Introduction

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation provides the following information to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, highlighting the escalating threats faced by civil society worldwide as a result of misuse of counter-terrorism measures.

Our findings, documented in 2025 through the CIVICUS Monitor, spotlight the alarming erosion of civic space and the chilling impact on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). CIVICUS expresses deep concern over the persistent misuse of anti-terrorism laws and other state-driven efforts to suppress voices in the global civic space, highlighting the closing civic space-security-counterterrorism nexus as an alarming trend.

The below cases in the different regions across the world are not meant to be exhaustive and serve to highlight the global nature of misuse of counterterrorism laws, regulations and practices affecting civic space.

1. Africa South of the Sahara

i. *Key human rights challenges*

Africa South of the Sahara faces human rights challenges as counter-terrorism laws, regulations and practices are used against journalists, activists, critics, and civil society actors.

Authorities in **Benin** increasingly used a specialist court, the Repression of Economic Crimes and Terrorism (CRIET) Court, to prosecute journalists, activists, and critics, at times using vague terrorism charges such as 'condoning terrorism'. In **Burkina Faso**, journalists, activists, magistrates and critics have been abducted, disappeared and forcibly conscripted to fight the armed Islamist insurgency with the army, as to silence dissent. Several media outlets in **Mali** and **Niger** have been suspended for their coverage of insecurity issues in the country, including on human rights abuses committed by the military during insurgency operations while activists and journalists have been subjected to arbitrary arrests, detention, criminal charges (including terrorism-related allegations) and enforced disappearances.

Sierra Leone's Counter-Terrorism Bill, adopted by Parliament in March 2025, raised concerns among press freedom advocates as it uses vaguely worded provisions that could be used to penalise journalists and unduly restrict public discourse. Terrorist acts are defined as acts "prejudicial to national security or public safety" or that "create fear"—definitions broad enough to include journalistic reporting. The bill grants authorities the powers to "request and obtain information" from any person without adequate judicial oversight and imposes severe penalties, including a minimum 25-year imprisonment for publication (Section 21) and life imprisonment for sharing suspected false information (Sections 17(f) and 32(f)).

ii. *Cases examples*

In **Benin**, on 10th July 2025, Beninese journalist Comlan Hugués Sossoukpè, editor of Olofofo, was arrested in Côte d'Ivoire and extradited to Benin, where proceedings against him began for 'incitement to rebellion', 'incitement to hatred and violence', 'cyberstalking' and 'praising terrorism' before the CRIET. In January 2026, the pre-trial detention of the known critic was extended. In November 2025, the CRIET acquitted Nigerian journalist Matthew Ojoduma, who was arrested nine months prior at the border with Burkina Faso and charged with membership in a terrorist organisation.

In **Mali**, a decree by the Ministry of Territorial Administration in January 2026 suspended media outlet Jeune Afrique "in all its forms" on accusations of 'terrorism apology' and 'defamation', including for making "baseless accusations" of human rights abuses by security forces of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Previously, in August and September 2024, French media outlets La Chaîne Info and TV5 Monde were suspended, including for "false accusations" made against the Malian army and its Russian allies.

In October 2024, the Ministry of Justice in **Burkina Faso** admitted to the forcible conscription of journalist Alain Traoré, to fight against armed groups under a general mobilisation decree signed in 2023. The journalist, editor-in-chief, was abducted from his home by armed men claiming to be National Intelligence Agency (ANR) agents on 13 July 2024. Adama Bayala, a political analyst and commentator for BF1, was abducted on 18 June 2024. Both were released in September 2025. Similarly ,Burkinabé columnist Kalifara Séré was abducted on 19 June 2024 and conscripted under the same decree, reappeared at his home in July 2025.

In **Niger**, prominent civil society activist, Moussa Tchangari, Secretary General of Alternatives espaces citoyen was arrested on 3 December 2024 and charged with 'criminal conspiracy in connection with a terrorist undertaking', 'undermining national defense' and 'plotting against the authority of the State' in what is believed to be in retaliation of his criticism of the authorities' decision, in November 2024, to withdraw NGO licenses. In December 2024, Niger's Minister of Communication suspended the BBC for a period of three months following the broadcaster's reports on jihadist terrorist attacks in the Tillaberi region. The military junta accused the BBC of spreading misinformation, threatening social stability and lowering the morale of troops engaged in fighting the jihadist groups.

iii. *Measures and stakeholder engagement*

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) proactively engaged with the legislative process by releasing a position paper on the Counter-Terrorism Bill on 7th March 2025, warning that vaguely worded provisions could unduly restrict public discourse, while the West Africa Network of Activists and Media Defence Lawyers (WANAMDEL)—a coalition of press freedom and human rights lawyers across West Africa—issued detailed statements on the Counter-Terrorism Bill, providing legal analysis and advocacy to challenge overly broad terrorism definitions.

2. America

i. Key human rights challenges

Authorities in the **United States of America (USA)** are expanding and applying counter-terrorism measures against civil society. While federal law does not criminalise domestic terrorism as a standalone offence—it attaches no sanctions to such conduct, but sets out over 50 other "federal crimes of terrorism"—, the USA Patriot Act defines it broadly under 18 US Code § 2331(5) as "activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws […];" and acts that "appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping." This vague definition has created a framework that can be operationalised through other offences.

Authorities rely on material support provisions under 18 US Code § 2339A - Providing material support to terrorists, and provision 18 US Code § 2339B - Providing material support or resources to designated foreign terrorist organisations, a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison. According to the statute, "material support" is defined broadly to include, for instance, any "service, training, expert, advice or assistance, or personnel." Each of these terms is vague and sweeping, and they potentially proscribe a wide range of protected forms of association, advocacy, and speech.

At the state level, domestic terrorism offences in at least 33 states rely on overbroad definitions, enabling conduct linked to peaceful assembly and advocacy to be reframed as terrorism. This trajectory has been reinforced by executive orders during President Donald Trump's second term. For example, on 25 September 2025, President Trump issued a National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM-7) on "Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organised Political Violence", directing federal agencies and law enforcement bodies to prioritise investigations into "domestic terrorism financing", including excessive scrutiny of civil society organisations, their funders and support networks.

The memorandum claims a surge in "organised campaigns of radicalisation, intimidation, and violence" allegedly led by "self-described anti-fascism movements", yet provides no evidence to substantiate these allegations. Although NSMP-7 does not itself have legal force, it risks stigmatising civil society organisations—especially those working on human rights and democracy issues—, expanding financial surveillance without adequate safeguards, and deterring lawful activities.

At the same time, legal instruments such as the False Claims Act (31 US Code §§ 3729-3733) may facilitate persecution against civil society organisations, including challenges linked to anti-terrorism certifications and tax-exempt status for grant or contract purposes.

ii. Cases examples

USA. Recent cases illustrate how these counter-terrorism frameworks are being applied in practice against civil society. In Georgia, since 2023, authorities have charged at least 42 activists linked to protests against the Atlanta "Cop City" police training facility under the state's domestic terrorism statute (O.C.G.A. § 16-11-220), a crime punishable by up to 35 years in prison. In parallel, prosecutors have used racketeering law (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations, RICO), which is typically designed to dismantle organised crime, to charge 61 protesters, claiming that the protest movement functions as a criminal network. Many of these cases are still ongoing as of March 2026. This is the largest case in the country's history using a racketeering law against protesters.

Alongside criminal prosecutions, authorities have increasingly relied on terrorism designations to stigmatise civil society organisations. In September 2025, the Department of Justice announced it would be conducting an investigation into the Open Society Foundations, a philanthropic organisation whose mission is to "champion bold democratic solutions to our urgent, common challenges that advance rights, equity, and justice". The directive lists potential criminal charges, from arson to "material support of terrorism."

On 13 November 2025, the Department of State announced the designations of four Antifa-related organisations based in Germany, Italy, and Greece. This continues the administration's targeted attacks on Antifa as an ideology and amorphous organisation and follows the designation of Antifa as a "domestic terrorist organisation" in September 2025, less than two weeks after the assassination of right-wing figure Charlie Kirk. The implications for organisations working domestically with any ties to the mission or priorities of the designated groups may be significant. These foreign terrorist organisations (FTO) designations are preventing organisations from accessing resources needed for operations and paving the way for material support allegations to be made against domestic groups, linking foreign entities to domestic ones.

Further expanding this trend, on 24 November 2025, President Trump issued an executive order that began the process of designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a FTO and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). US persons are prohibited from engaging in any financial transaction with listed organisations or providing them with material support. Likewise, there have been Executive and Congressional efforts to make this designation in previous years. This is one of the latest in an unconventionally long list of FTO designations that includes international cartels and unstructured ideological organisations.

iii. *Measures and stakeholder engagement*

Civil society organisations in the USA have responded through strategic litigation, legal defence and advocacy work. For example, the National Lawyers Guild has contested the application of domestic terrorism and racketeering charges in the "Cop City" cases, including through motions to dismiss and constitutional arguments related to freedom of expression and association. While some charges have been dropped or reduced, the cases remain ongoing, and no definitive judicial ruling has yet clarified the legality of these charges.

Beyond litigation, investigative organisations, including Type Investigations and In These Times, have used Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to obtain internal FBI records indicating that "Antifa" linked groups in Dallas, Texas, posed no national security threat. These findings are directly relevant to the Prairieland case, where nine anti-ICE protesters were convicted in March 2026 on charges including material support to terrorism and attempted murder, and where defence attorneys have raised serious due process concerns.

3. Asia-Pacific

i. Key human rights challenges

Pakistan - The authorities have deployed the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) to arrest and charge human rights defenders and journalists for social media posts, speeches or protests. They have been charged under the ATA for various crimes, including sedition and disruption of state affairs. It has also banned social movements or proscribed individuals by placing them under the First Schedule for 'List of Proscribed Organisations' of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997. In August 2025, the National Assembly passed amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997 which will authorise the state to detain individuals for 'inquiry' for up to three months, merely based on 'credible information' or 'reasonable suspicion', without judicial oversight.

India - Human rights defenders critical of the government have been implicated and jailed in politically motivated cases under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), a draconian anti-terror law. Under the UAPA's draconian provisions, activists remain in detention for long periods and are often denied bail even on health grounds. In May 2020, UN experts expressed concerns over the non-conformity of various UAPA provisions with international human rights law and standards.

Myanmar - The Counter-Terrorism Law was enacted in 2014. Following the junta takeover in February 2021, the law was amended to repress the democratic opposition forces. The amended law introduced harsher penalties, provides powers to conduct surveillance, regulate and arbitrarily seize the property of suspects, and collaborate with other governments to arrest and deport suspects. It also allows the junta to control and restrict the flow of funds from non-governmental and non-profit organisations to terrorist groups, persons, and associated organisations. Since the amendment, the junta has targeted and prosecuted a large number of civilians, activists, opposition political forces, and journalists.

Philippines - The draconian 2020 Anti-Terrorism Act includes a worryingly broad definition of terrorism and grants the Philippines police and military the power to detain suspects without a warrant or charge for up to 24 days for investigation. It also relaxes accountability for law enforcement agents who violate the rights of suspects, particularly those in detention. Further, the broad role of the Anti-Terrorism Council under the new law places people's liberty rights at considerable risk. The council can now designate individuals and organisations as terrorists without any hearing, as long as it sees "probable cause" that they commit, attempt to commit or are part of a conspiracy to commit acts defined and penalised as terrorism under Sections 4 to 12 of the law. The Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012, criminalises the provision of funds that contribute to acts of terrorism. It incorporates the vague and broad definition of terrorism. It has been used to freeze bank accounts of civil society groups. Six independent UN human rights experts flagged the Philippine government's "seemingly broad and unchecked" use of the anti-terrorism law to target red-tagged humanitarian workers and church leaders.

ii. Cases examples

Pakistan - In October 2024, prominent human rights activist Dr. Mahrang Baloch) was charged with aiding separatist groups in Pakistan's Balochistan province under the anti-terror and other laws. In October 2024 the government banned the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), or

Pashtun Protection Movement, a prominent rights group, listing it as a “proscribed organisation”. A notification issued by the federal government on 6th October 2024 said the PTM was “engaged in certain activities which are prejudicial to the peace and security of the country”. It was placed under the First Schedule for ‘List of Proscribed Organisations’ of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997. The state on 2 and 16 October 2025, designated 32 individuals from Khuzdar, Kech and Chagai districts in Balochistan province as “proscribed individuals” under the Fourth Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act. These include women activists such as Dr. Sabiha Baloch, Sammi Deen Baloch, Naz Gul and Syed Babi Sharif and Shalee Assa.

India - 16 writers, scholars and activists, referred to as the Bhima Koregaon (BK) 16, were targeted under the UAPA in 2018, due to their alleged association with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) organisation. There have been numerous procedural failings and irregularities impacting the BK-16 cases, including accusations of evidence tampering and more recent reports of the discovery of Pegasus spyware on at least one of the accused’s devices prior to his arrest. Most have been released on bail but continue to face charges. Human rights defender Khurram Parvez has been arbitrarily detained without trial since 2021 in Rohini prison, on politically motivated charges under the UAPA. Two prominent student activists have been denied bail after being held in prison for more than five years without trial under the UAPA

Myanmar – In June 2024, journalist Htet Aung was sentenced to five years in prison with hard labour under Section 52(a) of the country’s Anti-Terrorism Law. His sentence was in connection with a report the outlet published in August 2023, on the sixth anniversary of the genocide in Arakan State. In December 2025, according to ATHAN, freelance journalist Hsuat Rain Pan (aka Swan) was sentenced to an additional 10 years in prison by the Yangon Western District Court under Section 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law.

Philippines - In May 2024, terrorist financing charges were filed against the Community Empowerment and Resource Network (CERNET) and 28 individuals currently or previously on its council, board or staff. Founded in 2001, CERNET is a Cebu-based development NGO that has consistently worked alongside grassroots organisations to alleviate poverty in marginalised communities in the Visayas. In April 2024, two Southern Tagalog young activists, Fritz Jay Labiano and Adrian Paul Tagle were charged with violating the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012. Labiano is the coordinator of the rights group Kabataan Partylist in Quezon province, and Tagle is the coordinator of Tanggol Quezon, an advocacy group. In May 2024, The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) froze the bank accounts of the Leyte Center for Development (LCDe) working for communities in Eastern Visayas and those of its staff members and suppliers, citing “financing terrorism” as the reason for the move. August 2024, agents from the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), a counter-terrorism task force, visited the family of student activist Paolo Tarra in Trece Martires City, Cavite, threatening him with charges under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. In October 2024, Petronila Guzman and Lenville Salvador, board members of KADUAMI (Katinnulong Daguiti Umili ti Amianan), and Myrna Zapanta, a lay worker and member of the secretariat of the Ilocos Regional Ecumenical Council (IREC), received subpoenas from the Department of Justice (DOJ) directing them to answer trumped-up charges of allegedly violating the terrorist financing law. In April 2025, six prominent Cagayan Valley activists were charged on cases of financing terrorism under the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012. On 20 December 2025, Carmilo Tabada, former staff member of Central Visayas Farmers’ Development Center (FARDEC) was arrested at his residence in Bohol by elements of the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group on trumped-up financing terrorism charges. In January 2026, journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio and human rights defender Marielle Domequil were found guilty of financing terrorism and sentenced to at least 12 years in prison.

iii. Measures and stakeholder engagement

Pakistan - A Karachi anti-terrorism court acquitted Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) leader Dr Mahrang Baloch she had been booked in the terrorism case by Malir district's Quaidabad police on 11 October 2024, for allegedly inciting people by levelling "allegations against security institutions".

India - Activists Rona Wilson and Sudhir Dhawale detained under the UAPA were released from jail in Navi Mumbai on 24 January 2025, more than two weeks after the Bombay High Court granted them bail in the Bhima Koregaon case .On 19 November 2025, the Supreme Court granted cultural activist Jyoti Jagtap detained dunder the UAPA interim bail in a case for which she has spent five years and six months in jail. On 4 December 2025, a division bench of the Bombay High Court (BHC) granted bail to scholar and activist Hany Babu, more than five years after his arrest under the UAPA. On 5 January 2026, the Supreme Court granted bail to five out of seven activists accused in the Delhi Riots Case. Gulfisha Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa Ur Rehman, Saleem Khan, and Shadab Ahmad were granted bail.

Philippines - The Philippine Supreme Court issued a major ruling in May 2024, declaring "red-tagging" a threat to people's life, liberty, and security. On 5 June 2024, two activists Fritz Jay Labiano and Adrian Paul Tagle were cleared of terrorism financing charges by the Batangas Trial Court Branch 7. The court cited a lack of evidence in dismissing the case.

4. Europe & Central Asia

i. Key human rights challenges

The misuse of counter-terrorism provisions in ways that constrict civic space is also a problem across Europe and Central Asia.

In Europe, increasing narrowing of civic space identified in our monitoring has been linked to growing restrictions on protest rights and criminalisation of civil society activists. In particular, organisations and activists providing aid to refugees and migrants face constant targeting in "frontline" states, and recent years have seen deepening crackdowns on climate and pro-Palestine protesters and groups. These groups in particular are often targeted by the authorities through the misuse of counter-terrorism provisions. In 2023, environmental activism was included in Europol's European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend (TE-SAT) report, in which roadblocks and the occupation of bank buildings or airports were classified as "extremism", and "concern about climate change and earth resources" was given as an example of an "extremist" viewpoint.

In Russia, Belarus and Central Asia, there is a persistent trend of abuse of broad "extremism" provisions to intimidate and jail prominent critics, interfere with the work of CSOs and groups advocating for human rights and persecute individuals for associating with groups arbitrarily designated as "extremist" or disseminating their content.

Some examples of relevant cases are provided below.

ii. Cases examples

In the **United Kingdom**, authorities have increasingly employed broad powers provided by counter-terrorism legislation including the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Terrorism Act 2000 against pro-Palestinian activists and journalists reporting on Israel and Palestine. Examples include the detention in August 2024 of **six Palestine Action** activists who broke into an Israeli weapons manufacturing hub in Filton, Bristol. Powers provided by the Terrorism Act 2000 were used to prolong their detention, even though they were later charged with non-terrorism related offences including criminal damage to property, violent disorder and aggravated burglary. Also in August 2024, Palestine-Action co-founder **Richard Barnard**, activist **Sarah Wilkinson** and journalist **Richard Medhurst** were all detained under the Terrorism Act. In all the mentioned cases, the arrests were linked to their public advocacy in support of Palestine. In October 2024, police raided the home of journalist **Asa Winstanley** and seized his devices under sections 1 (Encouragement of Terrorism) and 2 (Dissemination of Terrorist Publications) of the Terrorism Act 2006.

The most widespread misuse of counter-terrorism legislation against Palestine solidarity came with the UK parliament's **proscription of the direct action group Palestine Action** under the Terrorism Act 2000, making expressions of support, membership and publicly wearing items associated with the group offences punishable by up to 14 years in prison. The decision followed the group's civil disobedience action at an airforce base, where it spray-painted two aircraft red. As people mobilised against the proscription, police carried out unprecedented arrests, detaining hundreds of entirely peaceful protesters at a time for holding signs reading 'I support Palestine Action'. As of March 2026, more than 2,700 arrests of protesters related to the proscription of Palestine Action have been recorded, with more than 250 people charged under the Terrorism Act. In February 2026, the High Court ruled the proscription of Palestine Action unlawful, however the Metropolitan police have announced arrests will continue as the ban remains in place pending a government appeal.

Other European countries have also deployed measures aimed at countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism against Palestine solidarity groups, with relevant intelligence agencies engaging in surveillance and intimidation of activists due to their advocacy. In June 2025, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, **Germany**'s domestic intelligence agency designated the CSO Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East (Jüdische Stimme) as extremist in a report, along with another group, Palestine Speaks, and groups that are part of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement in Berlin and Bonn. The report outlines the threat posed by "secular pro-Palestinian extremism," naming these groups in particular as extremist, citing their "hostility towards Israel" and participation in "anti-Israel rallies."

In **Belgium**, police arrested Palestinian activist Mohammed Khatib in April 2025 after he attended a daily protest, with officers citing a 'threat number' assigned by the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA). He was questioned without legal representation and released the next morning. His refugee status was later revoked after authorities labelled him a 'hate preacher'. In **Slovenia**, Palestinian-Slovenian citizen Jaber Elmasry reported sustained harassment by agents of the Slovenian Intelligence and Security Agency (SOVA) lasting over a year, including attempts to obtain information about Slovenia's Palestinian community and local solidarity activists through conditioning issuing a positive security assessment for his wife to immigrate to Slovenia on his cooperation.

In **Belarus**, authorities consistently abuse Article 361-1 (Creation and management of an extremist formation) and Article 361-4 (Facilitating extremist activity) of the Criminal Code against civil society representatives, HRDs and independent media, as well as those who donate to them and support their work in any way. For example, in April 2025, a woman was charged with "facilitating extremist activities" under Article 361-4 for transferring commissary money to political prisoners. Prosecutors claim she made around 70 small transfers totalling $183 to detainees accused of "extremism-related crimes."

In May 2025, the Investigative Committee (IC) announced a criminal investigation into members of an "extremist group" linked to the "New Belarus" platform, an online platform supporting the Belarusian diaspora. It includes initiatives such as free online medical consultations, legal assistance, a directory of Belarusian-owned businesses abroad, and event listings for the diaspora community. The authorities claim that more than 1,000 users registered on the app and its related services can be considered participants in the project, which was designated as "extremist" in 2023 and could be found criminally liable. According to the Viasna Human Rights Centre, during 2025, the courts designated over 2,000 new information materials as extremist, including independent media, educational initiatives, diaspora groups, and websites of human rights organisations, bringing the total list of banned materials to over 8,000 items.

Extremism provisions are abused in **Russia** in a similarly extensive way. In January 2025, a Russian court sentenced three lawyers who defended late opposition leader Alexei Navalny to prison terms of up to five and a half years on charges of participating in an "extremist organisation". Vadim Kobzev received five and a half years, Alexei Liptser five years, and Igor Sergunin three and a half years after a closed trial. Several months after Navalny was detained in 2021, Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and its regional offices were classified as "extremist". This was followed by a conviction against Navalny, who was already jailed on other charges, for founding and funding an extremist organisation as well. The lawyers were accused of "using their status" to relay messages between Navalny and his team. Donors to the Anti-Corruption Foundation also face prosecution. In December 2024, investigators in Kurgan Oblast opened a criminal case against Nadezhda Mikhailova, a former resident now living in exile, for donating 2,100 roubles (around 26 USD) to FBK between 5th August 2021 and 5th February 2022. Mikhailova was charged under Article 282.3, Part 1 of the Criminal Code for "financing extremist activity", her home was searched and police seized her electronic devices. She left Russia and has not been placed in pretrial detention.

Across **Central Asia**, critics continue to be prosecuted under vague criminal provisions such as alleged extremism, with trials often taking place behind closed doors without due process. In a worrying development in **Kyrgyzstan** in October 2025, a local court declared materials by investigative outlet Kloop, Temirov Live, and the affiliated Ayt Ayt Dese "extremist" and banned their activities, rendering it unlawful to share, engage with, or possess their publications. Under Article 332 of the Criminal Code, disseminating such materials carries a sentence of 3–5 years in prison, and up to 7 years in aggravating circumstances. Under Article 332-1 possession of "extremist" materials carries penalties of up to three years in prison following a written warning. Following the extremist designations, social media users engaging with material posted by the independent platforms have reportedly been summoned and questioned by police, with such engagement cited in at least one criminal case. The justifications provided by the court made it clear that the platforms were targeted for their independent reporting, with the court failing to cite any specific materials amounting to "extremism."

5. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

i. *Key human rights challenges*

Algeria: Algerian authorities persist in using terrorism charges – in particular Article 87 *bis* of the Penal Code – to silence peaceful dissent. The vague framing of counter-terrorism offenses, the expansion of terrorism-related crimes in 2021 (ordinance No 21-08) and 2024, and corresponding disproportionate sentences, as well as the misuse of this legislation to suppress dissent have been condemned by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

ii. *Cases examples*

Algerian authorities keep a national list of terrorist persons and entities that includes pro-autonomy movements. Authorities often use terrorism charges to prosecute individuals peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms. Some recent cases involve:

- On 29th October 2025, the criminal court of first instance in Oum El Bouaghi sentenced Ali Mammeri, the president of the Union of Civil Servants in the Culture and Arts Sector (SNFC) and critical human rights defender, to 15 years in prison among others on charges of “glorifying terrorism” in retaliation for providing information to the International Labour Organisation’s supervisory bodies;

- On 11th November 2025, Mohamed Tadjadit, known as “the poet of the Hirak” and a figure of peaceful resistance, was sentenced to five years in prison on terrorism-related charges, including “condoning terrorism” and “supporting terrorist organisations.”;

- On 3rd December 2025, the Tizi Ouzou Court of Appeals upheld the seven-year prison sentence handed down to French journalist Christophe Gleizes on 29th June 2025 for apology of terrorism. As a soccer specialist, he was arrested while working on a report and a book project about the Jeunesse Sportive Kabylie club. The Algerian justice system accuses the reporter of having contacts with individuals linked to the separatist movement Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylie (MAK).

iii. *Measures and stakeholder engagement*

Despite the difficulties, organisations do not hesitate to speak out in defence of activists who have been prosecuted or convicted. Some of these organisations operate from abroad. They denounce the arrests by documenting the violations, issuing statements and appealing to UN bodies.

One recent example is the release of Lyes Touati, an Algerian activist arrested on 15 December 2025 in Bejaia and placed in preventive detention on 3 February 2026. He was after 59 days in detention. Initially prosecuted on serious charges related to Article 87 bis, the charges were reclassified as misdemeanours and finally brought under Article 196 bis for allegedly spreading “false information”. The release comes after prolonged inaction by the judiciary and pressure from his support committee and human rights organisations.

CIVICUS' Global #StandAsMyWitness Campaign Spotlighting Concrete Cases

This segment sheds light on HRDs currently featured in the CIVICUS’ ongoing global campaign, #StandAsMyWitness. It delves into the specific laws and state-driven efforts employed to undermine their advocacy, impede fundamental freedoms, and consequently contribute to the erosion of civic space. Security and counter-terrorism laws are regularly misused by repressive state apparatuses to silence HRDs uncovering grave human rights violations and corruption or seeking transformative justice.

CIVICUS' #StandAsMyWitness campaign stands as a beacon for justice. This impactful initiative has been instrumental in advocating for the release of human rights defenders, collectively enduring nearly 50 years of imprisonment. We would like to highlight the following cases for the Special Rapporteur's consideration.

1. Narges Mohammadi (Iran): Human Rights Defender (HRD) sentenced to 15 months for "propaganda against the state" and an additional year for exposing sexual violence against women prisoners.
2. Bacede Mabuza and Mthandeni Dube (Eswatini): Members of Parliament advocating for democratic reform accused of "terrorism, sedition, and murder."
3. Buzurgmehr Yorov (Tajikistan): Human rights lawyer representing opposition members. In 2023, an extra 10 years were added to his existing 22-year sentence on alleged grounds of large-scale fraud.
4. Ahmed Mansoor (UAE): Advisory board member for Human Rights Watch and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, imprisoned for publishing information on social media, with the decision upheld by the UAE's State Security Court on December 31, 2018.
5. Abdul-Hadi al-Khawaja (Bahrain): Detained after 2011 democracy protests, charged and convicted with financing terrorism, participating in terrorism to overthrow the government, and spying for a foreign country.
6. Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov (Tajikistan): Human rights lawyer charged with participating in a criminal organization and sentenced to 16 years in prison.
7. Kenia Hernandez (Mexico): Indigenous and women's rights activist arrested on the fabricated charge of "robbery with violence" after a protest.
8. Hoda Abdel Moneim (Egypt): Human rights lawyer and former member of Egypt's National Council for Human Rights facing charges of joining an unspecified terrorist organization and receiving foreign funds.
9. Khurram Parvez (India): Kashmiri human rights defender arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act 1967 on charges related to conspiracy and terrorism, including fundraising for a terrorist act, conspiracy, recruiting for a terrorist act, offences relating to membership of a terrorist organisation, and raising funds for a terrorist organisation.
10. Kamira Nait Sid (Algeria): Advocate of the Amazigh language, culture, and identity prosecuted under Article 87 of the Penal Code, classifying any act as a terrorist act if it threatens the state's security, territorial integrity, stability, or normal functioning of institutions.
11. Chow Hang-Tung (Hong Kong): Pro-democracy activist arrested for "inciting others to participate in an unauthorised assembly" under section 17A of the Public Order Ordinance, based on violating a prohibition on gatherings due to COVID-19 prevention measures.