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Human Rights: Toxic political agenda is dehumanising entire groups, Amnesty warns

Monday 27 February 2017, by [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#) (Date first published: 22 February 2017).

NGO's annual report warns that aggressive political rhetoric is creating a 'hostile climate for refugees and migrants'

Toxic political rhetoric with echoes of 1930s hate speech is stirring up violence worldwide - including in the UK and US, Amnesty International has warned.

Kerry Moscovigiri, Amnesty UK's director of campaigns, said that campaigning for the Brexit referendum "was a particular low point, with all too real consequences" - pointing to a 57% spike in reported hate crime the week after the vote.

She accused the British government of "creating a hostile climate for refugees and migrants" as it shirked its responsibilities to them, particularly unaccompanied children.

But the UK was not alone in seeing vicious rhetoric targeting the most vulnerable, as 2016 saw leaders worldwide peddling "the dangerous idea that some people are less human than others", according to Amnesty's director of crisis research Tirana Hassan.

She pointed particularly to violence stirred up by Donald Trump, right-wing Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, who called a controversial referendum on refugees, and the Philippines leader Rodrigo Duterte who has launched a war on drugs that has cost thousands of lives.

"This report documents the very real human consequences of politicians like Trump, Orbán, Duterte, wielding a toxic agenda that hounds, scapegoats and dehumanises entire groups of people," Hassan said.

The attacks threaten not just human lives but the value system enshrined in international law after the second world war, warned the NGO.

"When language around 'taking our country back' and 'making America great again' is coupled with proposals to treat EU migrants like bargaining chips or to ban refugees on the grounds of religion, it fosters deep hatred and mistrust and sends a strong message that some people are entitled to human rights and others aren't," said Kate Allen, Director of Amnesty International UK.

"Have we forgotten that human rights protections were created after the mass atrocities of the second world war as a way of making sure that 'never again' actually meant 'never again'?"

It was a year filled with contempt for those ideals, Amnesty warned, from the almost "routine" bombing of hospitals in Syria and Yemen, to violent suppression of dissent and attacks on refugees and migrants.

Worldwide, 36 countries broke international law and forced refugees back into conflict zones or places where their rights were at risk, it said.

The report was particularly damning of the failure to halt the brutal bombing of rebel-held east Aleppo, in the final stages of a Russian-backed campaign, when chemical weapons and bunker-buster bombs were used against civilians. That inaction “called to mind similar failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica in 1994 and 1995”, the report said, and was a damning indictment of major powers and the UN, paralysed by their rivalries as civilians suffered.

“Never have these failures been as apparent as in December 2016, when we all witnessed the graphic and brutal bombardment of Aleppo, when war crimes were essentially beamed into our living rooms,” Moscogiuri said.

The British government is criticised in the report for stepping up digital surveillance with the new “snooper’s charter”, which allows the state disturbing access to private lives of its citizens.

“By introducing one of the broadest regimes for mass surveillance of any country in the world, the UK took a significant step towards a reality where the right to privacy is simply not recognised,” the report said.

It was not all bleak. Amnesty also noted how fierce repression had inspired courage and resistance around the world, from the people of the Gambia who threw off 22 years of dictatorship in a peaceful election, to the Olympic protest of Ethiopian marathon medallist Feyisa Lilesa, and the young “clown of Aleppo”.

Lilesa drew attention to the struggles of his Oromo tribe by crossing his arms over his head as he reached the finish line, a gesture of defiance that could potentially have cost him the medal.

The 24-year-old entertainer Anas al-Basha chose to stay in besieged Aleppo to bring some distraction and relief to its children, and died there in an airstrike in December.

“Ultimately, the charge that human rights is a project of the elite rings hollow,” the report said. “People’s instincts for freedom and justice do not simply wither away.”

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