
ARCHIVES AND HUMAN RIGHTS
News from the Section on Archives and Human Rights
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Commentary. It was a difficult year all right, old 2020. While the December issue's commentary usually looks at important items—often sad—from the year just past, this year's commentary reports only good news stories from the year or ones that may bring a smile. Here's to a better 2021!

January. In a landmark ruling, the United Nations Human Rights Committee said the effects of climate change may trigger the non-refoulement obligations of states where climate refugees seek shelter.

February. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in a Romanian case that a spouse's breach of internet privacy is a form of domestic violence.

March. In Argentina, public access to the archives of the Ministry of Interior led to an appeals court ruling that the claim of the Pilaga people that the National Police and Air Force committed genocide against them in 1947 was true.

April. The International Conference of Information Commissioners, while recognizing that during the COVID-19 crisis resources may be diverted away from usual information rights work, stressed the importance of the right of access to information and the need for good recordkeeping in what will be a much analysed period of history.

May. After more than two decades, the Amazon rainforest's Ashaninka indigenous community finally won a lawsuit against the timber companies who illegally deforested the tribe's land in the 1980s, gaining both money and an official apology.

June. A county sheriffs' department in the U.S. State of Maryland has an Electronic Storage Detection dog trained to sniff out storage devices like flash drives and cell phones.

July. When Haiti's chief prosecutor said he didn't have any documentation about Emmanuel Constant's part in the 1994 Raboteau massacre or his previous conviction, human rights groups supplied copies of the judgment against Constant and the 23 November 2000 *Monitor* (the country's official gazette) where it was published.

August. The United Nations Convention 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour (such as slavery, prostitution and trafficking) went into effect when the last of the 187 countries that are members of the UN International Labour Organization ratified it.

September. At the opening of a new Malaysian archives building, Sultan Nazrin reflected on the importance of archives, referring to the 2002 International Court of Justice ruling that Malaysia owns the Sipadan islands, which said Malaysia's Turtle Preservation Ordinance of 1917 showed Malaysia intended "to exercise State functions with respect to the two islands."

October. No matter what the Brexit agreement said, a document issued to Flanders (Belgium) in July 1666 by Britain's King Charles II gives 50 Flemish fishing boats access to British waters in perpetuity.

November. Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean committed to a "Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean," which UN human rights Special Rapporteurs termed a ground-breaking pact to fight pollution and secure a healthy environment.

December. Peruvian police filmed a raid in which police drug-squad members disguised as Santa Claus and an elf swooped into a house in Lima, not to deliver gifts but to capture a suspected cocaine and dope dealer.

SAHR News. The Section will hold an open meeting on 26 January, at 15:00 hours GMT. The tentative agenda is:

1. Reports on projects since SAHR became a Section (previously it was a working group)
2. Program for the next years
3. Publications
4. Working teams for specific projects
5. Participation of SAHR at the 2020 ICA Abu Dhabi Congress
6. Elections process for SAHR Executive Committee

To participate in the meeting via Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87249003574?pwd=ajQzSHlpcUdjYW4vUStXWll5VWhhdz09>

Watch for two new publications. In March, Routledge will publish *Archives and Human Rights* compiled by Jens Boel, Perrine Canavaggio and Antonio Gonzalez Quintana; any profits will go to ICA. For information see: <https://www.routledge.com/Archives-and-Human-Rights/Boel-Canavaggio-Quintana/p/book/9780367150341> And in June the ICA journal *Comma* will have a special issue on archives and human rights edited by Blanca Bazaco.

International news.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The Commission referred Colombia's "violence, intimidation, harassment and threats" against members of the Jose Alvear Restrepo Collective Lawyers Corporation (CAJAR) to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. IACHR "established that the work of the Administration Department of Security (DAS) through a special strategic intelligence group included monitoring the work activities of CAJAR members; intercept their landline and cell phone calls and emails; and make personal files of each member that include personal data." It recommended that Colombia "ensure the victims' access to their data in the intelligence files and, if they wish, request that they be corrected, updated or, where appropriate, purged from the intelligence files." http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2020/312.asp

International Criminal Court. The Prosecutor published the annual Report on Preliminary Examination Activities. She announced that the Office will not open an investigation into the "allegations of crimes committed by U.K. nationals in Iraq during the course of the U.K.'s military involvement in Iraq," although confirming "that there is a reasonable basis to believe that members of the British armed forces committed the war crimes of willful killing, torture, inhuman/cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, and rape and/or other forms of sexual violence." The Office also will not further investigate Australia, Nauru and Papua New Guinea for the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers held in the latter two and will not investigate China's treatment of Uyghurs. The Office will ask permission of the Court to open formal investigations into whether war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed during the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014 and into criminal acts committed by Boko Haram and Nigerian Security Forces since 2009. "Preliminary examinations" are underway on situations in Bolivia, Colombia, Guinea, the Philippines and two cases in Venezuela; a possible investigation in Palestine awaits a ruling on jurisdiction before proceeding. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=2020-otp-rep-PE-PR>; <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=201209-otp-statement-iraq-uk>

International Residual Mechanism for Criminals Tribunals (IRMCT). The Prosecutor told the UN Security Council that files on 15 suspects were given to Montenegro and other files were handed to Croatia and Serbia. Montenegro's Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime and Terrorism told *BIRN* that a case was opened "to examine documentation handed over" by the IRMCT that implicates Montenegrin citizens in "war crimes that were committed in surrounding countries." https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/17/montenegrs-listed-as-war-suspects-in-files-sent-from-hague/?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=75370f3062-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-75370f3062-319725265

According to the *Daily Maverick*, the Prosecutor also gave South Africa “a blistering public rebuke” for frustrating international efforts to bring to justice Fulgence Kayishema, one of the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide. He said, “[A]lmost three years ago, my Office finally located him. Relying on records and sources, my office concluded in early 2018 that he was living in CapeTown, South Africa,” which was confirmed “by South African authorities via Interpol.” An arrest failed in December 2019. After that the Prosecutor asked South Africa for “detailed information,” but South African officials “informed us that Kayishema’s refugee file and fingerprints do not exist. This is difficult to understand,” he said. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-12-19-un-war-crimes-prosecutor-blasts-south-africa-for-allowing-a-major-rwandan-genocidist-to-flee-the-country/>

Kosovo Specialist Chambers. A pre-trial judge confirmed the indictments of two leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army War Veterans’ Organization, charging them with obstructing justice and intimidating witnesses “after batches of confidential case files from the Specialist Chambers were leaked to them and both men urged media to publish the material,” *BIRN* reported. In his first court appearance, one of the men said the court itself was to blame for the leak of the files. For background, see *SAHR News* 2020-09. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/14/kosovo-war-veterans-leaders-indicted-for-obstructing-justice/>; https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/18/kosovo-veterans-deputy-leader-blames-hague-court-for-file-leak/?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=73bd980c8b-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-73bd980c8b-319725265

Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The court sentenced in absentia fugitive Hezbollah member Salim Jamil Ayyach to five terms of life imprisonment for the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri, but three other men were acquitted “due to insufficient evidence,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported. The court issued new warrants for Ayyach’s arrest and authorized the prosecutor to request Interpol to issue a “red notice” for him, the *New York Times* added. For background, see *SAHR News* 2020-08. <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2676906/salim-ayyash-sentenced-5-life-terms-over-hariri%E2%80%99s-murder>; <https://news24x7world.com/middle-east/hezbollah-member-sentenced-in-absentia-over-killing-of-ex-premier-in-lebanon/>

United Nations. Writing in *PassBlue*, former High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and Swiss politician Ruth Dreifuss applauded the 16 December vote by the UN General Assembly endorsing a “moratorium on the use of the death penalty.” They expressed “concern over the discriminatory application of the death penalty to women” and said there is a particular “need to restrict its use when an individual’s age cannot be determined.” Noting there are several cases of people under 18-years-old being executed, they wrote, “Authorities have stated their inability to determine the age of those sentenced because of several factors, such as a lack of resources and systematic recording of birth records.” <https://us4.campaign-archive.com/?e=974ec5d541&u=5d5693a8f1af2d4b6cb3160e8&id=d63f39b52f>

The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) registered the 1,000th urgent action request since it was established in November 2011. Iraqi disappearances make up 49% of requests, followed by Mexico with 42%. “The urgent actions procedure allows families, relatives and representatives of disappeared persons to submit a request to CED after having reported the disappearance to the relevant national authorities.” Ninety people have been located through the procedure. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26616>

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley (U.S.) published the first global “guidelines for using publicly available information online—including photos, videos, and other content posted to social media sites—as evidence in international criminal and human rights investigations.” <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/article/human-rights-center-berkeley-protocol-social-media-evidence-war-crimes-nuremberg/>

World/general news.

Business records. An Australian inquiry panel released an interim report on mining company Rio Tinto’s destruction of 46,000-year-old caves at the Juukan Gorge. It said it had received 142 submissions from interested individuals and groups, numerous supplementary submissions and other documents, and held 11 public hearings. It recommended that Rio Tinto reconstruct the rock shelters it destroyed and “the agreement should include keeping places where artefacts and other material could be stored and displayed” for the benefit of the traditional owners of the site. For background, see *SAHR News* 2020-05.

Global Witness issued two major reports in December. One, titled “Beef, Banks and the Brazilian Amazon,” exposed the chain of actors that “are either destroying rainforests or are complicit in the destruction of the Amazon, with flawed audits undertaken by U.S. and European auditors.” It added, “Some of this forest devastation also involves serious human rights abuses against indigenous peoples and land rights activists.” It provided a long discussion of its methodology: “cattle transport permits (GTA) for the years 2014 to 2019 from the website of the Sanitary Agency of the State of Para . . . to identify the cattle suppliers to JBS, Marfrig and Minerva” were matched with “all ranch boundaries from a publicly available website of the State of Para rural environmental registry (SICAR).” They “obtained official Amazon deforestation data from the Brazilian Government’s National Institute for Space Research and overlaid that with the land boundaries of the ranches that supplied to the beef companies over the period.” They also used deforestation permits from the forest inspection agency and found that of the 379 ranches it had identified as suppliers, none had the legally required deforestation permits. <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/forests/beef-banks-and-brazilian-amazon/>

In a second report, this one on palm oil production, Global Witness looked at the extent of land and human rights abuses in ADM and Bunge’s Indonesian palm oil supply chains (ADM and Bunge are food processing companies). They “analyzed a random sample of the mills supplying both companies” using the companies’ public “sourcing list of palm oil mills.” They found that 658 mills supplied both trading companies, of which they randomly chose 330 to investigate through internet searches for conflicts and grievances and 6 to examine in detail, verifying the findings “with Indonesian civil society organizations supporting those communities.” It found that “nearly 40% of the sampled mills supplying both ADM and Bunge have, according to credible reports, been accused of violating local community land rights, criminalizing or attacking defenders, and/or causing serious environmental degradation.” Both companies acknowledged the incidents and conducted some investigations. <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/indonesia-palm-oil-traders-are-failing-land-and-environmental-defenders/>

Thomson Reuters Foundation published an overview of algorithms and artificial intelligence employers use to manage gig workers and the legal actions that those workers are taking to regain control of data. (Gig workers have agreements with companies to provide services to the company’s clients, rather than to the company itself. Uber drivers are classic gig workers.) A June report by the research firm Gartner “found that nearly a third of employers were already replacing full-time workers with gig workers and contractors.” An Oxford University researcher said algorithms “are increasingly used not just to set pay rates [for gig workers], but also to make hiring and firing decisions.” Worker Info Exchange, a British NGO, “aims to pool data from workers across different platforms and analyse it to inform” labor actions such as claims for minimum wages. <https://news.trust.org/item/20201216050305-57mxi/>

After the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and attorneys general from dozens of states filed lawsuits against Facebook, accusing it “of abusing its dominance in the digital marketplace and engaging in anti-competitive behavior,” a law professor examined the FTC’s arguments. She found that the FTC quoted extensively from Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg’s “explicit and detailed” emails: a “paper trail a sophisticated CEO like Zuckerberg created of Facebook’s transgressions.” https://www.salon.com/2020/12/22/why-facebook-antitrust-case-relies-so-heavily-on-mark-zuckerbergs-emails_partner/

The U.S. Justice Department sued Walmart, the massive retail corporation, “accusing it of fueling the nation’s opioid crisis by pressuring its pharmacies to fill even potentially suspicious prescriptions for the powerful painkillers,” *AP* reported. Federal law requires pharmacists “to spot suspicious orders for controlled substances and report those to the Drug Enforcement Administration, but prosecutors charge the company didn’t do that.” For background, see *SAHR News* 2020-03. https://apnews.com/article/health-lawsuits-opioids-9a21000256f9cde4c666bb552547349e?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=e92f77ce82-MR_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-e92f77ce82-149736437

McKinsey, the global management consulting firm which advised Purdue Pharma on ways to “turbocharge” its sales of the drug OxyContin, “proposing that it pay distributors rebates for overdoses linked to the pills they sold,” issued an apology, reported the *New York Times*. Documents filed in connection with Purdue’s bankruptcy proceedings included a 2018 email exchange between McKinsey

executives discussing “whether to purge records related to Purdue.” The company said it is “undertaking a full review of the work in question, including into the 2018 email exchange which referenced potential deletion of documents.” https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/08/business/mckinsey-opioids-oxycotin.html?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=a0ff096947-MR_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-a0ff096947-149736437

“Using Internet scanning,” researchers from the University of Toronto (Canada) uncovered the contracts Circles, a surveillance firm, has with governments in at least 25 countries. “According to leaked documents” and documents filed as part of a lawsuit in Israel against Circles’ parent company NSO Group, “Circles customers can purchase a system that they connect to their local telecommunications companies’ infrastructure, or can use a separate system called the ‘Circles Cloud,’ which interconnects with telecommunications companies around the world.” The researchers identified “with varying degrees of confidence” several governments that are Circles customers who “have a history of leveraging digital technology for human rights abuses,” such as the Security Operations Command of the Royal Thai Army “which has allegedly tortured detainees.” <https://citizenlab.ca/2020/12/running-in-circles-uncovering-the-clients-of-cyberespionage-firm-circles/>

Alibaba, the “Amazon of China” . . . openly offers Uyghur ‘ethnic minority’ recognition as a Cloud service, allowing customers to be alerted any time Alibaba detects a Uyghur,” IPVM, a physical security research group, reported. IPVM and the *Washington Post* also revealed that the giant Chinese tech companies Huawei and Megvii “tested and validated ‘Uyghur alarms’ in face recognition software meant for police video surveillance projects.” <https://ipvm.com/reports/alibaba-uyghur>; <https://ipvm.com/reports/huawei-megvii-uygur>

Child abuse. Two new studies explore how abuse and neglect in early life can have a negative impact in adulthood. One study followed 1048 U.S. children from kindergarten into adulthood, with interviews and searches of school and juvenile and adult court records. The researchers found that “negative economic, health, and criminal outcomes in adulthood were more than twice as likely for adults who were abused early in childhood compared with those who were not.” A study in Australia of “all persons born in South Australia 1986 to 2003” used records from the birth registry and perinatal statistics collection and linked that to child protection datafiles. Child maltreatment was characterized as when there was “child protective service (CPS) contact.” The cohort included 331,254 persons, 20% with CPS contact. The study found that those people who had had contact with child protective services had more than twice the death rate by age 33 than those without CPS contact. This risk was especially elevated if the child was placed in care outside the home starting at age 3. https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2020/12/10/peds.2020-0873?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=d4655d2798-MR_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-d4655d2798-149736437; https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2020/12/10/peds.2020-023416?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=d4655d2798-MR_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-d4655d2798-149736437

Reuters reported that “Pornhub said . . . it had pulled content uploaded by unverified users from its platform, days after Mastercard and Visa halted payments on the sex videos site over allegations of child sex-abuse content.” https://news.trust.org/item/20201208230145-1l684/?utm_campaign=trafficking&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_source=secondListing&utm_content=link1&utm_contentItemId=20201208230145-1l684

Child labor. A late November article by *Deutsche Welle* reported on a new study by the NORC Research Institute at the University of Chicago which estimates that around 1.6 million children work in cocoa farming in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, the world’s two largest cocoa-growing countries, including children as young as five. To get data on child labor, “NORC administered 2,809 household head surveys, 5,552 child surveys, 158 community surveys, 372 cocoa shed surveys, and 260 school surveys across Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. The data from 2018-19 survey round show that among children living in agricultural households in cocoa growing areas 45 percent were engaged in child labor and 43 percent were engaged in hazardous child labor in cocoa production in aggregate.” <https://allafrica.com/stories/202011270035.html>; for the report <https://www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/assessing-progress-in-reducing-child-labor-in-cocoa-growing-areas-of-c%3%B4te-d%E2%80%99ivoire-and-ghana.aspx>

An *AP* investigative report used “U.S. Customs records and the most recently published data from producers, traders and buyers to trace” palm oil supply chains. *AP*’s researchers in Malaysia and Indonesia interviewed “more than 130 current and former workers—some two dozen of them child laborers—at

nearly 25 companies” and more than 100 activists and government officials. They “found children working on plantations and corroborated accounts of abuse, whenever possible, by reviewing police reports and legal documents.” A Malaysia government study in 2018 estimated “more than 33,000 children work in the [palm oil] industry there, many under hazardous conditions—with nearly half of them between the ages of 5 and 11.” *AP* found that companies using child labor were supplying many “leading food companies” including one that makes Girl Scout cookies, widely sold by Scouts to support their local activities. <https://apnews.com/article/palm-oil-forests-indonesia-scouts-83b01f2789e9489569960da63b2741c4>

Freedom of the press. “A total of 50 journalists were killed worldwide in 2020,” Reporters Without Borders announced. Mexico led the dismal list, with 8 journalists killed. <https://rsf.org/en/news/rsfs-2020-round-50-journalists-killed-two-thirds-countries-peace>

Inequality/poverty. *Thomson Reuters Foundation* warned that “nearly one in four people may not get COVID-19 vaccines until at least 2022 because rich countries with less than 15% of the global population have reserved 51% of the doses of the most promising vaccines.” Researchers at Johns Hopkins University (U.S.) came to that conclusion by using the “World Health Organization’s draft landscape of covid-19 candidate vaccines, along with company disclosures to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, company and foundation press releases, government press releases, and media reports” to examine the “premarket purchase commitments for covid-19 vaccines, publicly announced by 15 November 2020.” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccines-trfn/one-in-four-people-globally-may-not-get-covid-19-vaccines-until-2022-idUSKBN28P317>; for the report see <https://www.bmj.com/content/371/bmj.m4750>

Researchers at the London School of Economics issued a working paper, “The Economic Consequences of Major Tax Cuts for the Rich.” They used 50 years of tax data from 18 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries to “estimate the causal effect of major tax cuts for the rich on income inequality, economic growth, and unemployment.” They found that “reducing taxes on the rich lead to higher income inequality as measured by the top 1% share of pre-tax national income.” In other words, tax cuts for the rich don’t trickle down to the less wealthy, commented *Bloomberg News*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-16/fifty-years-of-tax-cuts-for-rich-didn-t-trickle-down-study-says>; for the study see http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/107919/1/Hope_economic_consequences_of_major_tax_cuts_published.pdf

Justice. To mark the tenth anniversary on December 21 of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), Penal Reform International, a London-based NGO, posted a blog on the global female prison population. Analyzing data from the World Prison Brief, which has prison statistics on 223 jurisdictions, PRI found an increase in the global female prison population of 105,000 in the decade, to 741,000; a 17% increase. Up to 80% of the women have “an identifiable mental illness.” Many are incarcerated for “petty offences, low level drug-related offences like possession of small amounts, and ‘status offences’ that only criminalize women like abortion, witchery or sorcery.” <https://news.trust.org/item/20201210185728-yz1bs/>; <https://www.penalreform.org/blog/addressing-the-105000-increase-in-the-global-female/>

Medical records. A debate is occurring about the “possible use of digital health passports to ease the [COVID-19] lockdowns that are crippling the global economy,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. Several countries are experimenting with certificates—paper or electronic—for those who have been vaccinated, but a researcher at the NGO Privacy International said “apps and other digital solutions combining health data and identification could exclude large numbers of people who do not own a smartphone” while also leaving open the possibility of “data exploitation, with the valuable data from these solutions (being) used for other purposes.” <https://news.trust.org/item/20201221125814-sv8ea/>

Migration. For a joint study, UNICEF and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees interviewed over 3,100 persons from northern Central America who were migrating in family units. Nearly 20% of them “identified violence—including death threats, extortion, gang recruitment and domestic violence—as the main reason behind the decision to leave their communities. More than 30% of unaccompanied migrant children surveyed identified some type of violence as the main driver of their movement, which in turn affected their ability to access essential services, including going to school.” <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/death-threats-and-gang-violence-forcing-more-families-flee-northern-central-america>

On the U.S.-Mexico border, 70,000 migrants were “caught” attempting to cross into the U.S. in November, “a 64% increase compared to last November,” *Axios* reported the U.S. Customs and Border Protection saying. About 4,500 of those persons were unaccompanied children. <https://www.axios.com/border-crossings-biden-immigration-89b48348-7882-4701-80ab-1019484bfe5e.html>

Thirty women, undocumented migrants, filed suit against the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for being pressured to have unwanted or unnecessary gynecological procedures while in custody or were retaliated against for speaking out, *PBS* reported. The case centers on actions at a detention facility in the state of Georgia, which is run by a private contractor. Lawyers for the women say ICE knew about the abuses “as far back as 2018,” a claim ICE denies. Records of ICE should clarify that. For background, see *SAHR News* 2020-10. https://www.npr.org/2020/12/22/949257207/dozens-of-women-allege-unwanted-surgeries-and-medical-abuse-in-ice-custody?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=e92f77ce82-MR_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-e92f77ce82-149736437

Slavery. A group of researchers used satellite vessel monitoring data from Global Fishing Watch for 16,000 industrial fishing vessels to see whether “vessels reported to exhibit any of the ILO [International Labor Organization] indicators of forced labor behave in ways that are systematically different from other vessels from other vessels, and then exploit this information using machine learning to discriminate between vessels that use forced labor from those that do not.” They identified suspect behaviors by reviewing investigative journalism reports and interviewing experts from NGOs working in the field. They found they could identify high risk vessels, showing that “remotely sensed dynamic individual behavior can be used to infer forced labor abuses,” which in turn can provide new opportunities for enforcement and policy interventions. <https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2020/12/16/2016238117>

A team of researchers created a “linked open data platform” as a central source for information on people, events and places involved in the transatlantic slave trade, *Smithsonian Magazine* reported. It currently links data from seven “partner portals;” another 30 databases will be linked over the next year. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/sweeping-new-digital-database-emphasizes-enslaved-peoples-individuality-180976513/>

Technology. “Drones can be used to investigate known crimes. But they are also sensors that can generate offenses,” a staff member of the American Civil Liberties Union told the *New York Times*. Police in the U.S. are using drones for policing at a distance, with programs that allow a drone to follow a particular person or vehicle on its own. Describing the use of drones by a California police department, the *Times* reported the department “treats drone video much as it does video from police body cams, storing footage as evidence and publicly releasing it only with approval.” <https://www.denverpost.com/2020/12/12/police-drones-are-starting-to-think-for-themselves/>

World War II. The Dutch Restitutions Commission, set up to decide on claims for return to private owners of artworks and other cultural artifacts in government museums and similar institutions, has been criticized for its tendency to find for the government and against the claimants. A committee established to review the Commission’s track record issued its findings, the *New York Times* reported. The chairman of the review said there are “at least 15 policy documents and letters to Parliament that outlined the Dutch rules for processing restitution claims, making it extremely difficult for an ordinary citizen to understand how their case would be judged.” The review committee “suggests the government resume systematic research into the wartime history of artworks, in hopes of finding victims of Nazi looting or their heirs; issue a clear set of guidelines to explain how the restitution process works; and set up a ‘help desk’ to guide claimants through.” <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-museums-amsterdam-netherlands-154f31d925d8f62e038c31df448bfe41>

China announced that “a collection of digital archives about the Nanjing Massacre will be made public,” *CGTN* reported. An archivist from the Second Historical Archives, where the originals are held, said “some of the more important files related to the Japanese war crimes, including a clipping from *The Tokyo Daily News* about the killing race between two Japanese generals, an English list of major Japanese war criminals, and documents on . . . trials [of Japanese war criminals].” <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-12-13/Digital-archives-of-Nanjing-war-crimes-to-be-made-public-WbVjr0jFBu/index.html>

Bilateral and multilateral news.

Afghanistan/United States. When the U.S. and its coalition partners arrived in Afghanistan, they made deals to get land for bases. As the foreign troops departed, the land was not returned to the original owners but was transferred to the Afghan security forces, the *New York Times* reported. Even land owners with deeds have been unsuccessful in getting the land back. “All this land is mixed up now, no one know which piece is whose,” a landowner told the *Times*, which said “resolving those conflicts would require digging through government archives, hoping to find old property demarcation records.” <https://bdnews24.com/world/2020/12/09/us-leaves-behind-afghan-bases--and-a-legacy-of-land-disputes>

Armenia/Azerbaijan. “Azerbaijan has arrested four soldiers suspected of involvement in war crimes,” *Al Jazeera* reported. The soldiers “recorded their actions on a smart phone and sent them to other people through social networks,” said the Prosecutor. Several of the videos showed “Azerbaijani servicemen mistreating Armenian soldiers and attempting to destroy graves;” they are also accused of defiling the bodies of dead Armenian soldiers. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/14/azerbaijan-arrests-soldiers-suspected-of-war-crimes>

Australia/Ireland/United Kingdom. A diary belonging to a British soldier posted in Australia’s Van Diemen’s Land in the 1820s has been located in Ireland’s national library, *ABC Radio Hobart* reported. It includes an “account of his part in the coverup of a massacre of men and women on March 21, 1827, near Campbell Town in the Northern Midlands,” a crime that was previously unknown. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-28/tasmanian-historian-uncovers-extremely-rare-diaries-of-a-soldier/12993464>

Austria/Syria. The Syrian Justice and Accountability Center reported that in mid-November Austrian media, using leaked documents from Austria’s national intelligence service (BVT), revealed “that the BVT made a deal, so-called ‘Operation White Milk,’ with the Israeli Mossad . . . to provide shelter and grant asylum to Khaled Al-Halabi,” who “as head of Branch 335 of the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate (GID) in Raqqa from 2009 until 2013 . . . was involved in crimes against humanity, torture, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and war crimes.” He arrived in Austria in June 2015 and by late 2018 he disappeared; his current whereabouts are unknown. https://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2020/12/03/justice-and-accountability-drowned-in-operation-white-milk/?utm_source=SJAC+Weekly+Update&utm_campaign=f7e9512504-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_10_02_56_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0a7405c641-f7e9512504-96428969

Balkan wars. A researcher working with *BIRN* produced a report on “links between wartime sexual violence and trafficking.” The research used verdicts from trials held at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and at domestic courts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. “Cases of human traffickers convicted in Serbia between 2005 and 2018 were analyzed to find out whether the defendants had also participated in any war crimes.” She found “a few documented cases of subsequent involvement of convicted war criminals in Bosnia in the trafficking of human beings” and pointed out, “Victims’ testimonies and transcripts of the trials of men who raped sexually-enslaved women contain many names of individuals who have not been brought to justice—suggesting that more connections between perpetrators of wartime sexual violence and crimes involving trafficking might still be undiscovered.” <https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/BIRN-Ivana-Radovic-FINAL-edited-1.pdf>

By analyzing “completed cases at the ICTY relating to crimes committed in the Herzeg-Bosnia statelet and in Prozor-Rama, as well as documents from evidence material, witnesses’ testimonies and expert witnesses’ findings,” *BIRN* identified “the names of more than ten people associated with the capture, abuse, forcible relocation and rape of prisoners in Prozor-Rama, as well as the use of detainees as forced labour and the destruction and confiscation of property.” *BIRN* asked the Bosnian state prosecutor “whether or not there are any ongoing investigations into crimes committed by HVO troops [the Herzeg-Bosnia military] and military police officers in Prozor-Rama” but got no answer. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/11/29/hague-archives-show-bosnian-croat-officers-links-to-executions-rapes/>

“Serbia’s information commissioner has ordered the country’s interior ministry to provide the *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network* with information *BIRN* requested concerning war crimes fugitive Rajko Kozlina, sentenced in late 2019 by a Serbian court to 15 years in prison but who remains at large.” For background, see *SAHR News* 2020-10 and 11. https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/25/serbian-commissioner-backs-birn-in-info-requests-on-war-crimes-fugitive/?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=3f93f10a50-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-3f93f10a50-319725265

Bosnia/Netherlands/Serbia. The Netherlands' defense minister told the Dutch parliament "that relatives of a group of Srebrenica victims who were killed in July 1995 can submit requests for compensation from the start of March next year, after a Dutch court ruled that the state has partial responsibility for several hundred deaths," *BIRN* reported. The Netherlands will set up a compensation commission in Sarajevo, and applications can be filed until March 2023. A lawyer for families of the victims "said the key issue is how to prove who was killed within the Dutch compound and who was killed outside it," remarking, "The Dutch parliament's committee will have a very difficult task in determining the list of people entitled to compensation." The head of the NGO Mothers of Srebrenica and Zepa Enclaves said her group's "lists suggest that up to 500 people were killed," but Parliament's list has around 330 names. For background, see *HRWG News* 2019-07. https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/22/srebrenica-victims-families-told-to-seek-damages-from-netherlands/?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=948fa760cf-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-948fa760cf-319725265

China/United States. "A security executive with the video-tech giant Zoom worked with the Chinese government to terminate Americans' accounts and disrupt video calls about the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy activists in Tiananmen Square, [U.S.] Justice Department prosecutors said," reported the *Washington Post*. The U.S. complaint quotes from electronic messages sent between the executive and other Zoom employees; it alleges the Zoom employee gave Chinese government officials "the names, email addresses and other sensitive information of users, even those outside China." Zoom says it fired the executive, placed other implicated employees on leave, and "will no longer allow requests from the Chinese government to affect users outside mainland China." <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/technology/federal-prosecutors-accuse-zoom-executive-of-working-with-chinese-government-to-surveil-users-and-suppress-video-calls/>

Egypt/Italy. Giulio Regeni, an Italian doctoral student, was murdered in Cairo in 2016. Italian police have now charged four officials of Egypt's National Security Agency with his abduction and murder, the *New York Times* reported. Cooperation between the two countries has been difficult: Italian investigators wanted to retrace his movements by using cellphone tower signal records, but the "Egyptian authorities were hesitant to produce the documents for privacy reasons." Italy also wanted footage from surveillance cameras inside Cairo metro stations; when they got it "three crucial portions were missing" for the time he was believed to have been in the subway. For the last two years "no new documents arrived from the Egyptian authorities," the Italian prosecutor said. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/10/world/europe/italy-egypt-giulio-regeni.html>

Germany/Syria. The Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC) published an "unofficial summary" by its trial monitor of the September 9 and 10 proceedings in the trial of Syrians Anwar Raslan and Eyad al Gharib in Germany. The testimony is especially interesting because the witness described his work as a civil servant supervising burials of corpses from the Syrian state security apparatus and the burial records that were created (see *SAHR News* 2020-09 for discussion). This publication illustrates the importance of trial monitors in the work of transitional justice. SJAC also published a helpful glossary of German and English terms that are used in the trial. https://syriaaccountability.org/wp-content/uploads/201208-Trial-Report-12_ENG_public.pdf; https://syriaaccountability.org/wp-content/uploads/201123_SJAC_ICWC_Glossary_english_final.pdf

Iraq/United States. Four Blackwater corporation security guards were tried and convicted in the U.S. in 2015 for killing 14 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad in 2007. U.S. President Donald Trump signed a pardon for all four on 22 December 2020, an act that was widely condemned. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said the pardon "contributes to impunity and has the effect of emboldening others to commit such crimes in the future," while the five member UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries said, "These pardons violate U.S. obligations under international law and more broadly undermine humanitarian law and human rights at a global level. Ensuring accountability for such crimes is fundamental to humanity and to the community of nations." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-regarding-executive-grants-clemency-122220/>; https://www.vice.com/en/article/88amjb/iraqis-who-survived-the-blackwater-massacre-are-devastated-by-trumps-pardons?utm_source=email&utm_medium=editorial&utm_content=news&utm_campaign=201226 ; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1080822>; <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26616&LangID=E>; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1081152>

Mexico/United States. The National Security Archive, a U.S. NGO, published documents it obtained through the Freedom of Information Act on U.S. aid to Mexico under the Merida Initiative, "a wide-

ranging U.S. aid program to fight organized crime and narco trafficking.” Among the “sensitive equipment” sent to Mexico’s Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU) were paper shredders!
<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/mexico/2020-12-09/us-prosecutions-bring-mexico-corruption-focus?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=5e43d6b3-0844-4b36-bb3b-73a5de108e38>

Mideast wars. *The Intercept* reported on interviews with more than 50 Wardak, Afghanistan, residents, who described “at least 10 previously undocumented night raids in the central Afghan province of Wardak” that began in December 2018 and continued for “at least a year,” killing “at least 51 civilians.” The Afghan unit believed responsible for the killings “and its American masters have never been publicly held accountable by either the Afghan or U.S. governments.” The interview notes are vital evidence.
https://theintercept.com/2020/12/18/afghanistan-cia-militia-01-strike-force/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Intercept%20Newsletter

Summing up 2020, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) published a report on the continuing deaths and injuries resulting from landmines and a report on extrajudicial killings that “claimed the lives of 1,734 civilians in Syria in 2020, including 99 in December.” The number of extrajudicial killings is the highest in the world, SNHR wrote. Both reports draw on SNHR’s extensive database on events in Syria.
<https://sn4hr.org/blog/2020/12/10/55735/>; <https://sn4hr.org/blog/2021/01/01/55788/>

The Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre released new open source software Bayanat, “allowing human rights documenters to safely preserve, analyze and share data of human rights abuses for advocacy, prosecutorial, and journalistic purposes.” <https://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2020/12/08/bayanat-sjacs-new-open-source-database/>

South Korea/Thailand. “At least 522 Thais have died in South Korea since 2015—84% of whom were undocumented,” reported *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, based on data from the Thai embassy in Seoul obtained via a freedom of information (FOI) request. “More Thais died in South Korea—283—than any other foreign country between 2015 and 2018, according to data obtained via a separate FOI request to Thailand’s foreign ministry. Statistics were not available for 2019 and 2020.”
https://news.trust.org/item/20201222000325-j5o12/?utm_campaign=trafficking&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_source=leadItem&utm_content=link1&utm_contentItemId=20201222000325-j5o12

National news.

Afghanistan. “Almost 90% of Afghan women have experienced at least one form of physical, sexual, or psychological violence in their lifetime, the World Health Organization says,” *The New Humanitarian* wrote. “The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission estimates that about 3,000 Afghans attempt to take their own life each year,” and unlike most of the world where male suicide is more common, in Afghanistan the Commission says “80% of suicide attempts are by women.” However, “national data on suicides is unreliable because so many go unreported and there’s no uniform tracking system.”
https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/12/16/Afghanistan-women-economy-gender-based-violence?utm_source=The+New+Humanitarian&utm_campaign=a6af840319-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_12_11_Weekly_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d842d98289-a6af840319-75545741

Bosnia. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed the search for persons missing during the war. The Missing Persons Institute told *BIRN* that through November “the mortal remains of 62 victims of the war were exhumed, compared to 97 last year and 134 in 2018” and only 51 remains were identified, compared to 177 in 2019.
https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/25/pandemic-slows-search-for-bosnian-war-missing/?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=3f93f10a50-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-3f93f10a50-319725265

Brazil. For the first time Brazil’s statistics agency has collected data on dangerous forms of child labor, which include sex work, drug trafficking and handling heavy machinery, and found that “almost half of Brazil’s 1.8 million child laborers work in dangerous conditions,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. It also found that only 86% of child laborers attend school, and children aged between 5 and 13 are paid 15% of the legal minimum wage.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-trafficking-children-trfn/half-of-brazils-child-labourers-work-in-dangerous-conditions-idUSKBN28R33P>; <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-de-imprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/29737-em-2019-havia-1-8-milhao-de-criancas-em-situacao-de-trabalho-infantil-no-pais-com-queda-de-16-8-frente-a-2016>

Chile. “Chile’s Human Rights Commission (CChDH) filed a complaint against the Military Police (Carabineros) for the illegal use of chemicals to dissuade protests in Santiago between November and December 2020,” *teleSUR* reported. “The lawsuit includes photographs and documents” that show the health impacts of the chemicals and also includes “graphic testimonies.” https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Chile-Human-Rights-Defenders-Claim-Chemical-Use-by-Carabineros-20201208-0010.html?utm_source=planisys&utm_medium=NewsletterIngles&utm_campaign=NewsletterIngles&utm_content=10

China. An *AP* investigation “shows the Chinese government is strictly controlling all research” into the origins of the COVID-19 virus. The “investigation was based on dozens of interviews with Chinese and foreign scientists and officials, along with public notices, leaked emails, internal data and the documents from China’s cabinet and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.” Finding the origin of the virus that has now killed upwards of two million people worldwide, which species it came from and where it leapt from that animal to humans and when the first cases were discovered in China are essential clues that can help prevent future pandemics. A World Health Organization team plans to visit in January 2021. A team member said “data collected by the country’s extensive disease surveillance system would likely prove valuable” as well as hospital X-rays and “reviews of hospital records before December” 2019. https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-coronavirus-pandemic-china-only-on-ap-bats-24fbade58cee3a40bca2ddf7a14d2955?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=December30_MorningWire_Automated&utm_term=Morning%20Wire%20Subscribers; https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-science-beijing-animals-cbola-virus-dec22c92bd4abf403f8fffbbe81880a7?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=81723f0803-MR_COPY_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-81723f0803-149736437

“New evidence from Chinese government documents and media reports shows that hundreds of thousands of ethnic minority laborers in Xinjiang are forced to pick cotton by hand through a coercive state-mandated labor transfer and ‘poverty alleviation’ scheme, with potentially drastic consequences for global supply chains,” said a report from the U.S.-based NGO Center for Global Policy. <https://cgpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/20201214-PB-China-Zenz-1.pdf>

Colombia. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said it has “recorded the deaths of 255 people in 66 massacres in Colombia this year, as well as the killing of 120 human rights defenders.” The UN Verification Mission “has also documented 244 killings of former FARC fighters since the signing of Colombia’s Peace Agreement in November 2016.” In July 2020 the UN Representative in Colombia warned “the Security Council that the killing of former combatants, human rights defenders and community leaders remained the most serious threat to peace since the 2016 peace agreement.” *teleSUR* reported that in 2020 Colombia’s Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (Indepaz) recorded 91 massacres with more than 375 victims, 310 social leaders and 64 ex-combatants, “ending the year with the 91st massacre where seven were killed,” plus 78 victims of killings by Colombian security forces. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1080082>; https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/colombia-ends-the-year-2020-with-90th-massacre--20210101-0020.html?utm_source=planisys&utm_medium=NewsletterIngles&utm_campaign=NewsletterIngles&utm_content=10

Germany. The *New York Times* published a long report on the former German army officer (identified only as Franco A., in keeping with German privacy laws) who posed for 16 months as a Syrian refugee. Prosecutors say the ruse “was part of a far-right plot to carry out one or several assassinations that could be blamed on his refugee alter ego and set off enough civil unrest to bring down the Federal Republic of Germany.” When police raided the man’s house, they “discovered scores of handwritten notes and a diary,” which are now in evidence files. The *Times* reporter read these and also interviewed him “several times,” during which Franco A. showed the reporter “videos of himself in refugee disguise.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/29/world/europe/germany-far-right-terrorism-refugee.html?referringSource=articleShare>

Guatemala. The Open Society Justice Initiative ended its monitoring of grave crimes trials in Guatemala. For its final wrap-up of the status of the cases, see: <https://www.ijmonitor.org/category/guatemala-trials/>

Iran. The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and six UN Special Rapporteurs wrote to the government in September, raising the issues of Iran’s “continued refusal to disclose the circumstances of death and remains of thousands of political dissidents who were forcibly disappeared and then allegedly extrajudicially executed between July and early September 1988 in 32 cities, and the authorities’ refusal to provide families with accurate and complete death certificates.” They observed that when death certificates were issued “they were not accurate.” The Working Group called upon the government “to urgently conduct a thorough and independent investigation into all cases, to

disclose detailed information on the fate of each individual and to prosecute perpetrators.” Amnesty International hailed the UN letter as a “momentous breakthrough.” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/iran-un-calls-for-accountability-on-1988-prison-massacres-marks-turning-point-in-three-decade-struggle/>; <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25503>

Ireland. The debate continued over the disposition of the archives of the Mother and Baby Home Commission which investigated the practices and conditions in those institutions. At the end of November, the *Independent* gained access to correspondence between Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and the Department of Children, in which “Tusla expressed serious concerns about taking responsibility for the archives,” stating it feared “it would be blamed for refusing access to records of survivors and adoptees.” Tusla’s chief executive pointed out that the agency “was already the subject of ‘sustained criticism’ because of its ‘legal inability to meaningfully process the information we already hold’.” <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/tusla-concerned-about-taking-over-mother-and-baby-home-commission-archive-39804024.html>

Italy. The judge in the case against officials of Autostrade per l’Italia and officials of the Infrastructure and Transport Ministry on responsibility for the 2018 collapse of the Morandi bridge in Genoa that killed 43 people commissioned an independent report on the reasons for the collapse. The 467-page report has been made public and places blame on a host of problems from the design and construction to the maintenance of the structure, the *New York Times* reported. The designer “was aware that some of the steel cables were vulnerable to corrosion and that some mistakes were made during the complicated construction of such a peculiar bridge, according to notes he made at the time, now collected in the State Archive of Rome.” The report says the bridge’s state operator “never carried out the thorough tests on its stays that were suggested by the designer.” <https://www.nytimespost.com/poor-maintenance-and-construction-flaws-are-cited-in-italy-bridge-collapse/>

Kenya. The High Court awarded four million Kenyan shillings to each of four survivors of sexual violence during post-election unrest between December 2007 and February 2008, saying the government failed in its “positive obligation to investigate and prosecute violations,” *International Justice Monitor* reported. The case began in February 2013. Since that time five judges have presided over the case; imagine the case file. For background, see *HRWG News* 2017-04. <https://www.ijmonitor.org/2020/12/kenyan-court-awards-four-sgbv-survivors-four-million-shillings/>

Kosovo. The prime minister, with the agreement of the acting president, fired the chief of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency after “a KIA inspector was allegedly found at the President’s office . . . trying to obtain confidential information from the safe” while Driton Gashi, the former secretary to ex-president Hashim Thaci and also a former intelligence chief, was in the office, *BIRN* reported. An adviser to the current acting president (who discovered the operation) said Gashi told him, “I do not want these documents to fall into the hands of EULEX” (the European Union’s rule-of-law mission that provides support to the Kosovo Specialist Chambers). Gashi denies the allegations. https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/18/kosovo-fires-intelligence-chief-over-raid-on-presidents-safe/?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=73bd980c8b-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-73bd980c8b-319725265; <https://eulex-kosovo.eu/?page=2,11,1280>

Lebanon. The judge investigating the catastrophic explosion at the port of Beirut in August that killed nearly 200 people charged the acting prime minister and three former ministers with negligence, the *New York Times* reported. “Government documents obtained by *The New York Times* and other news outlets after the blast showed that warning about the danger posed by the ammonium nitrate [that triggered the explosion] had bounced around the Lebanese state for years, crossing the desks of the port and customs authorities, three ministries, the commander of the Lebanese Army, at least two powerful judges, the president and the prime minister. It appeared that [acting prime minister] Mr. Diab . . . had been charged because the documents showed that he had been warned about the chemicals weeks before the blast.” <https://www.deccanherald.com/international/world-news-politics/lebanon-pm-hassan-diab-charged-with-negligence-in-beirut-blast-925953.html>

Mali. The UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, which investigated violence between 2012 and 2018, sent its conclusions to the Security Council, *Al Jazeera* reported. *AFP* obtained a copy and reported the Commission said it “has reasonable grounds to believe that the Malian defence and security forces committed war crimes” and that “extremist armed groups committed crimes against humanity and

war crimes.” The 338-page report “details in chronological order 140 cases of violence or abuse,” and “unlike other UN reports, the conclusions of the International Commission of Inquiry can be used as a legal basis for possible prosecution.” The Commission recommended setting up a special court for to handle the charges. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/22/un-mali-probe-sees-war-crimes-crimes-against-humanity> ; <https://www.macaubusiness.com/un-report-on-mali-gives-key-examples-of-crimes/>

Mexico. “Since 2000, 119 journalists have been killed in Mexico, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, making the country the most dangerous place in the world for members of the press. In 2020, 60 journalists from 25 international media outlets came together to pursue the stories of their murdered Mexican colleagues, resulting in ‘The Cartel Project,’ a series of five investigations published simultaneously by 25 international media around the world.” They “tracked the international associates of Mexican criminal groups, revealing their connections to organized crime” and in the course of the investigation “were given access to exclusive documents showing firearms sales” from German, Belgian, Italian and other “multinational weapons manufacturers . . . to Mexican states with a history of collusion with criminal groups and human rights violations.” <https://forbiddenstories.org/the-cartel-project/>

The *Washington Post* published a feature article on the search for the missing in Mexico and the work of the National Search Commission. The Commission’s records show more than 79,000 people have disappeared in Mexico, most of them since 2006. When Karla Quintana became the head of the Commission in February 2019, it had “40,000 names of the disappeared in a crazy quilt of Excel documents and Word files, replete with duplications and typos.” After Commission workers consolidated and updated the material, they “called state prosecutors’ offices for the latest figures,” only to find that “many wouldn’t send the information” and in some cases “their records were just a mess.” As yet, “nearly one-third of Mexico’s 32 states” still have not turned over their figures. And from 2006 to 2019 the justice system “had an abysmal record of convictions”: it opened 11,706 investigations of forced disappearances and sentenced 39 people. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/mexico-losing-control/mexico-disappeared-drug-war/?tid=ss_tw

World Politics Review surveyed the spike in femicides, writing, “Government statistics show that an average of 10 women are murdered each day in Mexico, and femicides have jumped by 137% over the past five years.” Even more chilling: “from 2015 to 2018 only 7% of crimes against women were even investigated.” <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29278/in-mexico-protests-continue-against-a-historic-spike-in-femicides>

Myanmar. A widow filed the first ever complaint by a Rohingya at the Myanmar National Human Rights Committee, requesting U.S. \$2 million in compensation from the government “for its gross failure to meaningfully address the ‘Inn Din massacre’ in which her husband was killed” by the Myanmar army. The NGO Legal Action Worldwide, which participated in the filing, said the complaint “builds upon the work of two *Reuters* journalists who were imprisoned in Myanmar while conducting an investigation that unearthed the fact of the Inn Din massacre” and were imprisoned for it (released after 500 days of incarceration). For background, see *SAHR News* 2019-05. <http://www.legalactionworldwide.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Press-Release-MHRC-10.12.pdf>; for the February 2018 *Reuters* investigation, see <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-rakhine-events/>

Netherlands. The government has agreed to pay “about 2,000 transpeople who had to undergo sterilization to legally change their gender” on their birth certificate, a practice that was in place from 1 July 1985 to 1 July 2014, *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. A spokeswoman for Transgender Network Nederland welcomed the news but noted also that those who did not undergo surgery “had to live without legal recognition of their identity.” <https://news.trust.org/item/20201201160027-m5chn/>

Peru. “The Ombudsman’s Office reported at least 5,016 women, girls, and teenagers have been reported missing between January and November,” and the numbers in November were an increase of 20% over October, *teleSUR* reported. “The Office also pointed out that there were 127 femicides, 188 attempts of femicide, and 50 violent deaths” during the period. “A survey by the National Institute of Statistics and Information . . . noted that about 60% of the population considered it ‘fine’ that women could be abused under certain circumstances.” https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Over-5000-Women-Were-Reported-Missing-in-Peru-This-Year-20201214-0003.html?utm_source=planisys&utm_medium=NewsletterIngles&utm_campaign=NewsletterIngles&utm_content=8

Human Rights Watch investigated the killing of two protesters and injuring of over 200 during the mid-November 2020 demonstrations against the ousting of then-president Martin Vizcarra and concluded that the National Police “committed multiple abuses” against the protesters. HRW investigators interviewed 76 participants, met with government officials, and “reviewed more than 200 videos posted on social media,” media reports and publications by local rights groups. Among the recommendations are a pilot program for police to wear body cameras with “clear rules about the use of those cameras that prevent police tampering with footage and data, and allow images to be released to investigative bodies and those affected, while protecting the privacy of people recorded, particularly victims of violence and children” and that “police should start recording work-related calls between police officers during crowd-control operations” and make the recordings available to prosecutors and internal affairs investigators. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/17/peru-serious-police-abuses-against-protesters#>

The police filmed a raid in which “police drugs-squad members disguised as Santa Claus and an elf swooped into a house in Lima not to deliver gifts but to capture a suspected cocaine and dope dealer,” *Reuters* reported. The police said the “arrested man had been videotaped selling drugs outside his house near a school.” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-peru-police-santa/armed-santa-peruvian-police-take-unorthodox-steps-to-bust-drug-pusher-idUSKBN28P32Q> for video of the raid, see *BBC*: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-55327903>

Philippines. After the state-run *Philippine News Agency* published a photo of members of the Philippine army posing next to the body of “a suspected communist rebel fighter, who is also the daughter of a member of Congress,” Human Rights Watch said posing with a body for photographs is “a cruel and unnecessary affront to the individual’s dignity and violates the laws of war,” *Al Jazeera* reported. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/3/philippine-army-under-fire-after-killing-of-lawmakers-daughter>

Russia. The online news outlet *Readovka* reported “a major personal data leak of COVID-19 patients admitted to Moscow hospital, as well as Muscovites who had been ordered to self-quarantine, or fined over violating the self-quarantine regulations.” The data included “names, home addresses, insurance numbers, phone number and medical data.” Human Rights Watch commented, “While collection of data about the spread of COVID-19 may be important to contain the pandemic, authorities should ensure that data collection efforts are guided by the principles of necessity and proportionality and develop comprehensive and transparent regulations on data collection and storage with robust data security safeguards.” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/15/personal-data-thousands-covid-19-patients-leaked-moscow>

“A joint investigation between Bellingcat [a group of investigative journalists] and *The Insider*, in cooperation with *Der Spiegel* and *CNN*, has discovered voluminous telecom and travel data that implicates Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) in the poisoning of the prominent Russian opposition politician Alexey Navalny.” Bellingcat noted that the Russian government “has officially declined to open a formal investigation” into Navalny’s poisoning. Russian president Putin admitted in a news conference that Russian intelligence agencies “indeed need to keep an eye on” Navalny. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/12/14/fsb-team-of-chemical-weapon-experts-implicated-in-alexey-navalny-novichok-poisoning/>; <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-putin-denies-involvement-in-poisoning-of-kremlin-critic-alexey-navalny/>

Spain. “Spain’s defense minister has asked prosecutors to investigate leaked chats of retired military officers allegedly talking about shooting political adversaries and praising the late dictator Francisco Franco,” *AP* reported. The messages “from a private WhatsApp group” were published by the *Infolibre* website. <https://www.ourmidland.com/news/article/Spanish-minister-condemns-far-right-chats-of-15772749.php>

Sudan. After interviewing witnesses, including doctors, and reviewing video footage, photographs, and forensic reports, Human Rights Watch concluded that “Sudanese authorities used excessive force, including lethal force, against protesters on October 15, 2020, leading to the deaths of 7 protesters, including a 16-year-old boy, as well as a security official” and injuring 25 people “most from bullet wounds.” The protests took place in Kassala after Sudan’s prime minister dismissed the governor of Kassala state. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/21/sudan-security-forces-kill-protesters-eastern-sudan>

Syria. *Psychological Medicine* published the results of a written survey of more than 1,300 secondary school children in Damascus about “the impact that nine years of exposure to the conflict has had. They found negative impacts in more than half”—it appeared worse in girls—“with high levels of post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), problematic anger and other, significant mental health issues.” <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-years-psychological-effects-syrian-war.html>

United Kingdom. A coroner ruled that the 2013 death of a 9-year-old girl was caused by “asthma contributed to by exposure to excessive air pollution,” with the “principal source of her exposure being traffic emissions,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. “Air pollution” will now be entered on her death certificate. Legal experts called the verdict “historic” and hope it will cause the government to toughen air pollution standards. <https://news.trust.org/item/20201216050305-57mxi/>

The Chief Inspector of Constabulary and the Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services issued a joint report saying “police should share less information with immigration officials about abused or trafficked migrant women as it stops them seeking help,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. https://news.trust.org/item/20201217110733-rj2z5/?utm_campaign=trafficking&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_source=mainListing&utm_content=link1&utm_contentItemId=20201217110733-rj2z5

United Kingdom/Northern Ireland. “More than 700 files” on the 1974 Guildford pub bombings “had been due to open this year but were retained by the Home Office” apparently because a new inquest on the matter is underway, *BBC* reported. “A Surrey Police report said the closure was ‘not for an indefinite period and will last for three years,’ adding the National Archives had requested an update next July.” The bombings are iconic events of the North Ireland “Troubles.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-surrey-55131476>

United States. *Reveal* sued the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives for data on how many guns once owned by police departments have been found at crime scenes. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that aggregate gun “trace data, such as the number of guns traced back to a general location” can be released, rejecting the claim that “such data violated privacy or exposes law enforcement operations.” Importantly, the court also rejected the idea that “querying and searching of government databases amounts to the creation of a ‘new document’,” which is a legal reason to deny a request under the Federal Freedom of Information Act. <https://revealnews.org/article/reveal-sued-the-atf-for-crime-gun-data-the-courts-decision-could-greatly-expand-government-transparency/>

Reuters released a major investigative report on deaths of persons in jail. “*Reuters* filed more than 1,500 public records requests to collect data on inmate populations, inmate health care and inmate deaths from more than 500 of the nation’s local jails or jail systems,” and compiled deaths from 2008-2019 (limited data for 2018 forced the exclusion of that year). Six states had to be excluded for various reasons, but for each of the other states *Reuters* compiled a report of both statewide data and individual jail data, a major assistance to civil society groups monitoring prison conditions. https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-jails-women/?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=782546cf28-MR_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-782546cf28-149736437

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention instructed “states to sign so-called data use agreements that commit them for the first time to sharing personal information” of people vaccinated against COVID-19, “including names, birth dates, ethnicities and addresses, raising alarms . . . that a federal vaccine registry could be misused,” the *New York Times* reported. The governor of New York State warned that “the collection of personal data could dissuade undocumented people” from getting the vaccine for fear that the information will end up at the Department of Homeland Security and be used to deport people. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/08/us/politics/cdc-vaccine-data-privacy.html>

Venezuela. The Organization of American States issued a report on human rights violations in Venezuela. Among other findings, it said since 2014 “18,093 extrajudicial executions [were] carried out by state security forces or *colectivo*” and “15,501 cases of arbitrary detention or other instances of severe deprivation of liberty.” Other findings relate to “acute malnutrition,” enforced disappearance, torture, rape and sexual violence. It urged the ICC prosecutor to “as rapidly as possible” open an investigation. https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=S-023/20

Police raided the headquarters of Convite Civil Association, an NGO which defends human rights of the elderly and provides medicine. *Caracas Chronicles* reported, “They wouldn’t let Convite workers take a

picture of the document [search warrant], but they confiscated gear, supplies and financial documents.” It editorialized that the government is bothered “that society found mechanisms to organize without the State, they’re angry some NGOs track, document and alleviate the complex humanitarian emergency and in addition, they want to show the UN that if they don’t handle the humanitarian aid, nobody does.” <https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2020/12/16/the-crackdown-against-venezuelan-ngos-continues-convite-is-raided/>

Vietnam. Amnesty International issued a report on “censorship and criminalization of online expression in Vietnam.” It noted that in April 2020 Facebook “disclosed that it agreed to ‘significantly increase’ compliance with requests from the Vietnamese government to censor ‘anti-state’ content in Viet Nam after concerted pressure from the Vietnamese authorities, including an enforced slowdown of Facebook services within the country.” This, said Amnesty, “marked a sea change in the social media landscape in Viet Nam,” making social media platforms “fast becoming human rights-free zones, where any peaceful dissent or criticism of the Vietnamese government is liable to be censored and where users seeking to post such content face the risk of being suspended or otherwise barred from the platforms.” The report documents “the experiences of dozens of Vietnamese human rights defenders and activists,” the actions of a “volunteer troll army,” and “the activities of Viet Nam’s ‘cyber-troops’ known as ‘Force 47’—a military unit established with 10,000 people whose mission is to ‘fight against wrong views and distorted information on the internet’.” Amnesty wrote, “Technology companies including Facebook and Google must urgently overhaul their content moderation polices to ensure that they are firmly grounded in international human rights standards.” <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA4132432020ENGLISH.pdf>

Good reads. “Human Rights Documentation by Civil Society – Technological Needs, Challenges, and Workflows,” Public International Law & Policy Group, The Engine Room, and HURIDOCs: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5900b58e1b631bffa367167e/t/5fb58becb67862d7d964cf27a/1605733350976/PILPG+-+HR+Doc+Solutions+-+Assessment+Report.pdf>

“Labor and Trade Union Rights: Inter-American Standards,” Inter-American Commission on Human Rights: http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/LaborRights_EN.pdf

“Forensics and the missing: Ask the experts webinar,” International Committee of the Red Cross: <https://communities.ext.icrc.org/videos/3645>

“Using the Sun and the Shadows for Geolocation,” Bellingcat: <https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/2020/12/03/using-the-sun-and-the-shadows-for-geolocation/>

Dominik Landwehr, “No Official Outcry In Swiss Crypto Spying Affair.” *SwissInfo*: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/26122020-no-official-outcry-in-swiss-crypto-spying-affair/>

“Cops are Getting a New Tool for Family-Tree Sleuthing,” *WIRED*: https://www.wired.com/story/cops-are-getting-a-new-tool-for-family-tree-sleuthing/?bxiid=5c48efcf2ddf9c4807adf975&endid=53684912&esrc=sign-up-page&source=EDT_WIR_NEWSLETTER_0_DAILY_ZZ&utm_brand=wired&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_mailing=WIR_Daily_121620&utm_medium=email&utm_source=nl&utm_term=list2_p2

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