

***Peoples under Threat*** Minority Rights Group 24 May 2012 Syria, Libya, Egypt and Yemen are among the most significant risers in this year's internationally acclaimed global ranking *Peoples Under Threat*, which lists countries where communities are most at threat of mass killing, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) says.

According to authoritative indicators factored into the *Peoples Under Threat*

analysis, states in the Middle East and North Africa have risen notably in the table, with minorities at particular risk. As political space opens up, ethnic or sectarian grievances have been exacerbated and minorities scapegoated, the international human rights organisation says.

'If 2011 will be remembered as the year of the Arab Spring, then 2012 could become the year the revolutions soured,' says Mark Lattimer, MRG's Executive Director. 'The huge changes taking place across the Middle East and North Africa, while increasing hopes for democratisation, represent for both religious and ethnic minorities perhaps the most dangerous episode since the violent break-up of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia.'

In Libya, former rebels still hold up to 6,000 people arrested during or after the armed conflict. Detained without charge or trial, up to half are believed to be sub-Saharan migrants or black Libyans, of whom a number have been tortured to death. Systematic repression continues against the former inhabitants of Tawergha, a town with a mainly black Libyan population of 30,000 who were accused of being Gaddafi loyalists and forcibly displaced in their entirety by the Misrata brigade.

In Egypt, activists' euphoria at the downfall of the Mubarak government has been replaced by increasing anger at the arbitrary detention and torture practiced by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Egypt's Copts total 7 million or more, but the number leaving the country is reported to have increased following attacks on churches and intimidation. The political success of the Muslim Brotherhood and of Salafist parties is also viewed with concern by other religious minorities, including the Shi'a and the Baha'i.

In Syria, the fact that the government is dominated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiism, places Alawite and other Shi'a communities at risk if the conflict intensifies, says MRG. Assyrian Christians are also deeply concerned about the possibility of attacks from Sunni militants.

In Yemen, clashes in the north between Sunni tribes and al-Houthis have added to the growing threats from sectarianism in a country where conflict with al-Qaeda-linked militants has again intensified. In recent weeks the capital Sana'a has also seen thousands of protestors from the

marginalized 'Akhdam' community, angry at the racism they face on a daily basis.

'Differences between Sunni and Shi'a, Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs, are all expressions of an internal diversity in the Arab world that is often under-estimated and which depends on mutual respect. These differences must not become fault-lines for mass killing,' says Mark Lattimer.

States on the borders of the Arab world are also major risers in the table this year. International attention on Iran has focused in recent months on the issue of nuclear facilities, but the systematic campaign of repression of opposition activists continues, and reached a new level in the country's north-west, where the conflict with Kurdish militias intensified. Baluchis, Ahwazi Arabs and Azerbaijanis also accuse the government of long-standing oppression and denial of political participation.

The highest riser in the  
*Peoples under Threat*

table this year is South Sudan, a country which acquired its independence from Sudan in July and which comes straight in at number eight. A history of cattle raiding between the Lou Nuer and the Murle, as well as other groups, has developed into inter-communal violence on a highly organised scale in Jonglei state, affecting some 120,000 people. Tens of thousands of refugees have also fled across the border into South Sudan in recent months, escaping Sudanese government shelling of communities in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile state.

This is the seventh successive year that the  
*Peoples under Threat*

index has been published. Almost all the significant episodes of civilian killing around the world that occurred in 2011 took place in countries which were near the top of, or major risers in, last year's

*Peoples under Threat*  
table.

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