups such as ISIS have conducted attacks on civilian targets with a view to inciting sectarian hatred and undermining the government's ability to maintain basic security in the country. Smaller minorities often constitute 'soft targets', as they lack wider political support and do not have their own militias, meaning attacks against them are often met with impunity, despite verbal condemnations from authorities. For example, the Sabian Mandaeans, a Gnostic religious minority who are forbidden by the pacifist principles of their faith to carry weapons, suffered a high number of kidnappings, murders, death threats and forced conversions, as well as attempts to kill their community leaders. Black Iraqis, living mainly around Basra, also faced security challenges during the year. They have been subjected to a series of kidnappings and murders, including the assassination of community leader Jalal Diab in April.

Another factor is that most minority groups are concentrated in strategic areas such as Baghdad or the oil-rich regions of Mosul, Kirkuk and the Ninewa Plains, where control is disputed between different factions. In these areas, religious and ethnic minorities have been pressured by Arab or Kurdish political groups. Yezidis and Kaka'i, two communities living mainly in the province of Ninewa and around Kirkuk respectively, reported having been subjected to threats and intimidation for their refusal to self-identify as Kurds. The

Above: Yezidi man in Iraq.
Chris Chapman/MRG.

Turkmen minority, the third main ethnic group, living mainly around Kirkuk, also reported cases of land confiscation by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and ongoing policies of 'Kurdification'.

Nevertheless, religious minorities are also targeted for ideological reasons, with fundamentalist groups such as ISIS aiming to bring an end to Iraq's religious diversity and to establish a Sunni caliphate in the region. Both Christians and Yezidis are frequently associated collectively with the West and attacked as a result. Throughout 2013, following Shi'a Ayatollah al-Baghdadi'a *fatwa* at the end of the previous year requiring Christians in the country to either convert to Islam or face death, Christian neighbourhoods in Mosul and Baghdad were subjected to targeted attacks. The violence peaked on Christmas Day with explosions in several Christian areas of Baghdad, killing dozens. Kidnappings and intimidation to force Christian families to leave Iraq have also been reported, with many fleeing to the Kurdish region or becoming refugees in neighbouring countries. Yezidis were also targeted by Sunni extremist groups, including a number of attacks on Yezidi students attending Mosul University. By year's end, approximately 2,000 Yezidi students had stopped attending their classes at the university. Abductions of Yezidi women and girls continued to be reported; these led to protests by Yezidi diaspora communities during the year.

The Turkmen community suffered deadly attacks by Sunni Islamist groups. During 2013, bomb attacks in Turkmen residential areas killed or injured hundreds of civilians. One attack occurred near Tuz Khurmatu in June, when two suicide bombers struck against a Turkmen protest demanding increased protection for their community. The UN estimated that dozens were killed. Likewise, Shabaks, a small ethnic minority which does not define itself as either Arab or Kurd, have been victimized because of their presence in disputed territory in and around Mosul. In 2013, suicide bombs exploded during a funeral and in a Shabak village hundreds of death threats were reportedly sent to encourage Shabaks to move away.

Minority women and girls are among the most vulnerable in this climate of insecurity.

Minority women have been specifically targeted for not conforming to strict Islamic or traditional norms and have become vulnerable to abductions characterized by a pattern of sexual violence. Mental health issues also continued to be reported. For instance, according to one report, over 30 suicides had occurred in the Yezidi community of the Ba'shiqah sub-district near Mosul by November; 64 per cent of the cases involved women. Activists noted that actual figures are likely to be higher as family members refrain from reporting the real cause of death, which in some cases may be linked to 'honour' crimes.

As in previous years the repeated attacks, creating a climate of fear and intimidation, also led members of minority communities to flee the country en masse or move to the Kurdish region, where security is perceived to be greater. In September, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees noted that the recent spate of bombings and the increased sectarian tensions had led to 5,000 people being displaced during a short period of time. According to the agency, the escalation in violence in 2013 uprooted nearly 10,000 people during the year. This new wave of displacement added to the continued reshaping of Iraq's ethnic-religious map.

The rich religious diversity of Iraq itself is at risk. For a few years, Iraq has consistently ranked among the countries where minority groups are most under threat. Smaller communities such as the Sabian Mandaeans are facing a risk of total disappearance in Iraq. With more than 90 per cent of the population having died or fled the country since 2003, community leader Sattar Hillo noted that fewer than 10,000 Sabian Mandaeans remained in the country by the end of 2013.

Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory

The legislative elections held in January led to the formation of a coalition government in March, under the renewed leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This new government promoted a number of initiatives that have had a negative impact on the rights of the Arab and Bedouin minorities living in Israel and in the territories under its control.

First, the new government accelerated the settlement process in the West Bank, the eviction of non-Jewish communities from their lands and

The dangers of living as an undocumented migrant in Morocco

In August 2013 Ismaila Faye, a 31-year-old Senegalese, was stabbed to death on a bus after he refused to vacate his seat next to a Moroccan woman. The murder, widely condemned as an act of racism by the Senegalese community and local rights groups, is just one example of an endemic problem in the country: the mistreatment of its sub-Saharan population. Since the 1990s, Morocco has become an increasingly popular transit country for migrants seeking a better life in Europe. But while poverty, political turmoil, civil conflict and persecution continue to push large numbers of sub-Saharans to leave their countries, strict European border controls and the high costs of migration have meant that in practice many remain in Morocco for years.

The marginalization of undocumented migrants, who receive no support or official recognition from the government, not only undermines their access to housing, employment and basic services, but also places them outside the formal justice system. In fact, undocumented migrants face widespread discrimination at all levels of society – including from the police and government officials. Local attitudes to sub-Saharan migrants are often characterized by deep-rooted prejudice and stereotypes, associating migrants with terrorism, AIDS and criminality. These negative representations have also been reinforced by the media.

Due to their clandestine status, undocumented migrants are not only underpaid by employers and overcharged for basic necessities such as food and accommodation, they are also unable to benefit from police protection or make use of official channels of complaint. This makes them especially vulnerable. Recent research and interviews have shown that attacks and intimidation are regular events, encouraged by their lack of formal recognition in the country. In the words of a 2013 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report, 'The fact that sub-Saharan migrants are classified as "illegal" means that the majority live with the constant fear of arrest and expulsion and the ever present threat of violence, abuse and exploitation.'

This is why other sub-Saharan migrants viewed Faye's murder not as an isolated incident, but part of a broader pattern of racism and discrimination in the country. In the wake of his death, hundreds of Senegalese congregated in Rabat to protest against racism. Moroccans also went online to voice their support for the migrant community. Nevertheless, until the root issues of exclusion and 'illegality' are addressed, Morocco's sub-Saharan population will continue to live with the constant threat of violence. ∎

the destruction of their houses. During the first six months of 2013, Peace Now documented a 70 per cent surge in new constructions in settlements compared to the same period in 2012, and a boom in the issuing of tenders for new settlements. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 600 demolitions were carried out in 2013 by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank, resulting in 1,100 persons displaced – a 24 per cent increase in comparison with 2012.

Herding communities living around East Jerusalem and in the Jordan Valley have been particularly targeted by 'relocation plans' on the grounds that they do not hold titles over the land. These plans were designed without consultation with the affected communities, amounting to forced displacement, and failed to offer relocation solutions compatible with their traditional way of life. Israeli NGO B'Tselem

reported that about 60 Bedouin were evicted in August from the Tal 'Adasa area of Jerusalem; they were given ten days to leave their homes and were reportedly told they could face a fine or arrest if they did not clear the demolition debris themselves. In early 2013, the Israeli government also reactivated a previously frozen proposal, the E1 Plan, allocating land occupied by herding communities near East Jerusalem to the expansion of settlements. In February 2014, Bedouin community leaders said that 2,300 Bedouin are at risk of displacement on account of the E1 Plan.

Furthermore, in June the Knesset approved the Prawer–Begin Plan on first reading. If voted into law, the Plan, denounced by rights groups and politicians from across the political spectrum, would have resulted in the forced displacement of up to 70,000 Bedouin living in unrecognized villages in the Negev desert (*Naqab* in Arabic) in the south of Israel. The Plan had been drawn up without adequate consultation with affected Bedouin communities. It would have been the largest displacement of Palestinians by the Israeli authorities in decades. However, the proposal was shelved by the government after it lost parliamentary support.

Two initiatives advanced in 2013 threatened to diminish the ability of minorities to voice their concerns and defend their rights. A bill introduced in May and finally adopted in March 2014 raises the electoral threshold for

representation at the Knesset from 2 per cent to 3.25 per cent, a development that could jeopardize the political participation of minority Arab and Ultra-Orthodox parties in parliament. Another bill, which received the government's support in December, provides for a 45 per cent tax charged on certain NGOs receiving foreign funding who campaign for the boycott of Israel, call for the prosecution of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers before international jurisdictions, or deny 'the Jewish and democratic' nature of the state of Israel. This bill is part of a wider trend in government policies towards Israeli NGOs, limiting their access to foreign funding and imposing administrative burdens in order to restrict their activities.

The state of Israel has developed a strong legislative arsenal to combat hate speech and hate crimes. Israel's Penal Code prohibits and imposes heavy sentences for acts of sedition, including *inter alia* 'the promotion of conflict and enmity between different parts of the population'. More precisely, since 2002 the law has stipulated a five-year prison term for 'a call to commit an act of violence or terror, or praise, words of approval, encouragement, support or identification with an act of violence or terror'. The Penal Code furthermore provides that a sentence should be doubled when a crime is committed 'out of a racist motive … or out of enmity toward a public because of their religion'. The application of the Israeli legislation has been extended to settlers, while the Palestinian population living in the occupied territory are subject to Military Order No. 101, which prohibits in broader terms 'attempts to influence public opinion in the region in a manner that is liable to harm public safety or public order'. The Palestinian Authority also issued a presidential decree on 'incitement' in 1998, applicable to territories under its jurisdiction in Gaza and in the West Bank.

However, there is an important gap between law and practice. This was evidenced in early 2013 by the much publicized outburst of racist and violent anti-Muslim slogans during football matches by Beitar Jerusalem fans protesting against the integration of Muslim players from

Chechnya. Nevertheless, these incidents were widely condemned by Israeli civil society, with fans appearing at matches with anti-racism banners, and initiatives such as the 'Football for All' and 'Kick Racism and Violence out of Football' campaigns.

Hate crimes by ultra-nationalist Jewish settlers targeting Christian and Muslim Arabs in the West Bank also reached unprecedented levels in 2013, through the practice of so-called 'price tags'. This consists of acts of random violence and harassment against Christian and Muslim communities, carried out by young settlers. The name 'price tag' refers to the price that should allegedly be paid by Palestinians – and also Israelis – who hinder the growth of settlements in the West Bank. In 2013, it translated into attacks carried out almost daily against Muslim and Christian Arabs. Offences included slashed tyres, torched cars, vandalized homes, houses set on fire, attacks on a Palestinian school by masked settlers, defacement of Muslim and Christian cemeteries and attacks against mosques and a Catholic monastery, as well as the burning of entire fields of olive trees. The symbolism of the targets and the intent to send a message is reinforced by the threatening graffiti that was almost systematically left behind by the offenders, promising war, forced eviction and death to Arabs, and signing with 'price tag' and Stars of David. The practice dates back to 2006 but it has nearly quadrupled over the years to peak at almost 400 documented incidents in 2013, making 'price tags' an increasingly routine occurrence.

Though these incidents are illegal and the Israeli authorities have issued public condemnations, numerous voices in civil society have raised concerns over the increase of these hate crimes and the inadequate official response to address them. 'Price tag' perpetrators were classified as members of an illegal organization in 2013, but critics wondered whether this designation goes sufficiently far. A special police unit was created in the West Bank, but it has been criticized for lacking effectiveness. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories denounced 'the almost non-existent efforts of the IDF to protect Palestinians or to investigate settler

abuses'. While some offenders have been arrested, they were very often released without charges. According to human rights organization Yesh Din, from 2005 to 2013, only 8.5 per cent of investigations against suspected incidents by Israelis against Palestinians in the West Bank resulted in the filing of an indictment.

Anti-Jewish language has also been an issue of concern. In 2013, in the context of US Secretary of State John Kerry's diplomatic offensive to bring about a peace agreement, allegations of Palestinian 'incitement' were raised repeatedly in Israeli political discourse. In the autumn of 2013, Hamas introduced new textbooks in the schools of Gaza containing questionable treatment of Jews and Israel, as well as a number of historical inaccuracies and omissions. Nevertheless, a recent report from Arab and Israeli academics, after a review of both Israeli and Palestinian textbooks, concluded that 'dehumanizing and demonizing characterizations of the other are rare in both Israeli and Palestinian schoolbooks', even if schoolbooks in both sides 'present exclusive unilateral national narratives' tending to portray 'the other as the enemy'.

Lebanon

Lebanon's social context remained fragile in 2013. The political and sectarian polarization of the conflict in Syria has had tremendous consequences on its neighbour, as Lebanon itself comprises Shi'a, Sunni, Alawite, Christian and Druze communities. However, while the civil war that tore apart the country from 1975 to 1990 has created lasting inter-communal tensions, it has also left painful memories that serve as a deterrent.

The first major destabilizing factor for the country of 4.5 million was the influx of refugees from neighbouring Syria, rising from 130,000 people in January to more than 800,000 in December. The influence played by the Syrian government in Lebanon over the past decade, and the profound divide within the country over Syria and its regime, makes this influx especially disruptive.

The open military involvement of the Hezbollah, the powerful Shi'a militia, alongside Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's troops is another source of instability. While the Lebanese

government had made efforts to follow a policy of 'dissociation' since 2011, officially abstaining from taking sides in the conflict in order to avoid being drawn into a new civil war, this policy became increasingly fraught when Hezbollah issued a public announcement of support for Assad's regime. All these developments have paved the way for increasing political polarization and outbursts of sectarian violence, at times encouraged by clerics such as Salafi Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir, who in April called for jihad against Hezbollah in Syria.

The northern city of Tripoli, while serving as the stronghold of the Lebanese Salafi movement, also hosts a significant presence of Lebanese Alawites. Historically marked by recurrent tensions between members of the Alawite and Sunni communities, the city has experienced a resurgence in violent attacks. Sectarian tensions date back to the civil war but have worsened due to the conflict in Syria. Abductions of civilians, attacks targeting clerics and sporadic armed clashes between Alawite and Sunni groups in the city had already been escalating since early 2013. In May, however, the violence in Tripoli escalated, resulting in dozens dead and hundreds wounded. In August, the bombing of two Sunni mosques in the city killed dozens of civilians on the same day. From the summer, sectarian violence also occurred in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Predominantly Shi'a areas were subjected to indiscriminate bombings by militant groups, resulting in civilian casualties.

However, faced with the risks of Syria's civil conflict spreading into Lebanon, some steps have been taken to counter the sectarian narrative between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. For example, in March, Hezbollah and Shi'a party leaders condemned the attacks of four Sunni sheikhs on the outskirts of Beirut, describing it as an attempt to fan religious tensions, while Sunni muftis called for calm and warned against incitement to division on both sides. Sunni and Shi'a clerics joined in condemning the aggression and called for calm. Christian bishops and patriarchs also denounced acts of violence.

Counter hate speech initiatives also emerged from civil society in 2013. In May, reacting to the profusion of hate speech on social media in the wake of the attacks on the Sunni sheikhs,

informal groups of young activists formed an 'anti-confessional police' to monitor and report incitement to hatred in social media. More generally, an inter-religious movement, advocating a less sectarian society, vocally opposed a proposal to revise the electoral law that could reinforce the sectarian divide in the voting process and stated their support for non-religious civil marriages.

Libya

Two years after Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was removed from power, the situation of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Libya remains uncertain. On the one hand, important progress occurred during 2013 in furthering the recognition of civil, political and cultural rights for the three main minority groups: Imazighen (Berbers; singular Amazigh), nomadic pastoralist Tuaregs living along Libya's western border, and black African Tebu, living near the town of Kufra in southern Libya. Nevertheless, the ongoing inability of the central government to establish control over the multiple armed groups operating in the country has left some minorities vulnerable to attacks.

The General National Congress (GNC), elected in July 2012, took significant measures in 2013 under Prime Minister Ali Zeidan to advance the rights of minorities. While Tebu and Tuaregs were assimilated as foreigners under Gaddafi, without citizenship or other associated rights, in April 2013 the GNC passed an anti-discrimination law that strengthened protections for ethnic minorities, and in June took the symbolic step of electing an Amazigh as its president. The following month, the GNC also passed a law prohibiting electoral candidates from speeches encouraging tribalism, regionalism or ethnic sentiments in the framework of the electoral campaign. However, rather than protecting minorities, existing provisions of the penal code prohibiting incitement to hatred have been used even since the fall of Gaddafi to arrest and prosecute individuals on grounds of blasphemy-like offenses and accusations of 'instigating division'.

After decades of marginalization, discrimination and forced Arabization, Libyan non-Arab minorities have been able to maintain and promote their distinct identities with greater freedom. In July, following protests from minority groups about the exclusion of a number of rights from the recently passed electoral law, the GNC passed a law officially recognizing the Tamazight (Berber), Tuareg and Tebu languages and enabling them to be taught in schools. The launch of media outlets in minority languages and the holding for the first time in 2013 of once forbidden Amazigh and Tebu cultural festivals, with the support of the government, confirmed the new emphasis on diversity within Libya.

One of the key demands of minority communities is for the future Constitution to formally recognize linguistic rights and other basic freedoms. A law passed in July provides for six out of a total of 60 seats to be reserved for minorities in the Constitutional Drafting Committee, to be elected in 2014, though minority representatives have objected that majority voting will still mean that their concerns will not be adequately reflected. They jointly called for the adoption of a 'consensus principle' for the drafting process to ensure their involvement in decision-making, and threatened to boycott the elections if these demands were not met. Minorities were also politically active in other areas during the year, organizing themselves into associations such as the Supreme Amazigh Council, the Tuareg Supreme Council and the Tebu National Assembly. They undertook joint political action and organized blockades of roads and pipelines in order to secure recognition of their rights in the future constitution.

Despite these moves, the security context for minority groups remained volatile. The government's weak enforcement of the rule of law, together with the presence of extremist Salafi movements and the continued hostility of sections of Libyan society towards ethnic and religious minorities, led to sporadic incidents of violence and intimidation during the year. These included the destruction of Sufi shrines and mausoleums and attacks on churches by Salafi groups at the start of the year. Priests were assaulted by gunmen and Copts accused of proselytization have been arrested and allegedly tortured by members of the militia Libya Shield.

Xenophobic rhetoric about Tebu and other minorities, a common occurrence under

Gaddafi, has lingered. There are ongoing reports of violence between Arab Zawiya tribes in the south and Tebu communities. These attacks occur against a backdrop of discrimination as well as competition for the control of the lucrative trans-Saharan smuggling routes in the region.

Similarly, the Tawerghan ethnic minority suffered violent attacks by brigades and continued to be displaced in 2013. During the Libyan revolution, government forces attacking Misrata were partly based in the town of Tawergha. Following this, Misrata rebel forces targeted Tawerghans, forcing them from the town. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), 1,300 remain detained or missing, while more than 30,000 civilians were forced into exile. During the year, Tawerghans remained in a state of protracted displacement in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, unable to return to their homes due to resistance from neighbouring communities. In November, random attacks by gunmen from Misrata left one dead and three injured. However, fewer raids were conducted in 2013 than in the year before, and some observers report that hostility towards Tawerghans is decreasing as people become better informed about their predicament through local media. The adoption by the GNC of the Law on Transitional Justice in December, providing for the establishment of a fact-finding and reconciliation commission tasked with addressing among other areas the situation of IDPs, could deliver positive improvements to their situation in future. However, in April 2014 HRW criticized the lack of implementation and noted that the commission had yet to be established.

Sub-Saharan migrants, asylum seekers and refugees also remain vulnerable to racist stereotypes and 'misguided fears of diseases', according to a report by Amnesty International. UNHCR estimates that more than 8,000 sub-Saharan asylum seekers and refugees, mainly from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan, were in the country in early 2014. In a climate of impunity and inadequate justice, they were subjected to exploitation and arbitrary arrests and beatings, with some detained indefinitely in harsh conditions in 'holding centres' because of undocumented entry to Libya.

Hate speech and Saudi Arabia's Shi'a minority

From religious freedom and education to justice and employment, Saudi Arabia's Shi'a minority has for decades suffered discrimination in almost every aspect of their lives. A key element in their marginalization, however, is the dissemination of negative stereotypes and misinformation about the group, as well as the failure of authorities to effectively address these representations. Faced with the challenge of uprisings across the region since 2011, the regime has been accused of exploiting sectarian politics to maintain its control over the population.

Hate speech and inflammatory language feature regularly in schools, mosques, national media and on the internet. In 2013, in the wake of ongoing sectarian conflict in Syria and Iraq, religious leaders in Saudi Arabia have demonized Shi'a and even issued calls for indiscriminate violence against them. Extremist clerics have also exploited platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to disseminate their message to hundreds of thousands of online followers. The spread of this material occurs against a backdrop of anti-Shi'a rhetoric, with hate speech featuring

Syria

While the unrest in Syria began in 2011 as a series of peaceful demonstrations by youth and underprivileged sections of Syrian society, calling for political change, since then the conflict has taken on an increasingly sectarian dimension. This development was initially encouraged by the Syrian authorities as a strategy to present themselves as protecting minorities against the threat of Sunni Muslim extremists. The sectarian

even in official Saudi schoolbooks.

While the state has in the past committed to removing inflammatory content from educational material, in practice hostile or misinformed representations of Shi'a and other religious groups remain in place. However, faced with mounting international pressure, Saudi Arabia responded by establishing the King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna in 2012. Furthermore, the government financed a UNESCO initiative to develop a toolkit to support the development of stereotype-free textbooks.

Nevertheless, these initiatives are based outside Saudi Arabia and do not directly address the domestic situation. And while the authorities took action during the year against the posting of comments and articles critical of the regime on Facebook and Twitter, anti-Shi'a content is still commonplace. Critics have suggested that this ambivalence is due in part to the regime's use of social division between Shi'a and Sunnis to prevent cross-sectarian demands for political change. Instead of taking comprehensive steps to address the issues affecting its minorities, Saudi Arabia has been accused of presenting Shi'a political claims as linked covertly to foreign powers.

In the long term, the only sustainable way for authorities to achieve stability in the country is to allow the Shi'a minority to participate more fully in public life. However, this will depend on whether the state is willing to commit fully to anti-discrimination not only in its international statements, but in practice. ∎

narrative has also been fuelled by a variety of commentators outside the country, ranging from mass media and influential Sunni clerics overseas to Salafi groups.

The politicization of religious identities has had severe consequences for the civilian population, particularly minorities. During the year, many were subjected to indiscriminate violence and targeted attacks because of their religious or ethnic affiliation. The year 2013 saw

a pronounced escalation of the hostilities, with the number of IDPs almost tripling over the year to reach 6.5 million, while the refugee population outside the country rose from 0.5 million to 2.3 million by year's end. In total, more than 40 per cent of the pre-conflict population have left their homes. In July, the UN estimated that more than 100,000 persons had died since the beginning of the conflict. At the start of 2014, it announced that it would not be updating its estimate due to the difficulty of accessing reliable data in the country.

Syria experienced in 2013 a 'dramatic increase in attacks on religious personnel and buildings' according to the UN, reflecting the growing importance of religiously motivated violence in Syria. Shi'a mosques and shrines, Christian churches and a Sunni mosque were looted and destroyed during the year. Meanwhile, a number of priests were abducted. Another priest and an Alawite imam were killed. Violence also reached unprecedented levels during the year. Large-scale practices of enforced disappearance and torture in detention facilities were documented. Women, men and children have been victims of rape and sexual violence.

President Bashar al-Assad belongs to the Alawite community, a religious minority with roots in Shi'a Islam. Alawites and Shi'a more generally, representing around 13–16 per cent of the Syrian population, were subjected to revenge attacks in connection with the presence of pro-government forces in their towns and villages. In May, Alawite farmers were abducted and killed by snipers as a reprisal against Syrian Air Force shelling coming from their village in Al-Ghab Valley. The attacks have made cultivation impossible for certain villages, depriving them of food and a key source of income. Shi'a enclaves in predominantly Sunni areas in villages near Aleppo were also besieged on the same pretext. In June, at least 30 civilians were summarily executed by combatants from the extremist Jabhat Al-Nusra in the town of Hatla. Two months later, at least 190 civilians, including women and children, were killed by armed groups in a cluster of Alawite villages in Al Hiffa. Islamist militias also killed 18 civilians in September in Alawite villages around Homs. A large number

of civilians were also kidnapped or taken hostage during the year, including hundreds of Alawite women and children abducted by anti-government armed groups, and often used for prisoner exchanges. Pro-government forces have also taken Sunni women and children as hostages for the same purpose.

However, the violence has extended beyond the Sunni–Shi'a conflict to include other minority groups as well. Christians were victimized during the occupation of the village of Sadad by al-Qaeda fighters in October. According to HRW, more than 40 civilians were killed. Druze communities, while largely spared the worst of the violence, have reportedly been pressured by militants to conform to *Sharia* law. Living mostly in the south of the country and representing around 3 per cent of the population, this small religious minority has maintained a position of neutrality in the conflict and welcomed refugees from both sides. Bedouin tribes, because of their perceived sympathy with the opposition, were targeted by pro-government forces. In April, an

entire family was executed around Homs; at least eight Bedouin men were summarily shot between July and September.

While Sunni Arabs represent around two-thirds of the overall population, they form local minorities in several predominantly Alawite or Shi'a areas. This has exposed them to targeted assaults from armed groups. The Sunni towns of Al-Bayda and Ras Al-Nabe', located in the predominantly Alawite region of Tartus, were attacked by the National Defence Force in May. Approximately 300 to 450 civilians were summarily executed during the two-day operation, including scores of women and children. The UN has confirmed that chemical attacks have been used, specifically sarin, during the conflict. In August, for example, an indiscriminate chemical attack on the predominantly Sunni district of Al-Ghouta, a stronghold of the opposition in the outskirts of Damascus, claimed the lives of between 300 and 1,500 people. The UN stated that the evidence suggests that the assailants had access

to the Syrian military's stockpile as well as had the technical knowledge necessary to use the chemical agents safely.

The Kurdish minority, long oppressed by the Syrian government, are concentrated in the oil-rich north-east provinces. In 2013, the Kurds tried to distance themselves from both sides while continuing to seek greater autonomy. According to reports, their security forces have presented themselves as a pan-ethnic organization defending all the communities in the region, including local Christian communities such as the Syriacs. The establishment of a non-religious civil marriage ceremony in the Kurdish-controlled area in December is a symbolic effort to assert the region's self-rule ambitions while also moving away from the sectarianism elsewhere in the country.

In July, Kurdish forces launched a campaign to gain control over towns and villages controlled by al-Qaeda affiliated militias in Kurdish-inhabited enclaves in the north. Following military victories, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party announced steps towards self-rule of the Kurdish-dominated regions in November. During the offensive in July, Kurdish inhabitants living in Islamist controlled areas of Ar-Raqqah and Aleppo were threatened through announcements on mosque loudspeakers and ordered to leave or face immediate attack, resulting in massive displacement and a number of abductions.

A number of factors contributed to the sectarianization of the conflict during the year. First, the composition of armed forces on both sides has become increasingly divided along religious lines. The Syrian Armed Forces, loyal to Bashar al-Assad, have become more reliant on external support from paramilitary groups to compensate for defections from the army. Lebanese Shi'a Hezbollah announced in May that it would join the fight in Syria and Iraqi Shi'a militias stepped up their military engagement. Most significantly, in early 2013, pro-government civilian volunteers formed a 'National Defence Force', reportedly composed largely of members of Alawite and Shi'a minorities. At the same time, a myriad of Sunni jihadist armed groups,

including Jabhat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), both affiliated to al-Qaeda, have become active alongside the Free Syrian Army.

Furthermore, the nature and pattern of the violence has also reinforced the sectarian aspect of the conflict and blurred the line between civilian and military targets. Governmental forces positioned artillery and bases in Alawite, Shi'a and Christian towns and villages, for example, while anti-government militias made similar deployments in Sunni areas. In this context, the civilian populations in these areas have come to be collectively associated with one or other warring party.

The widespread use of inflammatory language has also reinforced the representation of the conflict as a war of religions. A study published in *Foreign Policy* shows that Sunni and Shi'a clerics and politicians alike have consistently typecast the other group as non-believers serving foreign interests. In June, for example, prominent Egyptian Islamic theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi denigrated the Alawite community and called on Sunnis to join the jihad against the government in Syria. A month later, an opposing *fatwa* casting Syrian rebels as 'infidels' and encouraging Shi'a to join the war was issued by Iranian Grand Ayatollah Kazim al-Haeri. Thousands of foreign fighters, encouraged by such rhetoric, continued to enter Syria during the year to engage in the conflict.

Hate speech from clerics and other prominent figures has not only been broadcast on television, but also shared on Twitter, Facebook and other websites, reaching a large audience in the process. Internet and satellite channels also serve as platforms for stories, photographs and footage from the battlefield, such as the video posted online in May of a combatant apparently extracting the heart of a dead soldier while uttering threats towards Alawites. This profusion of shocking images and stories has been used by stakeholders on both sides to stoke hostility and dehumanize other groups.

Tunisia
Tunisia has been divided by intense debates around the future Constitution and the broader direction of the country following

the 2011 revolution, with competing visions from secularists and supporters of a state based on Islamic law. Though with a population overwhelmingly composed of Arab-Berber Sunni Muslims, the fate of minorities and their place in Tunisia has been an integral part of these debates. Behind the heated discussion about the place of Islam in the Constitution, a number of key issues are at stake, including freedom of religion, non-discrimination and respect for cultural diversity.

In January 2014, a new Constitution was passed enshrining important guarantees for minority rights. In particular, Tunisia was declared a civil state, despite calls from some groups to make *Sharia* the basis of Tunisian law, while freedom of religion and belief was declared a constitutional right guaranteed by the state. Jewish community representatives refused the proposal to allocate specific seats for Jews in Parliament, and requested to be treated as citizens on an equal footing rather than on a sectarian basis.

Nevertheless, the text represents a compromise between moderate Islamists and centre-left secular parties, with some troubling provisions included that could disadvantage minority communities. This includes the designation of Islam as Tunisia's official religion, the requirement that the President must be a Muslim, and the entrenchment by the state of its 'Arab-Muslim identity' through education, raising concerns among minority rights defenders. The difficulties in accommodating two fundamentally opposing conceptions of the role of the state towards religion is reflected in Article 6, which guarantees freedom of conscience and religion while committing the state to fighting apostasy (*takfir*).

Despite lobbying by the ethnic-linguistic Amazigh minority for linguistic rights during the year, the new Constitution retains Arabic as the state language and stipulates the promotion by the state of Arabic and the Arab-Muslim identity. Black Tunisians also undertook demonstrations, awareness-raising events and advocacy to combat ethnic discrimination. While Christian converts also continue to face social stigmatization and are often afraid to manifest their faith openly, the fact that a committee of the National Constituent Assembly sought the views of the small Christian Tunisian community was a sign of their increasing recognition as a religious group.

As elsewhere in the region, Salafist movements have developed in under-privileged areas of Tunisia, thriving on the country's socio-economic difficulties and the state's inability to provide employment to many young people. This social discontent and lack of prospects have been exploited by ultra-conservative preachers inspired by Wahhabism. Nevertheless, the importance of secular political forces in Tunisia and the relative ethnic and religious homogeneity of the population have meant that minorities have not been the primary victims of hate speech and violence in the country in 2013. Instead, Salafists mainly targeted journalists, human rights defenders and members of secular political parties. This included the killing of two politicians, Chokri Belaid in February and Mohamed Brahmi in July, prompting widespread popular protests.

Sufi leaders reported that dozens of Sufi mausoleums and shrines were ransacked by Salafist groups during the year. Hate speech against Jews in Salafist-controlled mosques was also reported and open calls from an imam to eradicate Jews, broadcast on television, did not lead to prosecution. Jewish cemeteries were desecrated in Kef and Sousse at the beginning of the year, and there were accounts of police harassment of the Jewish community on the island of Djerba. An attack on a Jewish school in Djerba was also reportedly handled inadequately by authorities. However, the annual pilgrimage at el-Ghriba synagogue, which had been cancelled in 2011 and poorly attended in 2012 due to security reasons, was held successfully in April, with hundreds of people attending. The government expressed its support to the Jewish community through the symbolic presence of the minister of tourism, as well the mobilization of a significant security presence to provide protection to participants.

Incitement to discrimination or violence is a prosecutable offence under Tunisian law, with offenders liable to up to three years of imprisonment. However, the ongoing challenge that authorities face in countering Salafist violence reflects broader challenges in

maintaining security. Nevertheless, the rise in Salafist activism met with strong reactions from Tunisian civil society. An association to monitor hate speech in mosques and other contexts such as schools was set up in 2013, while incitement to hatred in the media is being tracked by the regional media watchdog Arab Media Group for Media Monitoring, seated in Tunis. In December, Tunis also hosted a UN symposium on freedom of expression and on hate speech.

While some progress has been made to secure minority rights during the year, major challenges remain. Past practice has shown that Tunisian laws allowing religious freedom provided it 'does not disturb public order' can amount in practice to excessive restrictions on freedom of religion, under the guise of countering proselytization. Effective realization of these rights will depend on the balance of power between secular parties, moderate Islamists and Salafist movements, as well as the capacity of the state to tackle the economic and social conditions in which extremist groups can grow. ■

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.

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World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples
The internet's leading information resource on minorities around the globe:
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minority rights group international

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014

Events of 2013

Across the world, minorities and indigenous peoples are disproportionately exposed to hatred. From intimidation and verbal abuse to targeted violence and mass killing, this hatred often reflects and reinforces existing patterns of exclusion. The impacts also extend beyond the immediate effects on individual victims to affect entire communities – in the process further marginalizing them from basic services, participation and other rights. This year's edition of *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples* highlights how hate speech and hate crime, though frequently unreported or unacknowledged, continue to impact on every aspect of their lives. The volume also documents many of the initiatives being taken to promote positive change and the different ways that governments, civil society and communities can strengthen protections for minorities and indigenous peoples.