



# **Enforced disappearances in the context of transnational repression in the MENA**

**Submission to the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances and Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**

*Report submitted to inform the CED and WGEID project of joint statement on enforced disappearances in the context of transnational repression.*

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Transnational repression in the MENA

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), transnational repression refers to “acts conducted or directed by a State, or its proxy, to deter, silence or punish dissent, criticism or human rights advocacy towards it, expressed from outside its territory.”<sup>1</sup> These acts often target civil society actors abroad, such as human rights defenders, civil society, journalists, and peaceful dissidents as well as their families or associates who remain in the repressing country.

Transnational repression is one of MENA Rights Group’s thematic priorities. We document numerous cases of human rights violations falling under patterns of cross-border repression tactics at the hands of state authorities, regional bodies and international organisations. We represent victims of these violations before international human rights bodies, including United Nations (UN) Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures. In order to ensure the non-repetition of these violations, we identify patterns and root causes of transnational repression and bring our findings to the attention of relevant stakeholders to call for legal and policy reform.

Between 2018 and 2025, MENA Rights Group has documented the cases of 27 individuals and organisations targeted by acts of transnational repression in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, some of whom have been impacted by multiple acts of transnational repression at the hands of the same state authorities.<sup>2</sup> The incidents recorded include politically motivated extradition proceedings, criminal prosecutions *in absentia*, kidnappings and deportations, terrorism listings, administrative sanctions, and a killing. Impacted individuals and organisations were targeted in relation to their peaceful dissent, political criticism, human rights advocacy or participation in peaceful protests.

An act of transnational repression typically involves two states: the requesting state (often the state of origin), and the requested or participating state. Among the cases documented by MENA Rights Group, those impacted were targeted by an Arab League country and/or in an Arab League country. 14 Arab League states were involved in acts of transnational repression, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (11 cases), Saudi Arabia (8 cases), Egypt (5 cases), Morocco (4 cases), Jordan (2 cases), Lebanon (1 case), Kuwait (1 case), Iraq (1 case), Syria (1 case), Algeria (1 case), Tunisia (1 case), Djibouti (1 case), Bahrain (1 case) and Somalia (1 case). Non-Arab League states include the United States of America (U.S.) (4 cases), Türkiye (2 cases), China (1 case), Serbia (1 case), Bulgaria (1 case) and Pakistan (1 case).

## 1.2 Occurrence of enforced disappearance in the context of transnational repression

According to MENA Rights Group’s documentation of cases of transnational repression in the region, individuals are at heightened risk of enforced disappearance when facing extradition or

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<sup>1</sup> OHCHR, *Transnational Repression*, 18 June 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/transnational-repression> (accessed 20 January 2026).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, certain individuals were sentenced *in absentia* twice, and/or faced criminal prosecutions *in absentia* as well as terrorism listings or extraditions.

deportation proceedings. In many cases, peaceful dissidents or human rights defenders are targeted for exercising their fundamental freedoms or on the basis of security or counter-terrorism laws and measures failing to comply with international human rights standards, and face *refoulement* to countries where they risk grave human rights abuses, including torture, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

In this context, enforced disappearance can occur at three key moments. First, individuals can be subjected to enforced disappearance when they are targeted in the requested state while facing a risk of transnational repression. For instance, this was the case of Jasem al-Shamsi, an exiled Emirati dissident who was arrested in Syria in November 2025 and forcibly disappeared while facing a serious risk of extradition to the UAE.<sup>3</sup> As of January 2026, he was only allowed one short phone call with his wife in December, and he remains at imminent risk of *refoulement*.

Second, individuals can face enforced disappearance in the requesting state, or country of origin, once the act of *refoulement* has been conducted. For example, in May 2023, Turkish-Emirati dissident Khalaf al-Romaithi was extradited outside any judicial process from Jordan to the UAE, where he since remains forcibly disappeared.<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, individuals can be forcibly disappeared during an act of transnational repression, such as a rendition or a deportation. This was notably the case for Slimane Bouhafs, an Algerian activist who was abducted by unidentified men in civilian clothing in August 2021 in his home in Tunisia, where he had obtained refugee status from the UNHCR.<sup>5</sup> He was disappeared for four days before his family learned he had been forcibly transferred to Algeria and was being held in police custody.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 Legislative framework enabling transnational repression

### 2.1 Counter-terrorism and security frameworks

According to MENA Rights Group's documentation, individuals and organisations impacted by acts of transnational repression are frequently targeted on the basis of terrorism or security-related accusations. Such charges are typically contained in domestic counter-terrorism, cybercrime or

<sup>3</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Emirati dissident and member of the "UAE94" and "UAE84" arrested in Syria*, 13 November 2025, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/jasem-rashed-khalfan-rashed-al-shamsi> (accessed 21 January 2026); Human Rights Watch, *UAE: Emirati Dissident Faces Risk of Torture at Home*, 9 December 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/09/uae-emirati-dissident-faces-risk-of-torture-at-home> (accessed 21 January 2026).

<sup>4</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Emirati dissident disappears in Jordan, risking forcible return to the UAE*, 16 May 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/khalaf-abdul-rahman-abdulla-humaid-al-romaithi> (accessed 21 January 2026); Human Rights Watch, *Jordan: Emirati/Turkish Man Facing Forced Return*, 12 May 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/12/jordan-emirati/turkish-man-facing-forced-return> (accessed 21 January 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Algeria: Free Activist Granted Refugee Status in Tunisia*, 26 September 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/26/algeria-free-activist-granted-refugee-status-tunisia> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>6</sup> See: UN Special Procedures, UA DZA 9/2021, 20 September 2021, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=26654> (accessed 22 January 2026).

security-related laws with overly vague and broadly worded definitions of terrorism or security-related offenses which fail to comply with international human rights standards.

## 2.1.1 International framework

At the international level, there is no international definition agreed upon within the UN of the term “terrorism”.<sup>7</sup> While there exists a number of treaties dealing with various offenses that are defined as “terrorist” crimes, there is no one international comprehensive treaty on “terrorism”.<sup>8</sup>

The High Commissioner for Human Rights has called upon states to be guided by the key elements of acts of terrorism provided in Security Council resolution 1566 (2004)<sup>9</sup> and the model definition developed by the Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights.<sup>10</sup> States should ensure their counter-terrorism domestic legislation is aligned with international human rights law, notably by complying with the international principles of legality and legal certainty.<sup>11</sup>

However, national definitions of terrorism remain largely left to the discretion of states, leading to varying interpretations in domestic counter-terrorism legislation.<sup>12</sup> Ambiguous definitions of terrorism in domestic legislation have led to policies and practices that violate the fundamental freedoms of individuals and populations, discriminate against particular groups, and justify the exclusion of the protective norms of international human rights law. Notably, security and counter-terrorism justifications have been invoked to create exceptions to non-derogable rights, such as the principle on *non-refoulement* and the prohibition of enforced disappearances.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.1.2 Regional framework

The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism,<sup>14</sup> adopted in 1998 by the Arab Interior Ministers’ Council (AIMC) and the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice, defines terrorism as “any act or threat of violence, whatever its motives or purposes, that occurs in the advancement of an individual or collective criminal agenda and seeking to sow panic among people, causing fear by harming them, or placing their lives, liberty or security in danger, or seeking to cause damage to the environment or to public or private installations or property or to occupying or seizing them, or seeking to jeopardise a national resource”. Additionally, the Convention defers to Arab League Member States’ domestic definitions of terrorism to define the scope of terrorism offenses.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See: OHCHR, *OHCHR and terrorism and violent extremism*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/terrorism> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>8</sup> A list of UN terrorism instruments is accessible here: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/en/international-legal-instruments> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>9</sup> UN Security Council, *Resolution 1566 (2004)*, 8 October 2004, UN Doc. S /RES/1566 (2004), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/532676?ln=fr> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>10</sup> Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, *Ten areas of best practices in countering terrorism*, 22 December 2010, UN Doc. A/HRC/16/51, <https://docs.un.org/a/hrc/16/51> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>11</sup> See: OHCHR, *Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism, Fact Sheet No. 32 Rev. 1*, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/fact-sheet-no-32-rev-1-rights-terrorism-counter-terrorism-web.pdf> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>12</sup> See: 2.1.3 Domestic frameworks.

<sup>13</sup> See: OHCHR, *Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism, Fact Sheet No. 32 Rev. 1*, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/fact-sheet-no-32-rev-1-rights-terrorism-counter-terrorism-web.pdf> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>14</sup> League of Arab States, *Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism*, 22 April 1998, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3de5e4984.html> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>15</sup> Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, article 1 (3).

This definition of “terrorism” has been criticised for many of its elements being undefined and for generally being too broad, leaving space for wide interpretation and abuse.<sup>16</sup> For instance, this definition allows for the simple threat of an act to be constitutive of terrorism, without determining the elements constituting a threat.<sup>17</sup>

According to UN human rights experts, the broad language used in the terrorism definition contained in the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism “can be subject to wide interpretation” and “could involve a range of activities such as political participation and the activities protected under international human rights law by the freedom of expression, and the freedom of peaceful assembly and association.”<sup>18</sup>

## 2.1.3 Domestic frameworks

In MENA countries, domestic definitions of terrorism are often overly vague and broad and fail to comply with international human rights standards. The UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights notably issued detailed communications with various human rights concerns stemming from the counter-terrorism legislations in Qatar,<sup>19</sup> Algeria,<sup>20</sup> Saudi Arabia,<sup>21</sup> the UAE,<sup>22</sup> Egypt,<sup>23</sup> Bahrain<sup>24</sup> and Tunisia.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, domestic security and counter-terrorism frameworks in MENA countries incorporate a derogatory regime to ordinary criminal justice systems, granting excessive powers to unchecked state security apparatuses, and enabling exceptional jurisdictions operating without judicial independence to restrict defendants’ due process and fair trial rights.<sup>26</sup> In Saudi Arabia and the UAE,

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, *The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism: A serious threat to human rights*, 9 January 2002, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior51/001/2002/en/> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>17</sup> League of Arab States, *Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism*, 22 April 1998, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3de5e4984.html> (accessed 26 January 2026), article 1.

<sup>18</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL OTH 71/2023, 23 June 2023, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28070> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>19</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL QAT 1/2022, 8 February 2022, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=27053> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>20</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL DZA 12/2021, 27 December 2021, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=26905> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>21</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL SAU 12/2020, 17 December 2020, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=25726> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>22</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL ARE 6/2020, 13 November 2020, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=25663> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>23</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL EGY 4/2020, 28 February 2020, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=25072%C2%A0%C2%A0> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>24</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL BHR 2/2023, 8 May 2023, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28012> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>25</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL TUN 4/2019, 26 August 2019, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Opinion/Legislation/OL\\_TUN\\_4\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Opinion/Legislation/OL_TUN_4_2019.pdf) (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>26</sup> See: MENA Rights Group, *Counter-terrorism practices incompatible with human rights in the MENA region*, 1 May 2025, <https://www.menarights.org/en/articles/counter-terrorism-practices-incompatible-human-rights-mena-region> (accessed 22 January 2026); MENA Rights Group, *Silencing dissent in the name of fighting terrorism: Administrative measures as a tool of repression in the MENA*, 4 June 2025,



the countries' state security apparatuses have been widely criticised for abusing security and counter-terrorism frameworks to commit gross human rights abuses against peaceful dissidents, including arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in the context of transnational repression.<sup>27</sup> For instance, Loujain al-Hathloul, a prominent Saudi activist and human rights defender, was residing in the UAE when she was arrested without a warrant in March 2018 by UAE authorities, transported to Saudi Arabia, and detained in al-Ha'ir prison, which is administered by the Saudi State Security Presidency.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, security and counter-terrorism frameworks often enable indefinite or exceptionally long custody and pre-trial detention, as well as restricted or denied access to lawyers, placing defendants in terrorism or security-related cases at heightened risk of enforced disappearance. For instance, articles 19 and 20 of the Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism law grant the Public Prosecution<sup>29</sup> the authority to hold the accused in *incommunicado* detention for up to 90 days "if the investigation so warrants," and grant the Specialised Criminal Court (SSC)<sup>30</sup> the power to extend the period of custody indefinitely, including *incommunicado* detention, which puts individuals at risk of disappearance.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.1.4 Individual cases

According to MENA Rights Group's documentation, in seven cases where the UAE was at the origin of the recorded acts of transnational repression, all impacted individuals were targeted on the basis of terrorism or security-related offenses. Emirati peaceful political dissidents Khalaf al-Romaithi,<sup>32</sup>

<https://www.menarights.org/en/articles/silencing-dissent-name-fighting-terrorism-administrative-measures-tool-repression-mena> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>27</sup> See: MENA Rights Group, *The Saudi Presidency of State Security: An Arm of Repression in the Crown Prince's Kingdom*, June 2022, [https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Mena%20Rights%20Group\\_SSP%20Public%20Report%20%28v.4%29.pdf](https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Mena%20Rights%20Group_SSP%20Public%20Report%20%28v.4%29.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026); MENA Rights Group, *The UAE State Security Apparatus: A tool of repression against dissenting voices*, December 2022, [https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Mena%20Rights%20Group\\_SSA%20Public%20Report.pdf](https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Mena%20Rights%20Group_SSA%20Public%20Report.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>28</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Women's right activist Loujain Al Hathloul conditionally released and facing a travel ban*, 23 July 2020, <https://menarights.org/en/caseprofile/womens-rights-activist-loujain-al-hathloul-detained-2018> (accessed 28 January 2026).

<sup>29</sup> The Saudi Public Prosecution Office (PPO) is tasked mainly with investigating acts criminalised under the counter-terrorism law. See: MENA Rights Group, *The Saudi Presidency of State Security: An Arm of Repression in the Crown Prince's Kingdom*, June 2022, [https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Mena%20Rights%20Group\\_SSP%20Public%20Report%20%28v.4%29.pdf](https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Mena%20Rights%20Group_SSP%20Public%20Report%20%28v.4%29.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>30</sup> The Saudi Specialised Criminal Court (SCC) is an exceptional jurisdiction which has exclusive jurisdiction over all crimes defined under the counter-terrorism law. See: MENA Rights Group, *The Saudi Presidency of State Security: An Arm of Repression in the Crown Prince's Kingdom*, June 2022, [https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Mena%20Rights%20Group\\_SSP%20Public%20Report%20%28v.4%29.pdf](https://www.menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Mena%20Rights%20Group_SSP%20Public%20Report%20%28v.4%29.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>31</sup> UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, *General Allegation, Saudi Arabia*, 11-15 May 2020, [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disappearances/Allegations/121-SaudiArabia.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disappearances/Allegations/121-SaudiArabia.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>32</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Emirati dissident disappears in Jordan, risking forcible return to the UAE*, 16 May 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/khalaf-abdul-rahman-abdulla-humaid-al-romaithi> (accessed 21 January 2026).

Jasem al-Shamsi,<sup>33</sup> Mohammed al-Zaabi,<sup>34</sup> Saeed al-Tenaiji,<sup>35</sup> Hamad al-Shamsi,<sup>36</sup> and Ahmed al-Nuaimi<sup>37</sup> were all targeted by multiple acts of transnational repression on the basis of the UAE's counter-terrorism law,<sup>38</sup> criticised by UN human rights experts for its ambiguous and imprecise definition of terrorism and its failure to comply the UAE's international human rights law obligations.<sup>39</sup> All were convicted *in absentia* as part of the grossly unfair "UAE94" mass trial of political dissidents in 2013,<sup>40</sup> following which al-Romaithi faced a political extradition from Jordan to the UAE in 2023. Exilees al-Zaabi, al-Tenaiji, al-Nuaimi, and Hamad and Jasem al-Shamsi were sentenced again for terrorism-related offenses in the UAE's second-largest political mass trial in 2024, known as "UAE84". Hamad al-Shamsi, Saeed al-Tenaiji, Mohammed al-Zaabi and Ahmed al-Nuaimi were included in the UAE's terror list in 2021, and three of al-Nuaimi's companies were listed as terrorist entities in 2025.<sup>41</sup>

In the case Abdulrahman al-Qaradawi,<sup>42</sup> a Turkish-Egyptian poet extradited from Lebanon to the UAE in January 2025 for criticising the UAE authorities on social media, his extradition request was issued on accusations including "publishing false news" that would "disturb public security", acts that are punishable under the UAE's cybercrime law.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Saudi national from the Shi'a religious minority Hassan al-Rabea,<sup>44</sup> whose family had faced a long history of persecution including for participating in peaceful protests, was extradited in February 2023 from Morocco to Saudi Arabia on charges contained in the Saudi counter-terrorism

<sup>33</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Emirati dissident and member of the "UAE94" and "UAE84" arrested in Syria*, 13 November 2025, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/jasem-rashed-khalfan-rashed-al-shamsi> (accessed 21 January 2026).

<sup>34</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Human rights defender and "UAE94" member Mohammed Saqer al-Zaabi faces new terrorism charges*, 3 January 2022, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/mohammed-saqer-al-zaabi> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>35</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Emirati activist and UAE94 member Saeed Al Tenaiji labelled as "terrorist" by UAE authorities*, 3 January 2022, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/saeed-al-tenaiji> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>36</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Human rights defender and "UAE94" member Hamad al-Shamsi faces new terrorism charges during the "UAE87" trial*, 3 January 2022, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/hamad-al-shamsi> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>37</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Exiled member of the "UAE94" Ahmed al-Nuaimi is facing new terrorism charges in the "UAE87" trial*, 25 January 2024, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/ahmed-al-shaiba-al-nuaimi> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>38</sup> UAE, *Federal Law No. 7 on Combating Terrorism Offences*, 2014, [https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-11/UAE\\_TerrorismLaw\\_EN.pdf](https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-11/UAE_TerrorismLaw_EN.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>39</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL ARE 6/2020, 13 November 2020, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=25663> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>40</sup> See: MENA Rights Group, *United Arab Emirates: Free members of UAE94 and other prisoners of conscience*, 1 July 2022, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/united-arab-emirates-free-members-uae94-and-other-prisoners-conscience> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>41</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Silencing dissent in the name of fighting terrorism: Administrative measures as a tool of repression in the MENA*, 4 June 2025, <https://www.menarights.org/en/articles/silencing-dissent-name-fighting-terrorism-administrative-measures-tool-repression-mena> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>42</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Egyptian poet arrested by Lebanese authorities and extradited to the UAE after criticising Gulf countries online*, 21 January 2025, <https://menarights.org/en/case/abdelrahman-youssef-al-qaradawi> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>43</sup> UAE, *Federal Decree-Law No. 34 On Countering Rumours and Cybercrimes*, 2021, <https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1526/download> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>44</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Saudi national Hassan al-Rabea extradited from Morocco to Saudi Arabia*, 19 January 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/hassan-muhammad-al-rabea> (accessed 22 January 2026).



law.<sup>45</sup> UN human rights experts criticised Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism law for defining terrorism with overly broad and ambiguous terms, such as "disturbing public order", "destabilising national security or state stability" and "endangering national unity", which "could entail that a range of speech and association activities protected under international human rights law is characterised domestically as 'terrorism'."<sup>46</sup>

## 2.2 Extradition frameworks and inadequate protection of the *non-refoulement* principle

Among the 27 cases of transnational repression documented by MENA Rights Group, 17 involved individuals who faced extradition or deportation to a country where they risked being subjected to torture, arbitrary detention and/or enforced disappearance, in violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*. Additionally, impacted individuals are often targeted for their political opinions, in violation of the international principle of non-discrimination.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.2.1 Regional framework

In the MENA region, the main regional legal instrument governing extraditions is the Riyadh Arab Agreement for Judicial Cooperation<sup>48</sup> (hereinafter "Riyadh Convention"), adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice in 1983. The Riyadh Convention aims to facilitate judicial cooperation between its signatory Arab League countries.

The Riyadh Convention contains several exceptions under which extraditions cannot be carried out, including if "the crime for which extradition is requested is considered by the laws of the requested party as a crime of a political nature".<sup>49</sup> Despite this prohibition, the assessment of the political nature of the crime is left to the discretion of the requested country. In addition, the Riyadh Convention excludes a number of offences from being defined as political, and allows extraditions for *lèse-majesté*, or acts deemed as offensive to kings or heads of state.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, which foresees the extradition of individuals accused of terrorist offenses to requesting states,<sup>51</sup> prohibits extraditions for political offenses.<sup>52</sup> However, the Convention also excludes from these offenses attacks on kings and heads of states, as well as all acts falling within the scope of the Arab League's definition of terrorism.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Saudi Arabia, *Law of Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing*, 2017, [https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Law%20on%20Combating%20Crimes%20of%20Terrorism%20and%20its%20Financing%20282017%29%20\\_%20EN.pdf](https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Law%20on%20Combating%20Crimes%20of%20Terrorism%20and%20its%20Financing%20282017%29%20_%20EN.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>46</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL SAU 12/2020, 17 December 2020, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=25726> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>47</sup> The international principle of non-discrimination is considered a norm of *jus cogens* applicable to all states, at all times, with no exception or limitation, regardless of their treaty obligations. The non-discrimination principle is also enshrined in articles 2 (1) and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

<sup>48</sup> Council of Arab Ministers of Justice, *Riyadh Arab Agreement for Judicial Cooperation*, 6 April 1983, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38d8.html> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>49</sup> Riyadh Convention, article 41 (a).

<sup>50</sup> Articles 41 (1) and (3) of the Riyadh Convention.

<sup>51</sup> Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, article 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, article 6 (a).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, article 2 (b).

As such, the restrictive interpretation of political offences found in the Riyadh Convention and the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism allows for transnational repression through the extradition of individuals on political grounds, in violation of the principle of non-discrimination. UN human rights experts stated that the treaties “merely describe acts that are not considered to be of political nature and lack any definition of the offenses of political nature exempted from the extradition obligation.”<sup>54</sup> Regarding the exclusion of attacks against political leaders from the extradition refusal conditions for political offenses, UN human rights experts noted “the extremely broad language used, which could be distinctively applied to criminalise the mere exercise of legitimate and peaceful activities protected by the freedom of expression, including expressing political dissent.”<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, despite all Arab League Member States being parties to the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT), neither convention refers to the *non-refoulement* principle. UN human rights experts also noted “that the normative framework on extradition is silent on the risk assessment requirement and the risks pertaining to refoulement.”<sup>56</sup>

According to UN human rights experts, “[t]he normative framework on extraditions outlined in the Riyadh Arab Agreement on Judicial Cooperation and the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism appears to infringe on fundamental human rights and freedoms.”<sup>57</sup> UN human rights experts highlighted that “in considering the extradition requests, under the Riyadh Agreement framework, States do not appear to exercise due diligence in assessing the political nature of the charges brought against individuals, and no individual risk assessment appears to be either envisaged or undertaken.”<sup>58</sup>

## 2.2.2 Domestic frameworks

Transnational repression cases in the MENA are notably enabled by flawed domestic legal frameworks, including Penal Codes, Code of Criminal Procedures and extradition laws, which fail to codify the principle of *non-refoulement* in line with international human rights law.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, domestic laws can contribute to acts of transnational repression by failing to adequately prohibit political extraditions.

For example, in Lebanon, the principle of *non-refoulement* is not codified in national law. In addition, while article 34 of the Penal Code prohibits extraditions for political offenses, article 31 permits extraditions for offenses “that adversely affect” the requesting state’s “security or financial status.” In practice, article 31 was invoked by the Lebanese authorities to justify approving and proceeding with the extradition of Turkish-Egyptian poet Abdulrahman al-Qaradawi to the UAE,<sup>60</sup> where he was

<sup>54</sup> UN Special Procedures, OL OTH 71/2023, 23 June 2023, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28070> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> The international principle of *non-refoulement* is considered a norm of *jus cogens* applicable to all states, at all times, with no exception or limitation, regardless of their treaty obligations. The *non-refoulement* principle is also enshrined in article 3 of the UN Convention against Torture, article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and article 16 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

<sup>60</sup> The Lebanese Cabinet decision No. 43/2025-2026 is accessible here: <https://ccils-lebanon.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2026).

forcibly disappeared for over two months and remains arbitrarily detained in near-*incommunicado* conditions.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly in Morocco, although article 721 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that “extradition shall not be authorised when the offense for which it is requested is considered a political offence”,<sup>62</sup> Moroccan law has yet to make reference to the risk of torture or enforced disappearance as grounds for refusing extradition.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, domestic extradition frameworks can contribute to acts of *refoulement* by failing to enshrine the right to appeal the enforcement of an extradition order with suspensive effect, as set forth by the Committee against Torture in its General Comment on the implementation of the principle of *non-refoulement*.<sup>64</sup> Without a suspensive effect, appeals can be considered after an extradition has already taken place and therefore cannot effectively prevent violations of the principle of *non-refoulement*.

For instance, in Morocco, decisions made by the Court of Cassation regarding extraditions are final and enforceable after confirmation by decree of the Head of Government. Although decisions taken by the Court of Cassation may be subject to an appeal for retraction on the basis of articles 563 and 564 of the Code of Criminal Procedure,<sup>65</sup> such appeal proceedings do not have a suspensive effect.<sup>66</sup>

In its last 2024 Concluding Observations following the review of Morocco, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances notably regretted the lack of detailed information on “safeguards against the risk of being subjected to enforced disappearance, and in particular on “the criteria used to assess this risk and the means of verifying, in practice, the information provided by both the receiving State and the person whose expulsion, return, surrender or extradition is sought ; [...] the possibility of lodging an appeal against a decision authorising expulsion, return, surrender or extradition, indicating by whom and before which authorities the appeal is lodged, the steps involved and whether such an appeal has a suspensive effect”.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup> MENA Rights Group, Human Rights Watch, *Lebanon: Year Since Poet Unlawfully Extradited to UAE*, 13 January 2026, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/lebanon-year-poet-unlawfully-extradited-uae> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>62</sup> Morocco, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1959, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1959/ar/101702> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>63</sup> According to article 721 of the Moroccan Code of Criminal Procedure, “extradition shall not be authorised when the offence for which it is requested is considered to be a political offence, or an offence connected with a political offence, by the Moroccan State. This rule applies, in particular, when the Moroccan State has substantial grounds for believing that an extradition request apparently related to an ordinary offence has in fact been made for the purpose of prosecuting or punishing a person on grounds of his or her race, religion, nationality or political opinion, or may aggravate this person’s situation for any of these reasons.”

<sup>64</sup> Committee against Torture, *General comment No. 4 (2017) on the implementation of article 3 of the Convention in the context of article 22*, 4 September 2018, UN Doc. CAT/C/GC/4, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/general-comment-no-4-2017-implementation-article-3-convention-context-article-22> (accessed 22 January 2026), para. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Morocco, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1959, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1959/ar/101702> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>66</sup> In *Zikrullah Hasan and Buzainer Wubuli v. Morocco*, the Committee against Torture found that the rulings of the Court of Cassation on extradition were considered final and *res judicata*, noting that Moroccan law is silent on the suspensive effect of an appeal for retraction. The Committee observed that the State party failed to provide information or case law demonstrating that such an appeal had automatic suspensive effect. It further noted that, in other cases, extradition orders had been signed by the Head of Government even before the Court of Cassation ruled on retraction appeals, reinforcing the view that those rulings were treated as final. See: Committee against Torture, *Decision adopted by the Committee under article 22 of the Convention, concerning communication No. 1111/2021*, 15 July 2024, UN Doc. CAT/C/80/D/1111/2021, para. 9.3.

<sup>67</sup> Committee on Enforced Disappearances, *Concluding observations on the report submitted by Morocco*

## 3 Regional and international enabling transnational repression

### 3.1 INTERPOL

The International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) is an inter-governmental organisation of 196 member countries<sup>68</sup> which aims to ensure and promote mutual assistance between criminal police authorities, and to establish and develop all institutions likely to contribute effectively to the prevention and suppression of ordinary law crimes.<sup>69</sup>

INTERPOL red notices are requests to worldwide law enforcement bodies to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action.<sup>70</sup> INTERPOL's constitution states that the organisation cannot be used 'to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character', and that it acts in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>71</sup>

#### 3.1.1 Individual cases

MENA Rights Group has documented four cases of individuals subjected to INTERPOL notices putting them at risk of extraditions violating *non-refoulement*. Syrian human rights defender Mohamed al-Kayali was arrested in Turkey in December 2024 and risked extradition to Saudi Arabia.<sup>72</sup> Chinese national and Uyghur Muslim Idris Hasan (or Yidiyesi Aishan) was arrested in Morocco in July 2021 on the basis of a red notice requested by the Chinese government. Despite INTERPOL's subsequent withdrawal of the notice, the Moroccan authorities continued to detain him on extradition grounds.<sup>73</sup> Australian-Saudi national Osama al-Hasani was extradited after being arrested on the basis of a red notice in March 2021 from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, where he was arbitrarily detained.<sup>74</sup> In January 2022, after being arrested on the basis of an INTERPOL red notice,

under article 29 (1) of the Convention, 4 October 2024, UN Doc. CED/C/MAR/CO/1, para. 42.

<sup>68</sup> INTERPOL website, *What is INTERPOL*, <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/What-is-INTERPOL> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>69</sup> INTERPOL, *Constitution of the ICPO-INTERPOL*, 1956 (as amended in 2023), [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/590/file/01%2520E%2520Constitution\\_2024.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwj3qr2zraSSAxUW0AIHHR5XF9gQFnoECA0QAQ&usq=AOvVaw2DAZPt8qyZF5p6cgqzB4Dg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/590/file/01%2520E%2520Constitution_2024.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwj3qr2zraSSAxUW0AIHHR5XF9gQFnoECA0QAQ&usq=AOvVaw2DAZPt8qyZF5p6cgqzB4Dg) (accessed 22 January 2026), article 2.

<sup>70</sup> INTERPOL website, *Notices*, <https://www.interpol.int/en/How-we-work/Notices> (accessed 26 January 2026); Amnesty International, *Global: Misuse of Interpol red notices to target dissidents a grave institutional failure*, 26 January 2026, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/01/global-misuse-of-interpol-red-notices-to-target-dissidents-a-grave-institutional-failure/> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>71</sup> INTERPOL, *Constitution of the ICPO-INTERPOL*, 1956 (as amended in 2023), [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/590/file/01%2520E%2520Constitution\\_2024.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwj3qr2zraSSAxUW0AIHHR5XF9gQFnoECA0QAQ&usq=AOvVaw2DAZPt8qyZF5p6cgqzB4Dg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/590/file/01%2520E%2520Constitution_2024.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwj3qr2zraSSAxUW0AIHHR5XF9gQFnoECA0QAQ&usq=AOvVaw2DAZPt8qyZF5p6cgqzB4Dg) (accessed 22 January 2026), articles 2 (1) and 3.

<sup>72</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Syrian human rights defender detained in Turkey and at risk of being extradited to Saudi Arabia*, 23 April 2025, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/mohammed-al-kayali> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>73</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Morocco frees Uyghur activist at risk of extradition to China*, 4 August 2021, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/yidiyesi-aishan-also-known-idris-hasan> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>74</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Australian-Saudi national extradited from Morocco to Saudi Arabia*, 12 March 2021, <https://www.menarights.org/en/caseprofile/australian-saudi-national-risk-extradition-morocco-saudi-arabia> (accessed 22 January 2026).



Bahraini dissident Ahmed Jaafar Mohamed Ali was extradited from Serbia to Bahrain, despite interim measures issued by the European Court of Human Rights citing a risk of *refoulement*.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.1.2 Human rights concerns

For many years, the abuse of INTERPOL notices to target political dissidents and human rights defenders has been widely documented.<sup>76</sup> Victims of abusive red notices are often unaware of their existence until they are arrested, and critics have pointed out that those impacted do not have the right to a hearing, to examine evidence that governments produce against them, or to appeal the commission's decisions.<sup>77</sup>

Subjects of INTERPOL's red notices may request their removal from the Commission for the Control of Interpol's Files (CCF), an independent body known that reviews data contained in red notices. At the request of individuals, the CCF can remove a red notice if found to be in violation of INTERPOL's constitution and rules, and delete it from the organisation's systems.<sup>78</sup> The Notices and Diffusions Task Force, an institution established by INTERPOL's Secretary General in 2016, may also unilaterally review red notices on the basis of all available information, including information received from member countries other than the requesting country, and media monitoring.<sup>79</sup>

MENA Rights Group has engaged with INTERPOL on multiple occasions by filing requests for access to, or correction and/or deletion of data processed in the INTERPOL Information System to the CCF, on behalf of activists, peaceful dissidents and human rights defenders targeted by politically motivated and/or non-human rights compliant notices, in violation of articles 2 and 3 of INTERPOL's Constitution.<sup>80</sup>

INTERPOL's system poses several concerns. First, as individuals targeted by INTERPOL notices are arrested and put at imminent risk of extradition to countries where face grave human rights abuses

<sup>75</sup> MENA Rights Group, *NGOs urge RoyalJet to clarify involvement in wrongful extradition of dissident Ahmed Jaafar Mohamed Ali to Bahrain*, 31 January 2022, <https://www.menarights.org/en/articles/ngos-urge-royaljet-clarify-involvement-wrongful-extradition-dissident-ahmed-jaafar-mohamed> (accessed 29 January 2026).

<sup>76</sup> UN Special Procedures, *UN experts concerned by weaponisation of Interpol red notices against human rights defenders from El Salvador*, 19 November 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/11/un-experts-concerned-weaponisation-interpol-red-notices-against-human-rights> (accessed 27 January 2026); Freedom House, *Ten Findings from Ten Years of Data on Transnational Repression*, 6 February 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/ten-findings-ten-years-data-transnational-repression> (accessed 27 January 2026); Amnesty International, *Global: Misuse of Interpol red notices to target dissidents a grave institutional failure*, 26 January 2026, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/01/global-misuse-of-interpol-red-notices-to-target-dissidents-a-grave-institutional-failure/> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>77</sup> See: Alexis Thiry, *Politically Motivated Extraditions Are Abetting Transnational Repression*, 1 March 2023, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/politically-motivated-extraditions-are-abetting-transnational-repression> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>78</sup> See: INTERPOL website, *About the CCF*, <https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/Commission-for-the-Control-of-INTERPOL-s-Files-CCF/About-the-CCF> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>79</sup> See: INTERPOL website, *Compliance and review*, <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Notices/Compliance-and-review> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>80</sup> Article 2 of INTERPOL's Constitution states that INTERPOL's "aims are: (1) To ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities within the limits of the laws existing in the different countries and in the spirit of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"; (2) To establish and develop all institutions likely to contribute effectively to the prevention and suppression of ordinary law crimes." Article 3 states that it is "strictly forbidden for the Organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character." See: INTERPOL, *Constitution of the ICPO-INTERPOL*, 1956 (as amended in 2023), [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/590/file/01%2520E%2520Constitution\\_2024.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwj3qr2zraSSAxUW0AIHHR5XF9gQFnoECA0QAQ&usq=AOvVaw2DAZPt8qyZF5p6cgqzB4Dg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/590/file/01%2520E%2520Constitution_2024.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwj3qr2zraSSAxUW0AIHHR5XF9gQFnoECA0QAQ&usq=AOvVaw2DAZPt8qyZF5p6cgqzB4Dg) (accessed 22 January 2026).



including torture and enforced disappearance, their cases are inherently urgent in nature. Therefore, the removal of the notice issued against them should be carried out as promptly as possible, in order to effectively prevent a violation of *non-refoulement*. In practice, after filing access, correction or deletion requests on behalf of individuals targeted by abusive INTERPOL notices, MENA Rights Group faces excessive delays in obtaining a decision from the CCF, the process usually taking several months.

In this regard, the CCF does not open the possibility for applicants to request for provisional measures in urgent cases, as result of which notices could at least temporarily be removed or blocked in order to allow for the targeted person's extradition to be delayed or for them to be released from detention pending extradition.<sup>81</sup>

## 3.2 The Arab Interior Ministers' Council (AIMC)

### 3.2.1 Mandate, structure and functioning

The AIMC is a specialised Ministerial Council of the Arab League tasked with developing and strengthening cooperation and coordinating efforts between Arab countries in the field of internal security and prevention of crime.<sup>82</sup> The AIMC's Basic Laws, adopted by the Arab League in 1982, do not make reference to any human rights standards.<sup>83</sup>

The AIMC finds its legal basis in the Riyadh Convention, which enables the Council to circulate warrants at the request of state parties to the Convention.<sup>84</sup> The AIMC is also tasked with monitoring the implementation of the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism.<sup>85</sup> In practice, the AIMC can circulate state-requested warrants to Arab League Member States, thus facilitating the apprehension and extradition of wanted persons.<sup>86</sup>

The responsibility of circulating the warrants lies with the Department of Criminal Prosecution and Data within the General Secretariat, located in Tunisia.<sup>87</sup> This Department can circulate extradition

<sup>81</sup> According to article 37 of the CCF's statute, it is the Requests Chamber of the CCF which can decide to put provisional measures in place. See: INTERPOL, *Statute of the Commission for the Control of INTERPOL's Files*, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/5695/file/Statute%2520of%2520the%2520CCF%2520%2528E%2529.pdf&ved=2ahUKewiD7La7q6SSAxXA9glHHfYQF40QFnoECBkQAQ&usq=A0vVaw2NxAQASbPSfER8lwEEqIPh> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>82</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Understanding the Arab Interior Ministers' Council and its role in transnational repression*, 17 August 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/articles/aimc> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>83</sup> Arab Interior Ministers' Council, *Arab Interior Ministers' Council's Basic Law*, 23 September 1982, <https://www.mohamah.net/law/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/%D9%86%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B5-%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>84</sup> Article 57 of the Riyadh Convention provides that the contracting parties should "undertake coordination of extradition request procedures" with the "Arab Organisation for Social Defense Against Crime (Arab Criminal Police Bureau), through the liaison offices concerned." This Arab Bureau of Criminal Police was replaced by the Department of Criminal Prosecution and Data within the General Secretariat of the AIMC through the Resolution No. 667 of the Council dated 13 March 2013.

<sup>85</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Understanding the Arab Interior Ministers' Council and its role in transnational repression*, 17 August 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/articles/aimc> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> This Department is tasked with various counter-terrorism functions, including facilitating cooperation among Arab nations to apprehend fugitive terrorists, coordinating the exchange of terrorism-related

requests through its liaison or communication divisions present in Arab League Member States.<sup>88</sup> As part of the AIMC's framework, liaison divisions are established within each Member State's Ministry of Interior, to ensure coordination with the AIMC's General Secretariat, specialised offices, and other organs, and cooperation with liaison divisions in other Member States.<sup>89</sup>

In order to facilitate the tracking and apprehension of wanted individuals, the General Secretariat reportedly holds a database containing information on individuals wanted for alleged criminal activities across its Member States, including alleged acts of terrorism.<sup>90</sup> This database, notably populated with data from Member States, contains wanted individuals' personal information as well as alleged insights into the methodologies employed for acts of terrorism, among other crimes.

The AIMC reportedly established a Legal Committee tasked with reviewing Member States' requests to issue search warrants, assessing their alignment with approved standards and mechanisms, and addressing objections raised against search warrants issued by countries, the individuals being sought, or their legal representatives.<sup>91</sup>

### 3.2.2 Individual cases

Between 2022 and 2025, MENA Rights Group has documented eight individual cases of transnational repression in the form political extraditions between Arab League member states. All cases involved peaceful dissidents, protestors or members of religious minorities facing *refoulement* to Arab League countries where they risked grave human rights abuses, including enforced disappearance. Requested and requesting states included Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE. Five individuals were extradited and have since been

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information between Arab countries, receiving and circulating requests warrants for persons accused or convicted of terrorist offenses, regularly updating and sharing the list of individuals involved in "planning, executing, or financing terrorist acts" with Member States, enriching the General Secretariat's database of terrorist operatives with pertinent data, and making this database accessible to Member States.

<sup>88</sup> Arab Interior Ministers' Council Website, *Organs of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers*, <https://www.aim-council.org/about/council-devices/> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>89</sup> See: Ministry of Interior of Saudi Arabia Website, *Contact people of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers*, [https://www.moi.gov.sa/wps/portal/departments/moi30/lut/p/z0/04\\_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfljo8ziDTxNTDwMTYy8\\_Z2cnQ0cAy1DAnwDwozcXU31gxOL9AuyHRUB1uPJeg!!/p0/IZ7\\_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GU7=CZ6\\_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GE5=MECTX!QCPgeneralQCPgeneralQCAcontentQCAarQCParabQCAinteriorQCAministersQCAacouncilQCP30thQCAsessionQCPnewsQCParchiveQCPmoi\\_news\\_13-03-2013n\\_ar==/p0/IZ7\\_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GU5=CZ6\\_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GE5=MECTX!QCPGeneralQCPGeneralQCAContentQCAARQCPArabQCAInteriorQCAministersQCACouncilQCP30thQCAsessionQCPContactQCADivisionsQCP=/](https://www.moi.gov.sa/wps/portal/departments/moi30/lut/p/z0/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfljo8ziDTxNTDwMTYy8_Z2cnQ0cAy1DAnwDwozcXU31gxOL9AuyHRUB1uPJeg!!/p0/IZ7_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GU7=CZ6_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GE5=MECTX!QCPgeneralQCPgeneralQCAcontentQCAarQCParabQCAinteriorQCAministersQCAacouncilQCP30thQCAsessionQCPnewsQCParchiveQCPmoi_news_13-03-2013n_ar==/p0/IZ7_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GU5=CZ6_0I44H142KOBCC0AQ9TPMPV2GE5=MECTX!QCPGeneralQCPGeneralQCAContentQCAARQCPArabQCAInteriorQCAministersQCACouncilQCP30thQCAsessionQCPContactQCADivisionsQCP=/) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>90</sup> Okaz, Secretary of the "Arab Interior Ministers" to "Okaz": A mechanism for issuing "search warrants" against wanted persons soon, 3 April 2017, <https://www.okaz.com.sa/local/na/1537363> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared in the requesting country,<sup>92</sup> two were released and are living in exile,<sup>93</sup> and one is currently forcibly disappeared and at imminent risk of extradition.<sup>94</sup>

Among the eight cases, MENA Rights Group was able to confirm the AIMC's responsibility for circulating the arrest warrants which led to the extradition of five individuals. For the three remaining, the AIMC's involvement is highly likely.

### 3.2.3 Human rights concerns

While the AIMC's warrant circulation system appears similar to the practices of INTERPOL, the Arab League council lacks a body similar to the INTERPOL's CCF or Notices and Diffusions Task Force, or any independent oversight mechanism filtering out abuses of its systems. According to MENA Rights Group documentation, individuals targeted by AIMC-circulated warrants and at risk of extradition do not have the possibility to file access requests or to demand the removal of the warrants diffused against them. Should a review mechanism be established, it would be undermined by the lack of reference to human rights standards in the AIMC's Basic Laws.

Although the AIMC reportedly established a Legal Committee whose mandate suggests the possibility of an individual's right to challenge an arrest warrant, the actual process for doing so is uncertain and lacks accessibility. Further, the composition of this Legal Committee reportedly includes representative from Member States, giving rise to apprehensions about the impartiality and independence of its functioning.

Regarding civil society's oversight, the AIMC's meetings are closed, their meeting agendas are not announced in advance and their documentation is not publicly accessible. Therefore, there is no accessible information regarding measures implemented to check and filter out abuses of its systems, and it is generally very difficult for human rights organisations to engage with them. MENA Rights Group has attempted to reach out to the AIMC to share their analyses and human rights concerns about their operations, but received no response. While independent, human rights-focused civil society organisations are absent from AIMC conferences and meetings, the AIMC

<sup>92</sup> From most to least recent: Abdulrahman al-Qaradawi (MENA Rights Group, *Egyptian poet arrested by Lebanese authorities and extradited to the UAE after criticising Gulf countries online*, 21 January 2025, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/abdelrahman-youssef-al-qaradawi> (accessed 22 January 2026)); Salman al-Khaldy (MENA Rights Group, *Kuwaiti student Salman al-Khaldy stripped of his Kuwaiti nationality after social media activism*, 28 June 2022, updated 9 April 2024, <https://menarights.org/en/case/salman-alkhaldy> (accessed 22 January 2026); Ahmed Kamel (MENA Rights Group, *Egyptian peaceful protester risks extradition from Saudi Arabia to Egypt, where he faces torture*, 4 December 2024, <https://menarights.org/en/case/ahmed-fathi-kamal-kamel> (accessed 22 January 2026)); Khalaf al-Romaithi (MENA Rights Group, *Emirati dissident disappears in Jordan, risking forcible return to the UAE*, 16 May 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/khalaf-abdul-rahman-abdulla-humaid-al-romaithi> (accessed 22 January 2026)); Hassan al-Rabea (MENA Rights Group, *Saudi national Hassan al-Rabea extradited from Morocco to Saudi Arabia*, 19 January 2023, updated 10 February 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/hassan-muhammad-al-rabea> (accessed 22 January 2026)).

<sup>93</sup> From most to least recent: Abdelbaset Elemam (MENA Rights Group, *A Turkish doctor of Egyptian origin no longer at risk of extradition from Morocco to Egypt*, 25 November 2024, updated 18 December 2024, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/abdelbaset-elemam-also-known-abdelbaset-abdallah-mohamed-al-imam> (accessed 22 January 2026)); Sherif Osman (MENA Rights Group, *Political commentator Sherif Osman facing extradition from UAE to Egypt after calling for protests during COP27*, 22 December 2022, updated 7 February 2023, <https://menarights.org/en/case/sherif-osman> (accessed 22 January 2026)).

<sup>94</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Emirati dissident and member of the "UAE94" and "UAE84" arrested in Syria*, 13 November 2025, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/jasem-rashed-khalfan-rashed-al-shamsi> (accessed 21 January 2026); Human Rights Watch, *UAE: Emirati Dissident Faces Risk of Torture at Home*, 9 December 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/09/uae-emirati-dissident-faces-risk-of-torture-at-home> (accessed 21 January 2026).

reportedly invites National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), many of which lack independence and compliance with the Paris Principles, including in Saudi Arabia<sup>95</sup> and the UAE<sup>96</sup>.

The human rights concerns posed by the AIMC have been condemned by several UN human rights bodies. Numerous issues pertaining to the AIMC's operations have been highlighted by UN Special Procedures mandate holders in a communication addressed to the LAS,<sup>97</sup> and by the former Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights' Global Study on the Impact of counter-terrorism measures on civil society and civic space.<sup>98</sup> Human rights concerns about the AIMC's practices were also included in the two recent reports of the Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights on regional organisations, presented to the UN General Assembly in 2024,<sup>99</sup> and to the UN Human Rights Council in 2025.<sup>100</sup> The Special Rapporteur also addressed the AIMC's role in facilitating *refoulement* practices during the G7 Dialogue on Transnational Repression held in February 2025.<sup>101</sup>

In its November 2024 Concluding Observations regarding the fourth periodic review of Jordan, the UN Committee against Torture urged state authorities to guarantee that "deportation decisions, including extradition requests from the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior [AIMC], are subject to an independent judicial review procedure that allows the affected individual to challenge the decision before an impartial court."<sup>102</sup>

Civil society organisations have also repeatedly denounced the practice of transnational repression facilitated by the AIMC, including in February 2025 when 15 civil society organisations issued a joint

<sup>95</sup> MENA Rights Group, *The Saudi Human Rights Commission: a whitewashing tool of the Kingdom*, 27 November 2023, <https://menarights.org/en/documents/saudi-human-rights-commission-whitewashing-tool-kingdom> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>96</sup> Emirates Detainees Advocacy Center, *A group of officers is heading UAE's NHRI*, 19 December 2021, <https://en.edacrights.com/post/259> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>97</sup> Special Procedures, OL OTH 71/2023, 23 June 2023, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28070> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>98</sup> Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, *Outcome document of the Middle East And North Africa (MENA) Civil Society Consultation On The Impact Of Counter-Terrorism Measures On Civil Society And Civic Space*, 2023, [https://defendcivicspace.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SRCT\\_MENA\\_OutcomeDocument.pdf](https://defendcivicspace.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SRCT_MENA_OutcomeDocument.pdf) (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>99</sup> Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, *Protection of human rights by regional organizations while countering terrorism: norms, cooperation, victims of terrorism and accountability*, 27 August 2024, UN Doc. A/79/324, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a79324-protection-human-rights-regional-organizations-while-countering> (accessed 22 January 2026), para. 27.

<sup>100</sup> Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, *Protection of human rights by regional organizations while countering terrorism: civil society engagement, sanctions and military cooperation*, 26 February 2025, UN Doc. A/HRC/58/47, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5847-protection-human-rights-regional-organizations-while-countering> (accessed 22 January 2026), para. 16.

<sup>101</sup> Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, *G7 Dialogue on Transnational Repression: Turning Collective Experiences into Actionable Solutions: Remarks of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*, Ben Saul, 26 February 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/terrorism/activities/sr-ct-remarks-g7-transnational-repression.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>102</sup> Committee against Torture, *Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Jordan*, 6 December 2024, UN Doc. CAT/C/JOR/CO/4, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FCO%2FJOR%2FCO%2F4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FCO%2FJOR%2FCO%2F4&Lang=en) (accessed 22 January 2026), para. 32 (b).



statement, led by MENA Rights Group, urging the AIMC to cease facilitating transnational repression.<sup>103</sup> The AIMC's concerning practices were also highlighted in a January 2026 news release by MENA Rights Group and Human Rights Watch.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.2.4 INTERPOL and AIMC collaboration

In 1999, INTERPOL and the AIMC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).<sup>105</sup> With regards to this MoU, INTERPOL's spokesperson told MENA Rights Group that INTERPOL and the AIMC each have their own database and corresponding legal framework, and neither organisation can dictate to the other what action to take in relation to wanted persons.<sup>106</sup> Reportedly, if AIMC member countries communicate with the AIMC or use its channels in relation to individuals, INTERPOL is not involved in any way, nor can it intervene. The spokesperson added that INTERPOL does not work on notices or diffusions directly with the AIMC, the reference to "technical cooperation" in the MoU simply reflecting standard language for memoranda of understanding and agreements.

In 2022, INTERPOL and the AIMC sign a cooperation agreement replacing the aforementioned MoU "for purposes of broadening the scope of their future cooperation."<sup>107</sup>

## 3.3 UN counter-terrorism architecture

While transnational repression has been a rising issue of concern in the MENA region, including under the guise of countering terrorism, the UN counter-terrorism architecture has increasingly entered in partnerships and cooperation agreements with Arab League states and bodies sidelining critical human rights considerations.

According to this UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), UN entities are required to assess the risk that support to non-UN security forces may contribute to violations of international human rights law.<sup>108</sup> Sources of information for the risk assessment include reports of the OHCHR to the Human Rights Council, reports of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), UN Treaty Bodies and Special

<sup>103</sup> MENA Rights Group, *The AIMC must end its role in transnational repression, say NGOs*, 17 February 2025, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/aimc-must-end-its-role-transnational-repression-say-ngos> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>104</sup> MENA Rights Group, Human Rights Watch, *Lebanon: Year Since Poet Unlawfully Extradited to UAE*, 13 January 2026, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/lebanon-year-poet-unlawfully-extradited-uae> (accessed 22 January 2026).

<sup>105</sup> INTERPOL, *Annual Activity Report*, 1999, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/4918/file/Annual%2520Report%25201999-EN.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjEuKG7v8aQAxU07AIHHRTWPJEqFnoECC4QAO&usq=A0vVaw0mav5o8m8ySXnThvFadGGe> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>106</sup> Information provided by INTERPOL's spokesperson to MENA Rights Group via email on 1 February 2023.

<sup>107</sup> INTERPOL, AIMC, *Cooperation agreement between the International Police Organization - INTERPOL (INTERPOL) and AIMC*, 20 September 2022, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.interpol.int/content/download/11166/file/AIMC%2520Arab%2520Interior%2520Ministers%2520Council%25202022.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwiFzLHcwMaQAxXBfKQEHWyVNFUQFnoECBgQAO&usq=A0vVaw2dl3eTvhGr094sFdmMjKB5> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>108</sup> UN, *Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces, Guidance Note and Text of the Policy*, 2015, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Inter-Agency-HRDDP-Guidance-Note-2015.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2026).



Procedures. Risk assessments sources also include reports from international non-governmental organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.<sup>109</sup>

UN counter-terrorism bodies' actively collaborate with the Arab League and the AIMC. In 2018, the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) and AIMC signed a MoU.<sup>110</sup> Since 2019,<sup>111</sup> the UNCCT has provided technical assistance to support the AIMC in developing and implementing an Arab Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategy.<sup>112</sup> Adopted in 2022, the strategy is stated to be in line with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS).<sup>113</sup> However, as highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights,<sup>114</sup> the strategy was never made public and remains confidential.

In 2024, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the Arab League's Secretariat General signed a MoU to "strengthen their partnership in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism."<sup>115</sup>

## 4 Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, and in light of the above-mentioned considerations, we believe that transnational repression, and the occurrence of enforced disappearance in this context, are highly concerning human rights issues in the MENA region, which deserve significant attention as part of the CED and WGEID's thematic focus on the topic.

In this regard, MENA Rights Group makes the following recommendations to relevant stakeholders:

<sup>109</sup> UN, *Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces*, Guidance Note and Text of the Policy, 2015, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Inter-Agency-HRDDP-Guidance-Note-2015.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2026).

<sup>110</sup> Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, X post, 17 April 2018, <https://x.com/KSAMOFA/status/986171721874051072> (accessed 26 January 2026); Saudi Press Agency, *Arab Interior Ministers Council Signs MoU with United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office*, 17 April 2018, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/w670655> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>111</sup> UNCCT, *Quarterly Project Highlight Report to the UNCCT Advisory Board: 1st Quarter, Year IV of the 5-Year Programme*, 1 January – 31 March 2019, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/default/files/uncct-qphr-q1-jan-mar-2019.pdf> (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>112</sup> UNCCT, *The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism welcomes the adoption of the new Arab regional counter-terrorism strategy by the Arab Interior Ministers Council*, 2 March 2022, [https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/default/files/20220302\\_press\\_release\\_arab\\_regional\\_strategy\\_eng.pdf](https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/default/files/20220302_press_release_arab_regional_strategy_eng.pdf) (accessed 27 January 2026).

<sup>113</sup> MENA Rights Group has been assured on several occasions by UN counter-terrorism bodies it has engaged with that the Arab Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategy aligns with international human rights standards, as opposed to previous versions of the Arab Strategy to Combat terrorism developed in 1997 and updated in 2015. See: Tunisian National Commission for Counter-Terrorism, *The Arab Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, 2015, <http://www.cnclt.tn/?p=1759> (accessed 26 January 2026).

<sup>114</sup> Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, *Protection of human rights by regional organizations while countering terrorism: civil society engagement, sanctions and military cooperation*, 26 February 2025, UN Doc A/HRC/58/47, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5847-protection-human-rights-regional-organizations-while-countering> (accessed 26 January 2026), para. 16.

<sup>115</sup> UNOCT, League of Arab States Secretariat General, *United Nations Office Of Counter-Terrorism and the League Of Arab States Secretariat General Sign Agreement to Strengthen Cooperation and Coordination on Counter-Terrorism*, 27 September 2024, [https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/default/files/20240927\\_mou-las-unoct\\_press\\_release.pdf](https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/default/files/20240927_mou-las-unoct_press_release.pdf) (accessed 26 January 2026).

To member states:

- Cease participation in transnational repression, including by refraining from carrying out extraditions requested on political grounds and violating *non-refoulement*;
- Repeal counter-terrorism legislation failing to comply with international standards, or amend them in line with international human rights law;
- Cease abusing AIMC and INTERPOL systems to target individuals on political grounds and/or for exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms;
- Suspend the execution of extradition proceedings issued on the basis of arrest warrants circulated by the AIMC, as long as its framework and systems are not reformed in line with international standards;
- Uphold the principle of *non-refoulement*, by conducting an individual risk assessment to ascertain the risks the person may be facing if extradited to the requesting state, including the risk of being subjected to enforced disappearance in line with article 16 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED);
- Ensure the right to appeal an extradition decision before an independent administrative and/or judicial body within a reasonable period of time from the notification of that order;
- Ensure that the appeal on the enforcement of an extradition order has a suspensive effect;
- Uphold the principle of non-discrimination, by ensuring that extradition requests have not been made for the purpose of prosecuting or punishing a person on discriminatory grounds, including for their political opinions;
- Codify the principle of *non-refoulement* and the prohibition of extraditions on political grounds in domestic legislation, in line with international human rights law.

To the Arab League and the AIMC:

- Ensure the compliance of arrest warrants circulated by the AIMC's mechanisms with the principles of non-discrimination and *non-refoulement*, as well as other obligations enshrined in binding international human rights treaties;
- Create an independent, accessible, and transparent legal mechanism, allowing wanted individuals to access their criminal file and request the review or removal of an arrest warrant.

To INTERPOL:

- Strengthen review and compliance systems to ensure that individuals are not targeted by INTERPOL notices on political grounds, for their exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms, or in violation of international human rights law, including the principle of *non-refoulement*;
- Introduce a formal process for applicants to request provisional measures in urgent cases, modelled on the practices implemented by the UN Committee Against Torture and the UN Human Rights Committee, to ensure that notices can (at least temporarily) promptly be removed or blocked in order to allow for the targeted person's extradition to be delayed or for them to be released from detention pending extradition.

To UN counter-terrorism bodies:

- Suspend counter-terrorism related partnerships with Arab League states and bodies, including the AIMC, which play an active role in transnational repression and fail to uphold the *non-refoulement* and non-discrimination principles;

- Systematically assess the risk that counter-terrorism-related partnerships with non-UN security forces may contribute to violations of international human rights law, including transnational repression and enforced disappearance;
- Systematically consult and take into account the reports and communications issued by UN human rights bodies, and prioritise projects and programmes aiming to address the impact of counter- terrorism abuse on human rights, and prioritise engagement with civil society with human rights-focused mandates.

MENA Rights Group is a Geneva-based legal advocacy NGO defending and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Adopting a holistic approach, we work at both the individual and structural level. We represent victims of human rights violations before international law mechanisms. In order to ensure the non-repetition of these violations, we identify patterns and root causes of violations on the ground and bring key issues to the attention of relevant stakeholders to call for legal and policy reform.