

Countries of Special Concern

July-December 2020



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide



Active Emergencies

Afghanistan
Armenia/Azerbaijan
China
The Democratic Republic of the Congo
Ethiopia
Mozambique
Nigeria
Yemen

Situations of Increased Risk

Colombia
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Western Sahara

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Countries of Special Concern: July – December 2020

Genocide Watch exists to predict, prevent, stop, and punish genocide and other forms of mass murder. Genocide Watch actively monitors the progression of genocides and genocidal processes around the world.

The purpose of this Genocide Watch report on Countries of Special Concern is to report on developments in countries with ongoing genocides and in countries at increased risk for genocidal massacres. Based on developments over the past six months, the countries and territories of most concern are: Afghanistan, Armenia/Azerbaijan, Colombia, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Libya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Western Sahara, and Yemen.

For the Genocide Watch report covering the first half of 2020 see: [Countries of Special Concern: January – July 2020](#). "Stages" refer to the ten genocidal processes monitored by Genocide Watch: [The Ten Stages of Genocide](#).

Active Emergencies:

Afghanistan

Stages: Organization (5), Preparation (7), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

In September 2020, Afghan government officials and Taliban negotiators met in Doha to begin long awaited peace talks. Despite this "[historic opportunity](#)," the Taliban have since demonstrated that they are not good faith partners for peace, simultaneously negotiating with the government while [escalating violence](#) across the country. The Islamic State in Afghanistan has also increased its targeting of Afghan civilians and religious minorities.

In October, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for an [attack on an education center](#) in a Shi'a-dominated area of Kabul, killing 24. The group followed this up with an [assault on students](#) at Kabul University in November, leaving 35 dead. Later that month, [twin bombings](#) killed 14 civilians in the city of Bamiyan, home to many members of the long-targeted Hazara ethnic minority.

Taliban-sponsored violence is [on the rise](#). With the Taliban now openly operating in the capital, Kabul, residents warn they are [no longer safe](#). Due to the Taliban presence, Kabul has experienced a violent "[campaign of terror](#)," including a recent spate of targeted killings of journalists and civil society leaders. Amid this wave of violence, [renewed intra-Afghan negotiations](#) were slated to restart in January 2021, but the Taliban haven't shown up.

While President Trump ordered a [withdrawal of American troops](#) down to 2,500, President Biden is reviewing that order. Currently [10,000 NATO troops](#) remain in the country to support Afghan government forces. Without them, the Taliban will take over, twenty years of progress in public health, education, and women's rights will be lost, and Afghanistan will again become a global exporter of Islamist terrorism.

Armenia/Azerbaijan

Stages: Persecution (8), Extermination (9), Denial (10)

In late September 2020, [Azerbaijani forces invaded](#) the Armenian Republic of Artsakh. As part of its military assault, Azerbaijan employed tactics that blatantly violated international law, including the use of [cluster munitions](#), [white phosphorus](#), and [drone strikes](#) against Armenian civilians and critical infrastructure. These attacks killed hundreds of civilians and forced thousands more [to flee](#) to neighboring Armenia.

Azerbaijan, led by Ilham Aliyev and his government, habitually invokes [hate speech](#) against Armenians, including [active denial](#) of the 1915 Ottoman Genocide of Armenians. On November 10, 2020, a ceasefire was agreed, with Azerbaijan regaining large amounts of territory and the establishment of a Russian peacekeeping force. Azerbaijani troops have broken the ceasefire, and [vandalized Armenian cultural heritage sites](#).

During the armed conflict, Armenian and Artsakh forces [shelled Azerbaijani civilians](#), including a missile attack on Azerbaijan's second-largest city, Ganja. Armenians fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh [destroyed their homes](#), infrastructure, and supplies to prevent returning Azerbaijani displaced persons from resettling.

China

Stages: Discrimination (3), Organization (5), Persecution (8), Extermination (9), Denial (10)

The Chinese government is [committing genocide in Xinjiang](#). Across the region, millions of Uyghurs are being detained in concentration camps, where they endure political indoctrination, forced sterilization, organ harvesting, mass rape, and systematic destruction of their culture, religious beliefs, and right to bear and educate children.

Despite official claims to the contrary, Beijing is expanding its network of camps, now with a suspected [380 facilities across Xinjiang](#). While attempting to “secularize” detainees, China is also changing the demography and the very landscape of Xinjiang, [destroying mosques](#) and religious and cultural heritage sites. In December, a BBC investigation revealed that [570,000 Uyghurs](#) are being subjected to forced labor overseen by the state, picking cotton that provides as much as 85% of China’s cotton and at least 20% of the global supply. Despite this irrefutable evidence of genocide and crimes against humanity, the ICC recently [declined to investigate China](#) as China is not a state-party to the jurisdiction of the court.

China's genocidal assault on ethnic and religious minorities and its authoritarian crackdown on political dissent is not limited to the Uyghurs or Xinjiang. In September, the government began [forcing 500,000 Tibetans into labor camps](#). This comes amid a crackdown on political freedom in Hong Kong, where a [national security law](#) passed on June 30th places Hong Kong residents at the mercy of Beijing’s repressive regime. The measures against Uyghurs, Tibetans, and the people of Hong Kong are being justified under the guise of combatting the “[three evils](#)” of separatism, extremism, and terrorism.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Stages: Discrimination (3), Organization (5), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the first half of 2020, armed groups in DRC’s Ituri, North-Kivu, and South-Kivu provinces [killed 1,300 people](#). Since then, widespread violence has continued. From July through December, [ACLED](#) places the death toll at 2,000, including the killings of more than 900 civilians.

The interlinked conflicts in eastern DRC are driven by a deadly combination of ethnic, political, and communal conflicts. Among the principal perpetrators of genocidal massacres are Lendu ethnic militias, targeting the local Hema population, and Mai Mai militias which are attacking the DRC’s Banyamulenge ethnic minority. In a well-organized attack in August, Lendu militia members targeted three villages in Ituri, leaving [at least 19 dead](#).

The armed Islamist rebel group, the ADF, continued its campaign terrorizing civilians throughout the region. In the second half of 2020, the ADF carried out a series of brutal massacres. These include the August killing of [13 civilians](#), twin attacks in September that killed [58 civilians](#) in a span of two days, an October attack that [killed 20](#), a November massacre that left [29 dead](#), and an attack on New Year’s Eve that [killed at least 25](#) people. The relentless violence has forced [tens of thousands](#) Congolese to flee their homes in recent months, adding to the [millions already displaced](#) from years of conflict.

Ethiopia

Stages: Preparation (7), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

In November 2020 Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (a Nobel Peace Prize winner), ordered the [invasion of the country's Tigray region](#) in response to attacks by Tigrayan militias on Ethiopian Army bases. The conflict has killed thousands and displaced an estimated 200,000 people in Tigray, northern Ethiopia, and neighboring Sudan.

After weeks of intense fighting, on November 28, 2020, the Ethiopian army [captured the Tigrayan capital](#), Mekelle, cutting electricity off to the city and launching indiscriminate [artillery strikes against Tigrayan civilians](#). Despite the capture of the city, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front vows to continue to fight, and the potential for future violence against civilians continues.

[Targeted attacks](#) on ethnic minorities in regions dominated by ethnic majority militias have affected the Somali, Oromo, Amhara, Gedeo, Anuak and other ethnic groups [in Ethiopia](#). On December 23, 2020, genocidal massacres in the [Benishangual-Gumuz region](#) left at least 100 dead.

Mozambique

Stages: Organization (5), Polarization (6), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

In Mozambique's northernmost Cabo Delgado province, Islamic State linked militants continue to wage a brutal insurgency. According to [ACLEDD](#), the fighting has killed 1650 people in 2020, including 879 since July. Civilians have borne the brunt of the violence. In November, militants [massacred and beheaded 50 villagers](#). In April Islamists [beheaded 52 villagers](#) who refused to join their ranks. Such atrocities are the result of a growing Islamist insurgency that has reached "[frightening and hard-to-contain levels](#)."

The government has been ineffective in defeating the terrorists. Its brutal response is further inflaming the conflict. In their attempted crackdown, security forces have [committed widespread rights](#) abuses including extrajudicial killings and torture. A viral video shows men in military fatigues beating a woman before [shooting her in the back 36 times](#) as she fled. The Mozambique government denies its soldiers' involvement despite the video.

The violence and instability have displaced [more than 570,000](#) Cabo Delgado residents from a province with a total population of only two million. In December, the UN warned that as many as [1.1 million people](#) directly impacted by the violence will require humanitarian assistance over the course of the next year. The human costs are only likely to rise, with the insurgency showing no signs of abating while now also demonstrating the potential to destabilize the broader region. Attacks have spilled over into neighboring Tanzania, with Islamist militants proclaiming their intention to [overthrow the country's president](#).

Nigeria

Stages: Dehumanization (4), Preparation (7), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

Nigeria's Boko Haram and its splinter group the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), are among the deadliest terrorist organizations in the world. Over the course of their decade-long genocidal campaign, the jihadists have killed [nearly 40,000 people](#). They have especially targeted Christians. They sow terror not just in Nigeria but also in Niger, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso. In 2020, [ACLEDD](#) records nearly 2,500 civilians killed across Nigeria.

In November, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies found that Boko Haram attacks were [up 52% in Nigeria](#) during 2020, and up 90% in northern Cameroon where Boko Haram has operated since 2014. That same month, Boko Haram massacred 110 farmers in Borno state, an attack the UN described as the "[most violent direct attack against civilians this year](#)." Fulani jihadist militants are also perpetrating genocidal violence across the country, targeting Christians and non-Fulani civilians. The first six months of 2020 saw [1,100 killed by "bandits"](#), a euphemism that the Nigerian government uses to deny genocidal massacres by Fulani jihadists.

In combatting insurgency and instability, Nigerian security forces have committed widespread abuses. Since 2011, [at least 10,000 civilians](#) have died in Nigerian Army or police custody, according to Amnesty International. In October 2020, government forces violently attacked peaceful protesters. Tens of thousands of Nigerians had taken to the streets to demand the abolition of the "SARS" special police force, which has long operated with brutality, corruption, and impunity. Security forces opened fire on protesters, killing [at least 51 civilians](#).

Yemen

Stages: Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

Since 2014, Yemen has been embroiled in a brutal civil war. In 2020 alone, continued fighting [killed 20,000 people](#). It is a proxy war between Iranian backed Shi'a Houthis and Saudi led Sunni Arabs. Saudi airstrikes continue [to bomb civilian populations](#). Both the Houthis and the Hadi government have committed war crimes, including the [targeting of aid workers](#), bombing of hospitals, Houthi sniper murders of children, and obstruction of humanitarian aid. In their sales of advanced aircraft and laser-guided bombs, along with logistical support for the Saudi regime, [the United States and its allies](#) have aided and abetted the Saudi coalition's war crimes.

"The world's worst humanitarian crisis" continued with a massive cholera outbreak and the destruction of infrastructure, including Saudi bombing of 130 bridges. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned of "[the](#)

[worst famine the world has seen for decades.](#)” Thousands of Yemeni children face acute malnutrition, with humanitarian aid halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the heavy fighting.

[Minorities in Yemen](#) (i.e Al-Akhdam, Ismaili, Bahai, Jews), continue to face persistent discrimination and persecution due to their ethnic and religious identity.

Situations of Increased Risk:

Colombia

Stages: Organization (5), Preparation (7), Persecution (8)

In 2016, the Colombian government and the Marxist FARC signed a [historic peace agreement](#), ostensibly bringing an end to five decades of a conflict that killed at least 220,000 people. Despite achieving peace on paper, the reality on the ground has proven that peace is not at hand. According to the UNHCR, in 2020, Colombia recorded [375 violent deaths](#) in 66 separate massacres (defined as the murder of three or more people). 2020 was Colombia’s most violent since 2016, and was among the [deadliest in nearly two decades](#). While drug-funded paramilitary groups are leading this violent upsurge, these killings are not merely collateral damage from criminal activities. Rather, militias and death squads are targeting [rural and indigenous](#) communities, [human rights](#) and [environmental defenders](#), and former [FARC members](#). In just twelve days in August, armed groups [killed 35 young people](#) from Colombia’s rural communities. Many of the victims' bodies showed they had been tortured.

Indonesia

Stages: Discrimination (3), Dehumanization (4), Polarization (6), Persecution (8)

In recent years, Indonesia has witnessed an increase in the marginalization and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. Those most targeted include the [pro-independence](#) indigenous communities in Papua as well as Christians, who make up approximately 10% of the world’s largest Muslim-majority country. In late November, the UN Human Rights Office [expressed its concern](#) over the alarming rise in extrajudicial killings and arbitrary mass arrests of activists in Papua and West Papua. In December, Amnesty International reported that between February 2018 and November 2020, [security forces carried out 103 killings](#) in the two provinces. In November 2020, an Indonesian Islamic State-affiliate group [attacked a Christian village in Sulawesi](#), killing four civilians and forcing more than 750 to flee. The attack raises concerns in a country that has been grappling with [rising support](#) for Islamist forces that are calling for fusion of Islam and the state.

Libya

Stages: Organization (5), Preparation (7), Extermination (9)

Since 2011, Libya has been in a continuous civil war. Due to limited access to the country, the full human toll of the conflict is not fully known. However, evidence of genocidal massacres has recently surfaced. In August, the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) estimated that [10,000 Libyans have “disappeared”](#) over the course of the war. Many of the “disappeared” are likely victims of systematic mass killings, with officials finding more than [300 bodies in mass graves](#) since June 2020. Despite a UN-backed agreement to [hold elections in December 2021](#), the conflict is far from over. The Islamic State is taking advantage of the political vacuum to [regroup within the country](#). The threat of escalation is also exacerbated by the presence of foreign mercenaries, with the [UN warning that at least 20,000](#) Russians, Syrians, Turks, and other foreign nationals active in Libya. As a result of continued violence and instability, [1.3 million Libyans](#) are likely to require humanitarian assistance by January 2021.

Philippines

Stages: Discrimination (3), Dehumanization (4), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

President Duterte has used the COVID-19 pandemic as a cover to further escalate his “war on drugs.” According to Human Rights Watch, [between April and July](#), extrajudicial killings of suspected drug users were up more than 50 percent, a troubling trend that has continued into the second half of the year. Duterte’s draconian crackdown has also extended to human rights activists, with a [“war against dissent”](#) carrying out targeted killings of those who oppose Duterte politically. The Duterte government has [openly expressed](#) its intention to eliminate drug users and democracy and human rights activists across the country. By the government’s own admission in November 2020, Philippine police and associated anti-drug vigilante groups have [killed more than 8,000 people](#) since 2016. The UN puts that [number even higher](#). In December, the ICC found in a preliminary report that [Duterte has committed crimes against humanity](#), including murder and torture, in his ongoing violent crackdown

on suspected drug users and dealers. Addicts are not distinguished from dealers. Both are targeted for extra-judicial executions.

Somalia

Stages: Organization (5), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

As the US moves forward with plans for a [near full withdrawal of troops](#) from Somalia, al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda-linked jihadist group, continues to ramp up violence nationwide. Over the past six months, al-Shabaab has killed hundreds of civilians and carried out a series of high-profile terrorist attacks. In [August](#) and [September](#), militants stormed two separate hotels in the capital, Mogadishu, killing 31 people. Al-Shabaab was also responsible for a series of devastating suicide bombings in November and December 2020, targeting [two restaurants](#), an [ice cream parlor](#), a [mosque](#), and [a rally](#) held by PM Mohamed Roble. [For many across Somalia](#), the timing of the US withdrawal threatens to further embolden al-Shabaab and to roll back any of the modest gains made in countering the terrorist group. Recent reporting shows that al-Shabaab is poised to further solidify control over many rural areas of the country, with the group now [collecting more revenue](#) than the Somali government.

South Sudan

Stages: Extermination (9)

Violent conflict continues between the South Sudanese government led by Salva Kiir, a Dinka, and a Nuer militia led by Vice President Riek Machar. Over [2,300 civilians were killed](#) in 2020. [60% of the population](#) faces an acute food shortage and 1.4 million children are severely malnourished. [Floods](#) have ravaged South Sudan, displacing an estimated one million people. The starvation and flooding could undermine attempts at a peace settlement. Absent robust UN armed protection of civilians, there is a high risk of continuing genocidal massacres by the Dinka and Nuer armies.

Sudan

Stages: Preparation (7), Persecution (8), Extermination (9)

On August 31, 2020, the Transitional Government of Sudan and rebel factions under the banner of the Sudanese Revolutionary Front signed [a landmark peace deal](#) to end fighting in the regions of Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan. Despite the peace deal, [genocidal massacres by Arabs against black Africans](#) continue in Darfur. Following the outbreak of violence in Tigray, Ethiopia; [43,000 Ethiopians fled to Sudan](#) and now face precarious conditions in refugee camps. In June 2020 authorities in the Central African Republic [arrested Sudanese militia leader Ali Kushayb](#), a major leader of the Darfur genocide. Kushayb was subsequently brought to the Hague, where he faces charges at the International Criminal Court for 50 war crimes and crimes against humanity. Despite some reforms, the Sudanese government is still dominated by the Sudanese military, including generals and militia leaders who planned and directed past genocides. The government continues to execute and imprison pro-democracy activists, most notably [killing seven protestors](#) on October 15, 2020 in the town of Kassala.

Western Sahara

Stages: Discrimination (3), Organization (5), Preparation (6)

In November, a [29-year ceasefire collapsed](#) between Morocco and the Polisario Front, a Sahrawi national liberation group fighting for self-determination in Western Sahara. Morocco annexed Western Sahara in 1976 after Spain withdrew from the territory. The most recent outbreak of hostilities threatens to [revive the dormant conflict](#) that killed an [estimated 10,000](#) and displaced 200,000 more from 1975-1991. Further [escalating the risk of violence](#), in December 2020 President Trump unilaterally recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara as part of a [Morocco-Israel normalization deal](#). The Trump administration recognition reverses decades of international consensus that the Sahrawi are entitled to vote on their own self-determination. [More than 100,000 Sahrawis](#) live in refugee camps in Western Sahara and neighboring Algeria. The recent US announcement threatens to further embolden Morocco's [ongoing crackdown on activists](#) in the territory.

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