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THE WEEK IN RIGHTS

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The 2014 World Report: *The World's Rights Struggles*



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On Tuesday, Human Rights Watch released its 2014 World Report, which summarizes key human rights issues in more than 90 countries and territories worldwide.

By Kenneth Roth, Executive Director

Looking back at human rights developments in 2013, several themes stand out. The unchecked slaughter of civilians in Syria elicited global horror and outrage, but not enough to convince world leaders to exert the pressure needed to stop it. That has led some to lament the demise of the much-vaunted "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, which world governments adopted less than a decade ago to protect people facing mass atrocities. Yet it turned out to be too soon to draft the epitaph for R2P, as it is known, because toward the end of the year it showed renewed vitality in several African countries facing the threat of large-scale atrocities: the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Democracy took a battering in several countries, but not because those in power openly abandoned it. Many leaders still

feel great pressure to pay lip service to democratic rule. But a number of relatively new governments, including in Egypt and Burma, settled for the most superficial forms -- only elections, or their own divining of majoritarian preferences -- without regard to the limits on majorities that are essential to any real democracy.

Since September 11, 2001, efforts to combat terrorism have also spawned human rights abuses. The past year saw intensified public discussion about two particular counterterrorism programs used by the United States: global mass electronic surveillance and targeted killings by aerial drones.

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Human rights conditions in Papua New Guinea (PNG) remain poor. PNG's significant oil, gas, and gold reserves have continued to fuel strong economic growth, but improving living standards remains a challenge with consistently poor governance and endemic corruption. Violence against women in PNG is rampant. A series of gruesome crimes involving mob torture and murder of accused sorcerers was reported in 2013. Police violence is also common.

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Amid economic crisis and much contested austerity measures in many member states, discrimination, racism, and homophobia remained serious problems in European Union member states. Roma, migrants, and asylum seekers are particularly marginalized.

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Syria's armed conflict escalated even further in 2013 as the government intensified its attacks and began using increasingly deadly and indiscriminate weapons, culminating in a chemical weapons attack on the Damascus countryside on August 21. Government forces and pro-government militias also continued to torture detainees and commit executions.

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